



by Christie Thomas

twcchristie@aol.com

DIARY OF A *Wannabe* PRO

www.christie-thomas.com

www.bassworld.co.za

ANOTHER BASSING WORLD CHAMPION FOR SOUTH AFRICA!!

Jeffrey Toplis, Cape Town 2007 Junior World Bassmaster Champion (11-14 year olds)

During the weekend of 18th February 2007 eighty two junior anglers converged upon Lake Logan Martin in Alabama, USA, to compete in the **2007 Junior World Bassmaster Championships**. The anglers competed in two age divisions, 11-14 and 15-18, with two anglers, one from each division, fishing from the same boat in the company of a Bassmaster Classic competitor. In addition to competing for the title of Junior World Champion these kids would also be competing for a top prize of a fully rigged Triton/Mercury bass boat and \$5,000 in scholarship money. A Walt Disney World experience for the winners and their families would also be tacked on to the final prize.

The Junior Championships are the most prestigious worldwide event on the junior calendar each year. Throughout the 2006 season juniors from all over the world competed in fishing tournaments locally and regionally to qualify to fish the JWBC. For the first time last year South Africa was able to send two contestants, one from each age group, to compete in the championships. South African bass anglers first created a ripple when Anré de Villiers won the Federation Championships earlier that year and then MC Van Aswegen, a junior from the older age group, tied for third place in his group. Americans started sitting up and paying attention whenever they heard South Africans would be competing in any kind of tournament.

The South African Contenders

The two anglers from South Africa who qualified for the

2007 Junior World Bassmaster Championship were **TYRON MORTIMER**, who turned seventeen whilst in the States and lives in Johannesburg, and **JEFFREY TOPLIS**, fourteen years old and lives in Cape Town. Accompanying these young adults were Tyron's father, Kevin, Jeffrey's father, Mike and Xavier Tiberghien, Marketing Director for the South African Bass Angling Association (SABAA), who is also heavily involved in the Federation Nation and the Youth Director program in the United States. Xavier had been asked to chaperone and mentor the two junior contenders during the 2007 JWBC.

(The 6 P's)... Proper Pre-Preparation Prevents a Poor Performance

With the 2006 JWBC the juniors had come somewhat unprepared for the event as no one really had an idea of what to expect and what kind of competition they were up against, especially being the first time South Africa had sent junior bass angling representatives to the US. This time around the South African Federation decided to plan a whole lot better so that the kids would be better groomed for the experience. They even managed to schedule some pre-fishing for them and overall it was an unbelievable experience for them to take back to South Africa. Everybody gathered together and worked as a team to make the most out of the very limited time available to figure a strategy out. Xavier and the two parents worked as three individuals to gather as much information as possible from contacts, internet, etc. and then pooled their resources so that it could work to everybody's benefit. By doing this they managed to put together a really good game plan for the kids. The support base had been very good too as the parents had been there to support their children from start to finish, this included planning and phone calls at least six months before the trip to staying to attend the final hours of the whole Bassmaster Classic experience.

Practice

I managed to catch up with everybody in Birmingham the evening before official practice started. I found Mike Toplis and the two boys hunched over and studying the lake map trying to decide which areas the kids should check out the next day. That same evening we attended the official welcoming banquet where an angler from each age group would



be teamed up with one of the 2007 Classic contenders. The Classic competitors would act as guide and mentor on practice day and then strictly as skipper during the competition day. Jeffrey had drawn **Edwin Evers**, one of the Nitro Pro staffers fondly referred to as 'Steady Eddy' because of his consistent high finishes and big checks earned during the Elite Pro Tour. Tyron was teamed up with **John Murray**, an Elite Series angler from Phoenix, Arizona. Both boys were very excited at the opportunity of being able to fish with and learn from a 'genuine' touring professional angler.

During practice the pros were allowed to help the junior anglers with advice regarding the lake they would be fishing, successful fishing techniques, lures and any questions the kids may have on the subject of fishing. This is an opportunity very few people can enjoy and I guarantee you that there were many senior anglers around that evening who would have given their front teeth to have been able to fish with the pros as these kids did.

Frigid February in Alabama

For some reason I had believed the coldest part of the winter in the United States would be during the Christmas and New Year period (January/February) but was seriously mistaken. Everybody assured me the coldest winter months are generally in February and warned me to prepare myself for some seriously cold weather during the Classic week. Forewarned and prepared is still not enough when faced with 40 degree (F) temperatures and frigid 30 mile per hour Northern winds. This is what our South African anglers had to face each day. For the locals and those of us who have been here a while; we come prepared with insulated winter coveralls, snow boots, heating pads to put in your boots and gloves to warm the hands and feet, fleece jackets and the whole shooting match. Our kids were not prepared for the cold and after their initial pre-fishing cold shock had to make a stop at the local sporting-goods store to stock up on enough cold weather gear to get them through practice and the tournament.

With our long summers, short winters and very mild temperatures in South Africa it is a major adjustment for South Africans to comprehend that you can catch fish in water just 10 degrees (C) above freezing and outside temperatures so cold that your live-well hatches freeze shut and the rod eyes block with ice as the water from your line freezes in them.



Jeffrey Toplis, Cape Town - 2007 Junior World Bassmaster Champion (11-14 year old age group). Photo: C Thomas



Jeffrey Toplis, Cape Town, with his pro for the day Edwin Evers, one of the Nitro Pro staffers fondly referred to as 'Steady Eddy' because of his consistent high finishes and big checks earned during the Elite Pro Tour. Photo: James Overstreet



Tournament Day

Practice day was cold but tournament day turned out to be even colder. The outside temperatures, according to the local weather station, were not supposed to be that much colder than the previous day but the difference was the cold Northern wind which had blown in overnight. In South Africa we are used to our cold weather blowing in from the South but in the States it comes from the North, where everything stays frozen and covered in snow throughout the winter. This cold wind creates a 'wind chill' factor and when the icy wind cuts through your clothing it makes the outside temperature feel a whole lot colder than it actually is. The biting wind, as a rule, makes fishing feel very uncomfortable; feet and hands ache painfully and feel so numb that it becomes virtually impossible to detect a bite or set the hook positively when you do finally feel something.

Off course, as all fishermen know, when cold weather moves in it seems that all bass move out. The bite slowed down for the kids and a tough practice day turned out to be an even tougher tournament day. I had asked the boys two days earlier what problems they thought they may encounter whilst fishing this tournament and both their responses were spot-on. **Jeffrey Toplis's** reply was *'...catching the fish. I think the tournament will be won on a bag. If you can get a bag (5-fish limit) you will do well'* and **Tyron Mortimer** said *'..cold weather and the time that we have available to fish will be the most important factors during the tournament'*

The only thing Jeffrey was wrong about was catching a limit; fishing was so tough that not one angler was able to bring a limit of bass to the scales on tournament day. The winning weight in both age divisions turned out to be in the 7-pound range with the winner of the older age group only bringing in three fish and Jeffrey, the winner of the younger age group, bringing in two fish to the scales.

Changing Conditions

During practice several fish had been caught on jerkbaits and many kids had gone out the next day determined to duplicate the pattern but the conditions had changed which meant that the presentation needed to be changed too. Our boys did very well in knowing they needed to change up if they wanted to bring any bass to the scales that afternoon and they were not afraid to make drastic changes. **Jeffrey** found out early on that the fish did not seem to be biting on the jerkbait and decided to change to a bait and technique he had never fished before in his life. A little **brown jig** with a **green pumpkin trailer** helped him catch the two fish that brought him his Championship title. **Tyron**, on the other hand, decided to go back to the confidence bait he often uses back home in South Africa. As he rigged up the **green pumpkin fluke mojo style** the pro on

his boat (John Murray) thought to himself *'I don't think he's going to catch a bass on that'*. Two casts later Tyron caught his first bass and later, with only 15 minutes left before check-in, he caught his second keeper right in front of Danny Brauer!!

Glowing Testimonials

As the boats came in that afternoon I took time to speak to the two pros that had accompanied the South African boys and asked them their opinion as to the boys' fishing ability. It is a very heart-warming feeling when you know things are being done right back in South Africa because the kids represent their country so well and the people you speak to only have good things to say about them. When the pros make comments such as..... *'I told my friends; whoever is teaching the kids in South Africa, they're sure teaching them right! I don't know where the techniques are coming from....but they are learning the right stuff. Very impressive.'* (John Murray)you know the junior program in South Africa is on the right track.

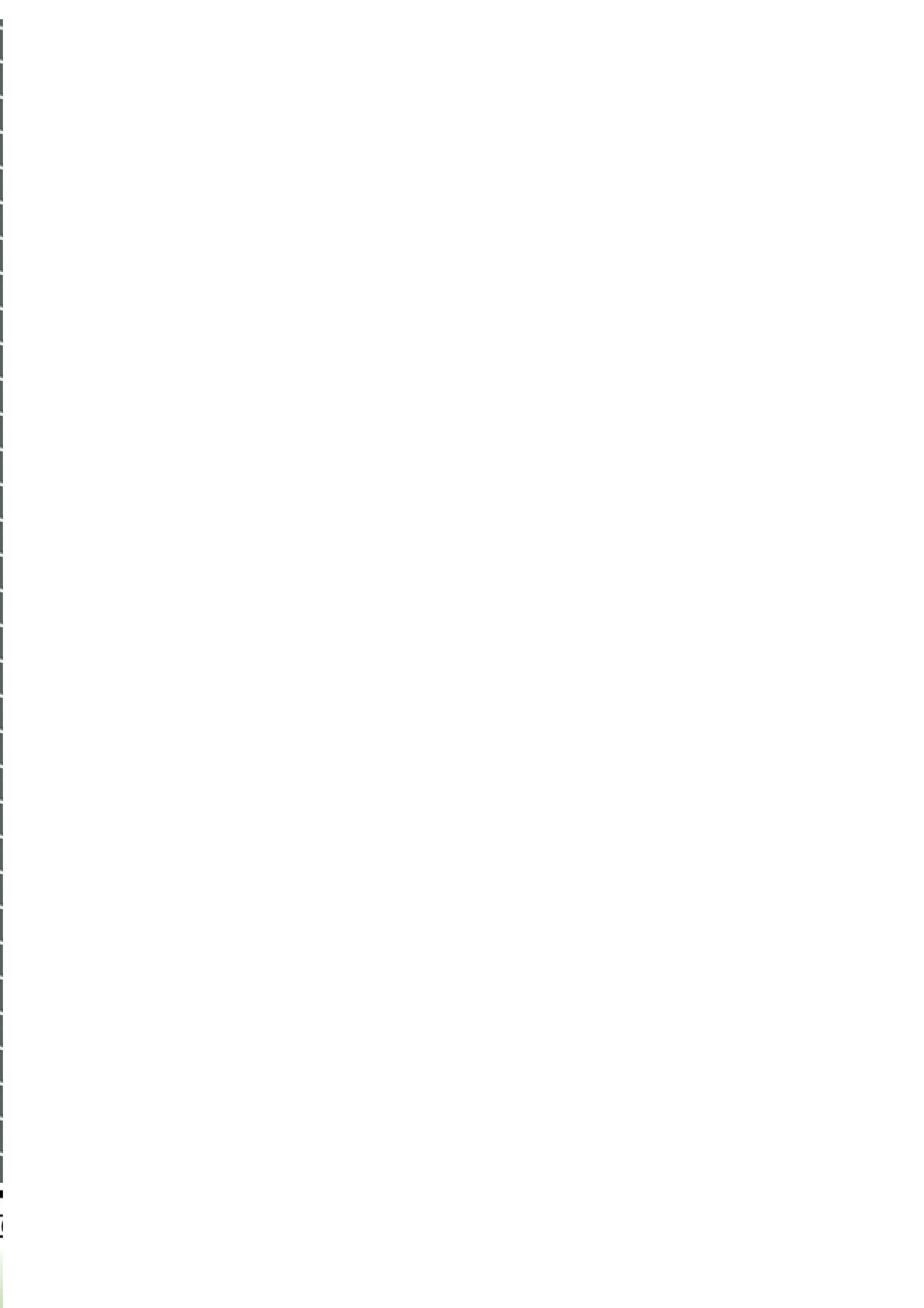
Edwin Evers/Jeffrey Toplis (14) – *'I think Jeffrey is a really well-spoken young man, a very positive type of person and he fished really hard today. He had two bites and made the most of his opportunities. I think he has the potential of becoming a really good fisherman, a great young man and I enjoyed the day in the boat with him'*

John Murray/Tyron Mortimer (17) – *'Now today...was a tough morning and no-one got as many bites as they had the previous day. It was really tough. Finally, quite late, Tyron decided to go to one of his confidence rigs and he followed his instincts a little and tied on a strangely rigged bait. I looked at it and thought to myself 'I don't think he's going to catch a bass on that' and it wasn't 2 casts later and he caught one. I think it was just a good learning experience; you have to adapt; you have to be able to follow your instincts and he did. It turned out well and he caught 2 good ones (bass). Another day...I think he will make the right adjustments and catch them again. I think his future as a competitive bass angler is very promising. The tackle he has, the way he approaches, he's excellent as far as he thinks and looks as a tournament fisherman. He tears it apart; he thinks about it and makes adjustments. A lot of guys won't make adjustments but he does. That is a very big key; I know a lot of full time bass pros that can't really adjust and have the kind of confidence he has. I think if he wants to be a professional bass fisherman it will be something very easy for him to translate into.'*

The Future of Junior Bass Angling in South Africa

I asked Xavier Tiberghien, the South African representative to the Youth Director program currently run in the United





States and Marketing Director for the **South African Bass Angling Association**, to explain to me in which direction SABAA was moving in regard to junior angling in South Africa. This was his response.... *'Corporate sponsors are starting to get seriously involved in our junior programs, and I think the association (SABAA) also sees that without a good kids program we will not get very far from a corporate point of view in terms of getting money back into our sport. From a growth point of view we are starting to see a lot more influence from the clubs and the senior anglers in pushing for our kids to become more and more involved. While we appear small (as a country) the competitiveness is intense. Our kids compete on an identical level to our seniors; they understand match play and their skills are far superior to where they were 5 to 10 years ago. I think this has a lot to do with the seniors getting involved in teaching the kids a lot about, not so much techniques and stuff, but more about learning and reading water conditions and fish patterning. I think a lot of emulation comes through seeing a lot from the media aspect such as watching ESPN2 and reading the Bassmasters magazine. Media has a tremendous influence on kids getting involved in this sport. With these kids performing well at the JWBC they go back to school and other kids will start asking a lot of questions about it and start getting a lot more involved in the sport. They want to become part of the program and ask 'how can I get involved?'. We would like to see the Casting Kids program take off in South Africa. I believe this can be a completely independent program on its own but it will release our sport into the masses so that people can just get to understand what fishing is all about, not necessarily just bass fishing. Fishing can be fun, it can be a team thing or an individual thing, its entertainment, it gets kids into the outdoors instead of sitting back at home bone idle and not sure what to do with themselves. It is a great venue for family vacations and being from SA we are very fortunate with our weather. We are able to be outdoors with our kids a lot more often compared to the US where, it seems, for a great deal of time the weather is either too hot or too cold to spend a lot of time outdoors. I believe we have huge potential in our country; we just need everyone to work together to get the whole thing off the ground and working properly.'*

Proudly South African!!!

I have to admit that I felt like a proud parent after these two young men had done so well and it was a great honour for me to be associated with them, their parents and our association. I can truly say I feel 'Proudly South African' and assure you that South Africans are being noticed over here in the United States. Americans have started calling us the 'New Japanese' to the fact that our presence in their country is being felt and we are making waves in the BASS arena!!

Tournament Results

2007 Junior World Bassmaster Championships - Birmingham, AL

Logan Martin Lake, Birmingham Ala.

18 February 2007

(All age groups)

Angler	Hometown	No.fish/lbs-oz
1. Kalem Tippett	Hanson, Ky.	3 7-08
2. Brandon Weathers	St Francisville, La.	2 7-07
3. Geoffrey Toplis	Cape Town, SA	2 7-04
4. Brad Rutherford	Avonia, Ga.	2 7-00
5. Corey Lindsey	Centerburg, Ohio	1 5-07
6. Dylan Matheis	Waterford, Mich.	2 5-00
7. Christopher Baksay	Easton, Conn.	2 4-15
8. Shane Lehew	Charlotte, N.C.	3 4-11
9. Spencer Worthington	Pershing, Ind.	2 3-15
10. Hunter King	North Platte, Neb.	1 3-11
11. Justin Hamner	Northport, Ala.	2 3-07
12. Seth Garrison	Farmington, N.M.	1 3-05
12. Tom Gomez	Brooklyn Park, Minn.	1 3-05
14. Matthew Roberts	Pulaski, Iowa	1 3-04
15. Luke Biewick	Littleton, Colo.	1 3-03
15. David Slater	Spokane Valle, Wash.	1 3-03
17. Tyron Mortimer	Johannesburg, SA	2 3-00
17. Andy Wicker	Pomaria, S.C.	2 3-00
17. Cady Reinke	Pierce, Neb.	1 3-00
20. Jordan Lane	Clinton, Tenn.	1 2-14

SOUTHERN DIVISION (15-18)

Angler	Hometown	No.fish/lbs-oz
1 Kalem Tippett	Hanson, Ky.	3 7-08
2 Brad Rutherford	Avonia, Ga.	2 7-00
3 Shane Lehew	Charlotte, N.C.	3 4-11
4 Justin Hamner	Northport, Ala.	2 3-07
5 Tyron Mortimer	Johannesburg, SA	2 3-00
5 Andy Wicker	Pomaria, S.C.	2 3-00
7 Jordan Lane	Clinton, Tenn.	1 2-14
8 Colby Cotterill	Lakeland, Fla.	0 0-00

SOUTHERN DIVISION (11-14)

Angler	Hometown	No.fish/lbs-oz
1 Geoffrey Toplis	Cape Town, SA	2 7-04
2 Kophen Sudduth	Sulligent, Ala.	1 1-08
3 Kyle Black	Winnsboro, S.C.	0 0-00
3 Tyler Browning	Arcadia, Fla.	0 0-00
3 Bubba Cribb	Taylorsville, N.C.	0 0-00
3 Dj Frederick	Brownsville, Tenn.	0 0-00
3 Joe Manley	Alvaton, Ky.	0 0-00
3 Robert Marsh	Fayetteville, Ga.	0 0-00

Check out the following link on www.bassmaster.com to find a more comprehensive listing of the final tournament results.....

http://sports.espn.go.com/outdoors/bassmaster/youth/news/story?page=b_youth_jr_bassmaster_overview

