



Over the years, the landscape of college athletics has experienced rapid growth, and today, the fastest growing sport in collegiate athletics is Bass Fishing. In the spring of 2010, DBU began exploring the idea of beginning a team, which gained momentum as DBU President Dr. Gary Cook and Executive Vice President Dr. Blair Blackburn turned that vision into a reality.

Connor Smith ('09,'11) currently Acting Athletic Director for DBU, accepted the opportunity to be the team's administrative sponsor and began the task of researching collegiate Bass Fishing. Smith reached out to Scott Darragh, a fellow Baptist and former professional champion angler, to help coach the team.

One of the first hurdles they faced was finding a boat to fish in year-round, not to mention learning the ins-and-outs of the sport. After numerous phone calls and meetings with prospective boat dealers, Smith connected with Legend Boats in Mountain Home, Arkansas, and company owner, Randy Qualls.

Prior to his first conversation with DBU, Qualls had already developed a place in his heart for the University. In 2006, his

nephew, who tragically lost his life fighting in Iraq, was buried next to DBU at the Dallas Fort Worth National Cemetery. During those four years, Qualls visited the cemetery and became acquainted with the Dallas Baptist campus. Following the initial phone call to and meeting with Legend Boats, Qualls phoned Connor to explain how he sensed the Lord leading him to assist DBU with their effort.

Qualls and DBU made collegiate history, as the program signed the first-ever, multi-year bass fishing boat agreement. The contract granted DBU three new top-of-the-line, fully loaded Legend Alpha 199 bass boats. Qualls also made arrangements for outboard motors from one of the nation's top motor manufacturers, Mercury Marine.

"The Legends Boat deal was simply the Lord working through their company president, Randy Qualls," Smith commented. "To be the first program in the history of the sport to sign a multi-year deal and to do it with a first-class company like Legend Boats, we couldn't have asked for more. Randy has been terrific to work with ever since that first day we met. He is always there to provide advice and answer any questions."

Two-and-a-half years removed from the birth of the program, DBU is currently one of 17 institutions in the State of Texas with a college Bass Fishing team. The squad competes in all three collegiate Bass Fishing circuits including the FLW; the Boat US Association of College Anglers; and the most widely known amateur and professional association, the College Bass Anglers Sportsman Society.

In the first two seasons, DBU has experienced tremendous success, qualify-

ing for both the regional and national championships in each circuit both years. In 2012, the team finished eighth out of 250 teams in the Boat US ACA School of the Year standings and concluded the season ranked 19th in the nation by Bassmaster.com.

"The level of commitment and sacrifice that those initial five young men [on the team] demonstrated may be unmatched," said Darragh. "To establish a program, have it ranked within the top ten in the nation, and to qualify for two to three national championships in each of the first two years is amazing."

Since their inception, the program has been featured on such high-profile networks as ESPN, ESPN Radio, NBC Sports, and various bass fishing magazines and websites.

Aside from the accolades and national notoriety, DBU's Bass Fishing Team has used their platform to proclaim their faith. In the spring of 2013, the program founded the very first Fellowship of Christian Anglers Society (F.O.C.A.S.) on the collegiate level. "The F.O.C.A.S. group has truly been a blessing and has proved to be a great success," Smith commented. "Typically, anywhere from 10-60 anglers attend with our group of guys at each tournament in the spring." Darragh continues, "These young men exemplify the highest level of character, skill, and are truly Christ-like followers."

As the Dallas Baptist Bass Fishing Team enters their third season on the water, five anglers return from last year's squad including: Cameron Burger, Trent Newman, Michael Romagosa, Jacob Sepeda, and Chase Winston. The team also welcomes three newcomers: Zackary Hines, Dakota Jones, and Garrett Seagraves.

