

Seth Borton lands bass fishing coach job

Chosen to lead Adrian College angling team

By DAVID GREEN

Seth Borton is hearing joke after joke about the Adrian College bass fishing team and his role as coach. It's no joke to him; he's landed a full-time job with the college and he knows there's a lot of work ahead.

In reality, the response shouldn't be "What is Adrian College doing with a bass fishing team?" Instead, you might ask this question: "What took them so long?"

There are more than 600 colleges and universities with fishing teams—along with many high schools—but there is a difference at Adrian. At most schools, fishing is considered a club sport. At Adrian College, it's now an official sport with institutional funding. Yes, a bass fishing team.

"The sport is growing unbelievably at both the high school and college level," said the Morenci native.

Not only is it a good recruitment tool, but it also gives a smaller school the possibility of national exposure.

"It's unique for Adrian College to have the opportunity to compete with the largest Div. I schools," he said.

Borton said other schools have seen the tremendous appeal and potential to put a small school into the national spotlight when competitions are broadcast on television.

Need a coach

Borton heard over the summer that Adrian was considering adding fishing to its athletic department, and he thought he might be a great fit to lead the program.

"I figured I didn't have anything to lose so I sent an e-mail to President Docking," he recalls. "I would either be invited in to talk or told to get lost."

He got the invitation.

Pres. Docking was aware of Borton's success in competitive fishing, and he soon found out other factors that suggested a new coach might be sitting across the room.

Borton has been involved in competitive fishing for more than 12 years, garnering several top finishes in FLW Outdoors and Bass Fishing League events, including a first-place tie in the 300-boat 2013 National Bass Anglers Association National Championship.

In addition, his background in the fishing business world could prove invaluable in gaining corporate support for the program. He's served as a regional merchandiser and pro staff member with Pradco Outdoor Brands and Rapala Lures/Accessories since 2010 and worked as an assistant manager in the fishing department at Bass Pro Shops for three years. He also conducts monthly clinics at Cabela's.

Borton earned a degree in sport and business management from Siena Heights University.

He emerged from an interview process as the top choice to lead the program, scheduled to begin in the 2014-15 school year. The fishing season will match that of baseball, with "spring training" in southern states in March.

Recruiting

There's fishing and then there's competitive fishing.

"You may have fished before," Borton said, "but have you fished at this level? Do you know how to handle a \$40- to \$50,000 boat? You need to have a foundation."

Borton has heard from a few Adrian College students who want to join the team, but there's not a lot of time to learn, he said. He needs to field a knowledgeable team a year from now and he's hoping to recruit a few experienced students. He's contacting high school coaches and professional anglers for leads, but he says it's sort of like starting out in the seventh inning. Many high school seniors already know where they intend to attend school in the fall.

In the future, he said, the school might be able to allow some kids into the program who will have a couple of years to learn.

The college is expected to furnish two boats and Borton will bring in the boat he won at a national tournament last year. That can put up to nine students out on the water for an event.

But before they're out on the water....

To succeed in competitive fishing, an angler doesn't just show up with a

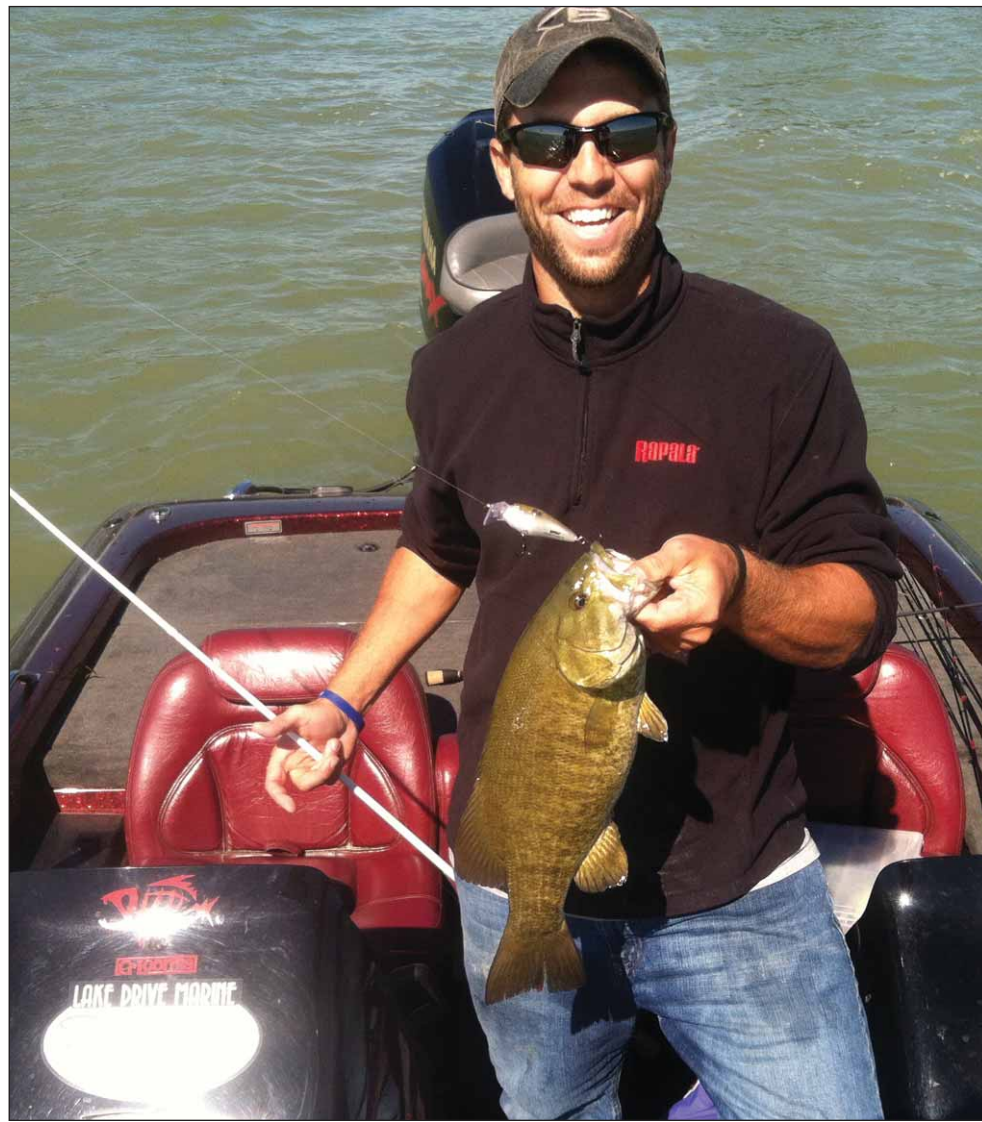
boat. Some people think that water is water and fish live there, Borton said, but every lake and river is different and anglers need to plan ahead and learn to read the water.

Contours below the water body, seasonal movements and patterns, vegetation, underwater objects—half of a lake can be ruled out before you leave home, Borton said. In addition to map study and learning characteristics of water, team members will put in a lot of time practicing precision casting.

"You have to learn to present a lure without a big splash," Borton said. "There's a lot to learn about artificial lures and weight,



Seth Borton



NICE CATCH—Seth Borton shows off a smallmouth bass from Lake Erie. The Morenci native has fished competitively for a dozen years. That experience, combined with his connection to the business of fishing through equipment sales, makes him a likely choice to lead Adrian College's new bass fishing team. Fishing is not an NCAA-sanctioned sport so team members—like their coach in his spare time—are able to keep prize money they win. A portion of prizes, Borton said, would likely stay with the college to help fund the program.

along with fish-finder technology."

While some team members practice and study, others will put their research to the test. There's a lot of downed wood in Lake Adrian that isn't found in Round Lake or Wampplers Lake. That's a scenario anglers will encounter sometime. There's also Lake Erie and the Detroit River for a longer jaunt.

Coach Borton will expect the same commitment from his team members that would be shown in any other college sport.

There are two collegiate fishing tournament circuits to compete in, plus there's talk among several Michigan schools about creating a state tournament.

"It's exciting, but it's also a little daunting," Borton said. "It's all up to me."

He's contacted coaches and representatives from several schools for ideas to get him started, and he's learned a lot, but, like a secret fishing spot, they aren't telling all.

Looking back

Like hundreds of other Morenci kids,

Borton got his fishing start on Bean Creek.

"We found my dad's poles and tackle boxes," he said. "My home waters was fishing at Bean Creek. That's where it all started. Carp, suckers and small-mouth in the Bean."

The big change came during a family visit to an aunt and uncle's house. David Rydzinski was involved in competitive fishing and that visit gave Borton his first experience with artificial lures.

"Uncle Dave opened it up for me," he said. "My involvement grew and branched out."

And now he says he's still pinching himself to make sure his new job is a reality.

"To get paid to do something you love, that's what you strive for," he said.

As Adrian's coach, he's expected to continue his own competitive fishing, wearing a team shirt, of course, and talking up the college program whenever he has the opportunity.

"Maybe now I'm going to get to fish more than I ever dreamed of."

FLW ranking of fishing-friendly schools

1. North Carolina State University (Raleigh)
2. Auburn University (Auburn, Ala.)
3. University of North Carolina (Charlotte)
4. Virginia Tech (Blacksburg)
5. University of Wisconsin (Madison)
6. Georgia College & State University (Milledgeville)
7. University of Wisconsin (Stevens Point)
8. Murray State University (Murray, Ky.)
9. Clemson University (Clemson, S.C.)
10. Georgia Southern (Statesboro)
(rankings from 2010)

Bassmaster rankings of top teams

1. Bethel University (McKenzie, Tenn.)
2. Daytona State College (Daytona Beach)
3. Western Illinois University (Macomb)
4. University of North Carolina (Charlotte)
5. University of Central Florida (Orlando)
6. New Mexico State University (Las Cruces)
7. Auburn University (Auburn, Ala.)
8. Georgetown College (Georgetown, Ky.)
9. Eastern Kentucky University (Richmond)
10. Tarleton State (Stephenville, Texas)
(rankings from June 2013)

Purdue's fishing team formed in 1992. It challenged a squad from Indiana University in what's believed to be the first collegiate tournament.

One directory of schools with fishing teams lists more than 600. Five years earlier there were fewer than 90.