

Man Flips For Bass Fishing

By ASHLEY KEESIS-WOOD

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Bass fishing is more than just a hobby for Frank Villa. It's his passion.

Villa, who has fished since he was 3, is president of the Centennial Bass Club of Northern Colorado, founder and mentor of the Northern Colorado Junior Bass Fishing Club and is a professional bass fisherman himself.

"When I was younger I had fished recreationally, for multiple species," Villa said. "I'm an avid outdoorsman."

It was about three years ago that Villa first began thinking about fishing professionally. But in August 2006, that idea grew gills when he met Blake Muhlenbruch.

"Blake had designed a new kind of skirt expander and wanted me to come with him to ICAST, a kind of demo for all sorts of fishing equipment," Villa said.

It was at ICAST that Villa began meeting up with sponsors willing to provide him with gear for the professional tournaments. His first tournament was February 23 in Texas.

"The first year was mostly spent getting sponsors and products together," Villa said. "When I go to the tournaments, I use the gear provided by my sponsors, and I also promote those products to other fishermen and local retailers."

The tournaments cover several days each. When the fishermen arrive, the first day is spent tying lures, studying maps of the lake and talking to locals to gather information about potentially good fishing spots.

"We're not allowed on the lake that day," Villa said.

The next one to three days are reserved for pre-fishing, where the fishermen scout out the lake to find the best spots for the actual competition.

Then there are three days of competition, where fishermen are allowed on the lake during certain times. At the end of that time each day, they are allowed to bring the five biggest fish they've caught during the day to the weigh-in.

Payouts at these tournaments can be up to \$1 million, and entry fees can be anywhere from \$300 up to \$20,000 for the elite levels of competition.

"There are differences in the tournaments also, depending on whether you have a boat or not," Villa said.



Non-boaters are paired each day of the tournament in a blind draw with a boated fisherman for the duration of the day.

Villa recently purchased a boat - a 21-foot Ranger Z21 with a 250 horsepower Optimax and 109 thrust trolling motor. And thanks to a sponsor, he has a 2008 Toyota Tundra SR5 truck to pull it with.

"Most people prefer being boaters," Villa said. "On the water, boaters tend to have an advantage over non-boaters. They get to fish off the front of the boat and are better prepared to catch fish."

When he's not traveling the country competing, Villa is president of the Centennial Bass Club of Northern Colorado.

"The club is always recruiting new members," he said. "It's for recreational fishermen interested in learning about club-style tournaments."

Currently, there are about 40 members in the club, both boaters and non-boaters, who live all around the area and up into Wyoming.

The club meets the first Tuesday of each month, and they are very active in the area. They bring in guest speakers, put on tournaments and special events, do habitat projects on area lakes and build docks.

"We also do a lot of work with the junior club," Villa said.

The Northern Colorado Junior Bass Fishing Club meets the first Monday of each month and has about 20 members.

Fishing, according to Villa, is the perfect opportunity to network and make new friends.

"The camaraderie is the best part of the club atmosphere," Villa said.

FISHERMAN'S THANKS

Frank Villa would like to thank the following sponsors:

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Fishful Thinker: fishfulthinker.com

If you are interested in sponsoring Villa, please contact him at 302-4851.

BASS CLUB

The Centennial Bass Club of Northern Colorado meets the first Tuesday of each month. The cost to join is \$55 annually, as well as a \$20 annual fee to join the Bass Angler Sportsman's Society. The club is open to anyone aged 18 or over, and no experience is needed. For more information or to join, contact Frank Villa at 302-4851 or visit the club's Web site at www.centennialbass.com.