



Image courtesy of John Dean

High-end angling kayaks offer an engineered platform that allows maximum flexibility on the water.

Paddle-Powered Bass Whackers

*Kayak Fishing
Tournament Trail
Strikes Healthy Balance*

As it is demonstrated in these pages on a monthly basis, there are many ways to fish and saying you don't like sharing the lake with anglers is outright prejudice.

Are all anglers created equal? Heck no! Tournament fishing in particular seems to put a bur under the saddles of some, but even within that relatively small world of competitive angling, there are many ways to skin a fish. Set aside the image of wave after wave of ultra-sleek bass boats rocketing across your favourite lake at 70 mph. Boil it down to its essentials: A group of anglers, their gear, individual fishing platforms. That's what John Dean ended up doing after half a lifetime of fishing, the challenge he came up with was competitive bass fishing exclusively from kayaks. It re-lit a passion in him, taking his



Image courtesy of John Dean

The top honour on the OKBT is Angler of the Year.



Image courtesy of Miguel Sigouin

Miguel Sigouin has fished two seasons on the OKBT and enjoys the chance to compete.

Continued: Lengthy Bass Resume

commitment to the sport from dedicated to completely immersed.

“My bass resume I guess goes back to the early 1980s when I did my first bass tournaments with a series called Bass’n’Tario,” Dean recalls. “There was a long pause from that series until I started tournament fishing again in the kayak scene where I fished in series out of New York and Michigan.”

He first started entering competitive kayak bass tournaments in the U.S. in 2015.

“I had done just about all I could have done shore fishing for years, and chasing trout and migratory salmon, and hitching rides in friends’ boats and I just wanted to get back on the water,” he explained.

“I had seen a couple of internet shows highlighting kayak fishing and after some research figured this would be a good way to go.”

While the relative cost of kayaks versus other fishing boats was a factor; as a longtime angler, there were other lures to paddle-power

that led him to the sport. “The attraction, I guess was that you could now access the water and spots that the larger boats could not. You were solo on the water and responsible for all the decisions to be made. The biggest challenge changing to a kayak from a boat is the amount of water you can cover.”

It’s about being efficient with both time and energy while still maximizing your time in productive water.

“In a bass boat you can run miles to a spot and then move

Continued: Launched Ontario Tournaments

again and again if things aren't as planned, but in the kayak, you can't do that. Sure, you can cover water but not to the extent of a bass boat," he said. "You learn to cover the water more thoroughly in the area you are rather than hitting up many spots looking for the bass."

Eventually Dean got tired of crossing the border before every event and decided it was time to start a series in this country, one that showcases all of the amazing bass fishing territory found in Ontario waters in particular. Five years ago, he launched what is now one of several Ontario-based kayak tournament series, Ontario Kayak Bass Trail.

"The fact that I, and others were travelling to the U.S. for kayak events was the main driving force in getting the Ontario Kayak Bass Trail up and running," he said.

One of the biggest differences between kayak fishing and traditional tournament events is the absence of a formal weigh-in at the end of fishing. As kayaks don't generally have live wells the OKBT instead uses cameras and the internet during its events.

"The tournaments that we participate in use a photo-based judging system, commonly referred to as CPR (Catch, Photo, Release). How this works is, all competitors use a measuring device that is approved for tournament use," he said.

Kayak anglers focus on the length of a fish rather than its weight.

"In the OKBT we allow two boards to be used, the Hawg Trough and the Ketch Board. These boards are industry standards used in most events that take place throughout North America. As an angler catches a fish, they then proceed to document that fish by placing the fish on the measuring device, taking a photo of the fish with



Image courtesy of John Dean

Competitive kayak fishing means bringing all the gear you might need.

their phone, and then submitting this photo with recorded length to the Tournament Management System through their data on the phone."

The system the OKBT uses, and in fact the one employed by the majority of all such upper-echelon series active today, is Tourney X (www.tourneyx.com). Tourney X is a third-party software platform that allows events to be run and judged live as the day goes on.

"Our OKBT judging is done by a judge offsite from the event that is not involved with the event. Fish are judged against various criteria that the photo must meet: correct positioning of the fish, proper placement of fish, condition of fish, correct event identifiers visible. Any deviations can lead to disqualification of fish or deductions to the submitted length."

The system works very well, but as with all tournaments and fishing derbies, things don't always go as planned. The main issues are usually related to cellular reception at some of the areas where the fish are biting.

"The anglers learn fast enough how to use the app and to submit photos correctly. A couple of searches on YouTube and they can find all the information they need. And after a couple of deductions, they figure it out pretty quickly."

One of the OKBT's familiar faces is that of capital region-based competitor Miguel Sigouin.



Image courtesy of Miguel Sigouin

After finishing third in an OKBT event in 2020, Miguel Sigouin was literally hooked.

Continued: Fish All Around Province

“I was born and raised in Kapuskasing, but I now live in Gatineau, Que. I have been fishing tournaments since 2013. I prefer to fish smaller back lakes and stay away from the crowds,” he said.

“I was drawn to OKBT because I love to compete, and this series has some of the best kayak anglers in the country. I generally prefer the first events of the season because it’s more suited to my style of fishing. Next season, I’m looking forward to the Ramsey Lake event in Sudbury.”

“I always try to focus on my strengths when competing in a tournament. For me, that means finesse techniques like drop shot, ned rig, wacky rig and Texas rig,” said Sigouin.

“Good catches depend on fishing conditions, but 16-inch fish are usually a good average. If you’re lucky, you’ll add an 18- to 20-inch lunker to your bag.”

He echoed Dean’s sentiment in that he feels the biggest challenge related to kayak fishing is your limited traveling capacity because of speed and time. It all comes down to strategy, you need to pick the right area and work with it. Having a kayak specifically engineered for fishing also helps ensure you can stay as flexible as possible during the narrow windows of competition.

“I currently fish out of a Hobie Pro Angler 14. As far as gear goes, I take it all on tournament day. That’s the advantage of having a Pro Angler. When I fish for fun, I usually keep it light.”

The technological backbone of OKBT allows it to also host online challenges when anglers can fish wherever they want to build their virtual bag of fish over a longer period.

“We do hold month-long challenges for the anglers as well. These are strictly online events and

Continued: Catch-Photo-Release



gives them something to do between live series events. Basically, they work the same as a live event except they take place over the entire month (or a specific time outlined for the event),” explained Dean. “The anglers can fish any public water in Ontario at any time they like and as often as they like between the start time and finish time of the event. “They submit their fish in the same CPR manner for judging on the Tourney X app and at the end of the event the best five fish total wins.”

These events are popular with experienced anglers and new tournament fishing folks, alike. “I think the reason they are so popular is that they can fish at a time that suits them and are not held to a single day that they may not be able to accommodate.”

For Sigouin, he enjoys both the live and virtual events and has already experienced some early success in his short career.

“2020 was my rookie OKBT season and I was very pleased with how it unfolded. I took third place on Lake Couchiching and ended in seventh place for the Angler of the Year race,” he said. “Unfortunately, my 2021 season didn't go as planned. That’s the beauty of having different lakes every year, it’s always a new challenge.”

Nothing attracts a crowd, like a crowd, and OKBT has been enjoying strong fields and growing in popularity in its events despite the challenges of COVID.

“As we conclude this fourth season, we reflect and see where we started and how far we have come. From the inaugural 2018 season with three events and an average attendance of 36 anglers per event growing each year to this season with five events and an average attendance of 92 anglers per event,” explained Dean. “And to add to that, 175 unique anglers participated in OKBT events this year and we once again posted the largest single day kayak event to ever be held in Ontario with 107 anglers at the season-opener on the Tri-Lakes (in the Kawartha’s consisting of Pigeon Lake, Buckhorn Lake and Chemong Lake).”

Image courtesy of John Dean
Fish are ranked by length and released immediately.



Image courtesy of Miguel Sigouin

Mig Sig Outdoors is Miguel Sigouin's company and sponsor on the OKBT. He says it allows him to find a tremendous balance between work and his first love, spending time outdoors.

Continued: Sponsors Make It Work

As far as prize pools go, the OKBT is a no-profit series, meaning it pays out 100% of the entry fees (after expenses) back to the anglers.

"This season with the record numbers we had attending the events, prize purses were more than \$4,000 per event. We typically payout the Top 5 anglers in each event as well as the angler with the big bass of the day. At year-end we also present an Angler of the Year Award to the person that was the most consistent throughout the season."

Along with the prize money, OKBT also hosts a number of draws for the participating anglers at each event from sponsors who are among the top companies within the kayak and angling industries.

"A lot of these sponsors have been part of the series since Day 1 and they continue to support us each year," said Dean. The series also has year-end draws that are for larger prizes that again are drawn from the anglers who participated at any event through the season.

"The one thing the OKBT does at the awards for both the events and the year end is we remove those that have won events and larger payouts through the season so we are able to offer those prize packages to the anglers that may not have had a great year. Spreading the wealth, you might say," said Dean.

Not all series' sponsors are hard to sell on the idea of backing the OKBT or its individual competitors. "I'm currently sponsored by myself. It sounds funny, but it's true! In March 2020, I started my own outdoor apparel business," said Sigouin. "Mig Sig



Image courtesy of John Dean

With cash and donated prizes, the OKBT ensures many anglers leave with something.

Outdoors is the name of my business and I sell high quality fishing and hunting apparel. It's been great and the OKBT has been very supportive. I wanted to start a small business that would be a good fit with my lifestyle. I get to travel all over Ontario to fish tournaments and sell my own apparel. It's a tough life!"

For Dean too, life is better since he made the switch to kayak competitions and it's helping to change the image some have of sport anglers in general.

"Yes, tournament anglers sometimes don't get a warm welcome from the lake residents, especially the bass boat guys. But overall, the response to the kayak events has been very positive," he said. "It is not uncommon to be stopped by a resident who sees you and is intrigued by what you are doing and the




Photo courtesy of John Dean

Some 107 anglers went head-to-head at an OKBT event last year - the largest ever in Ontario.

Continued: Mainly Positive Welcome

kayak you are in. Once they see the system we use and how non-invasive it is to the fish population by releasing immediately, they are usually very impressed. Of course, there are always the ‘ones’ that apparently think they own the water and like to make sure you know that. But then you just move on about your business and try not to let them ruin your day.”

Based on Sigouin’s experience, OKBT is a great place to compete and meet like-minded individuals.

“I believe that the Ontario Kayak Bass Trail will soon have similar numbers to some of the biggest tournaments in the U.S.” 



On the Trail in '22

The Ontario Kayak Bass Trail is heading into its fifth season in 2022 and once again will be holding both online challenges and the live trail events.

The five live events scheduled for the coming season cover a wide area so that no one enjoys a home lake advantage on multiple trail stops.

The calendar includes:


May 28: Ramsey Lake, Sudbury

June 25: Lake St. Clair, Windsor

July 16: Bay of Quinte, Trenton

August 13: Georgian Bay, Port Severn

September 10: Sturgeon Lake, Bobcaygeon

If you wish to find out more about the Ontario Kayak Bass Trail, the series maintains a Facebook page and website, www.okbt.ca. 

Unsure about lead?

Weigh the science:

Current research around the U.S. has found that lead poisoning is responsible for **12% to 50% of adult loon deaths.**

Alternatives exist in many styles!