



Op-Ed: California Sportfishing League encourages early fishing participation

Submitted by California Sportfishing League
January 24, 2019

*This op-ed was supplied by California Sportfishing League. The printed version of this op-ed was ***edited for brevity*** by Parimal M. Rohit.*

SACRAMENTO—As a Bassmaster Elite Professional Angler from Hughson, California, Ish Monroe was fortunate to compete and win the 2018 Bassmaster Elite at on the Mississippi River. The journey to the winner’s stand began many years ago.

Ish’s earliest childhood memories include fishing with his father and childhood friends in Michigan, before moving to the Mission District of San Francisco. He found that fishing created a special bond between his father and him, and a lasting relationship with childhood friends.

Ish’s early recollection of fishing was of both joy and sorrow. On most mornings, he fished with his buddies at the San Francisco Bay’s waterfront, sometimes all day long. One night, instead of going to a late-night party like most teenagers, Ish chose to go to bed early so that he could be among the first to cast his line the following morning. One of his best friends chose otherwise, never to fish again. The circumstances that led to his friend’s murder were never determined. Given that they were inseparable, Ish’s decision to fish may have altered his life in more ways than he could have ever imagined.

Over time, Ish grew into a young man who worked multiple jobs to compete in amateur fishing tournaments and when he qualified for the Bassmaster Tour, so began his journey as a professional angler, traveling over 30 weeks out of the year with the support of Yamaha Outboards, Bass Pro Shops and all of his sponsors.

As Ish competes before thousands of fishing enthusiasts’ it is clear to him that not every child has a parent or family member that can introduce them to the joy of fishing. This comes with consequences. According to a national survey, more than 70 percent of anglers were introduced to fishing by a family member. Such introductions and connections are critical to the future of fishing and essential to reversing the declining participation rates in California. Today, the number of diehard anglers is getting older and declining in numbers faster than the rate of new anglers.

While some states and national organizations such as the Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation (RBFF) are securing funds and developing programs to reverse this trend, Ish Monroe is among many who are committed to making a difference in his community of Hughson, California. Ish competed in and won the 2018 Bassmaster Elite at on the Mississippi River. He fished with his father and childhood friends in Michigan before eventually moving to San Francisco's Mission District.

Today, there are thousands of high school and college bass clubs in the U.S. and over 70 in California. When Ish discovered that the high school in his Central Valley town did not have a fishing club, he sought to change that. His efforts to provide this useful opportunity for the students was much easier said than done, but with the support of students, parents and a facility who saw the value of the program, after two years, Hughson High School has a competitive bass fishing club and the membership is growing in numbers.

Even though these kids are actively fishing, many barriers still exist for far too many prospective anglers, especially for kids in low income and minority communities. California has some of the best fishing in the country, especially bass fishing, yet it has become increasingly more difficult to fish. A fishing license is among the costliest in the country, a major barrier for prospective anglers, and the rules and regulations associated with it are more complicated than any other recreational activity. What's more, declining fishing license revenue has resulted in smaller and fewer fish being stocked in California rivers and lakes.

But, this could be changing. With the encouragement of the California Sportfishing League, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) invited Ish to become a member of its R3 (Retain, Recruit and Reactivate) Stakeholder Group. With the support of the sportfishing industry, including his sponsor Yamaha Outboards, the state is seeking new strategies to increase fishing (and hunting) participation rates by identifying new licensing structures and strategies to remove barriers to fishing. Needless to say, when California's fishing rate is the lowest among all 50 states (per capita), the work of retaining and recruiting new anglers has taken on added urgency.

So, when Ish is not casting his line on the pro fishing circuit, he will be among the many Californians spending their free time introducing the next generation of anglers to fishing. He would encourage every angler to do the same. There is another Bassmaster Elite angler waiting to be discovered. Be a part of their journey.

<https://www.fishrapnews.com/features/op-ed-california-sportfishing-league-encourages-early-fishing-participation/>