

*Interviewer:* What is your name?

*James Eddison:* My name is James Eddison.

*Interviewer:* How long have you been fishing?

*James Eddison:* I have been tournament fishing for twenty-three years.

*Interviewer:* What was your best catch?

*James Eddison:* My best catch outside of a tournament was a thirteen-pound largemouth bass on Lake Seminole in Pinellas Park.

*Interviewer:* What kind of fish do the tournaments catch?

*James Eddison:* For tournaments, I specifically fish for bass in tournaments, all throughout the State of Florida.

*Interviewer:* What is the most common fish you catch?

*James Eddison:* Largemouth bass, the Florida strain largemouth bass, which typically grows larger than most of your bass up north, like your Suwannee bass or your spotted bass. I fish specifically for largemouth, Florida strain.

*Interviewer:* What is the most exciting story you ever had with fishing?

*James Eddison:* The most exciting story I've ever had fishing was having a friend in the back of my boat on Lake Seminole in Pinellas Park. He's a guy that weighs about 360 pounds, and he set the hook on a largemouth bass and went overboard.

He didn't think that the water was shallow enough for him to stand up, and I threw him a floatation device, thinking that the water was a little deeper, even though I had seen on the depth finder that it was three-and-a-half feet deep, and he was floundering around in the water, and I started yelling to him to grab the preserver. Keep in mind that this individual is a firefighter.

He finally grabbed the preserver, and I said, Chad, just try standing up. Then he realized it was three feet of water, and we both just spent the rest of the day laughing about that. Needless to say, he spent most of the day drying out.

*Interviewer:* Did you learn by yourself to fish or did somebody teach you?

*James Eddison:* Most fishermen never learn to fish by themselves. They gather information from friends and parents, as I did. My dad taught me to fish when I was five years old. I learned from other anglers, the people that were on the back of my boat, and so I can't say that I learned to fish by myself. I take bits and pieces of information from TV shows and books and other people. I learned that way.

*Interviewer:* What type of fishing equipment do you prefer to use?

*James Eddison:* I fish a Stratos boat, which is a high-performance bass boat. It's all tricked out. The rods that I like to use are Abu Garcia rods and Abu Garcia reels, Baitcasters, to be specific. I have a few spinning reels that I use and a couple of Shimano rods. I try to stay with monofilament or fluorocarbon, unless I am fishing heavy cover, and then I use braided line.

*Interviewer:* How often do you go fishing?

*James Eddison:* If it wasn't so cold, I would be fishing today. That's how often I fish. I would rather fish than sleep, if that makes any sense. I fish as much as I possibly can. I try to fish at least four times a month.

*Interviewer:* What is your opinion about illegal fishing?

*James Eddison:* My opinion about illegal fishing is that, first of all, it shouldn't be done. Illegal is illegal. There is no substitute for that. It just shouldn't be done, and let the punishment fit the crime.

*Interviewer:* What is the biggest fish you ever caught?

*James Eddison:* The biggest fish I ever caught was a thirteen-pound bass on Lake Seminole, several years ago. I have caught several double-digit fish in my career with tournament fishing, and that's ten-pound-plus bass. That's been pretty exciting.

*Interviewer:* Was fishing a hobby before an occupation?

*James Eddison:* Fishing has always been a hobby of mine. It's a passion. I

don't do it for an occupation. I do it because I love the sport of fishing, and so I like to keep it fun. That way, it can always be a hobby.

*Interviewer:*

How have fish sizes changed over the years?

*James Eddison:*

Fish sizes have changed over the years on the lakes that I have fished in that this time of the year is the spawn, during the winter. The bass start to spawn from December through March, and you get a lot of the guys that get out there in these tournaments and they pick bass off the beds, which typically the females guard the beds. When that happens, only the male, which is typically smaller, will guard the bed.

If you pick that female off the bed, she is a bit more aggressive to guard the fry that's there. You leave the male, and the male is typically smaller, and he can get run off by other indigenous species, such as your garfish and your catfish and some of your larger tilapia. They will make that male move off the bed, which leaves the fry vulnerable to other predators.

When that happens, if you have a good strain of largemouth bass fry that are there, and you pluck those bass off the bed, you're going to have, for one, a reduced number of bass in a given lake, and typically you will see that the bass that you will start to catch down the road, when you get guys bass fishing on a lake that is a real high-pressure lake, you will start catching smaller fish, in time.

*Interviewer:*

What is the best weather to go fishing?

*James Eddison:*

The best weather to go fishing, in my opinion, is sixty-five-degree water temperature and sunny and seventy-five.

*Interviewer:*

What is the best season to go fishing, summer or winter?

*James Eddison:*

Spring. Spring is probably the best time to go fishing. It's an exciting time of the year. You get your rainy seasons and you get your bugs that have bred and the hatches out there, and top-water is a great type of fishing to do during the spring of the year.

You get all the other types of species of fish that are

spawned out, and, me being a bass fisherman, that helps, because now the bass are feeding on some of the other indigenous species that have spawned out as well, and it's just an exciting time of the year, the spring of the year, to bass fish or fish in general, because the weather is not going to beat you down, for one.

*Interviewer:* Do you fish only in Tampa Bay or do you fish all over?

*James Eddison:* I fish in the Southeast. The last three years, I've been all over the State of Florida.

*Interviewer:* Where do you usually participate in the fishing tournaments?

*James Eddison:* Everywhere from Leesburg, which is the Harris Chain, down to Lake Okeechobee, which is down in Clewiston.

*Interviewer:* Did you get any good trophies?

*James Eddison:* Absolutely. In April of 2014, I won the tournament for Lakeland Bassmasters on the Harris Chain. I took first place, and I also won big bass in that exact same tournament, which is typically pretty hard to do when you're fishing against the caliber of people that I fish against, which are a lot of Elite-Series pros and touring Bassmaster Open pros, FLW pros, which is the Fishing League Worldwide that you guys see on TV probably, on ESPN some weekends.

There is a good networking caliber of fishermen that are out there that can really catch them, and I was fortunate enough to win on the Harris Chain last year, in April, and I also won Big Bass at Lake Okeechobee last October.

*Interviewer:* Where do you prefer fishing, in lakes or in the ocean or the estuaries?

*James Eddison:* The lakes. I love the lakes, lakes and rivers. That is my forte. If I could pick one lake in the State of Florida to fish every day, it would be Lake Okeechobee. It's a beautiful, beautiful place to fish, and there is lots of fish, and they're willing to bite.

*Interviewer:* Have you ever tried fishing in the winter, like making a

hole in the ice and fishing?

*James Eddison:*

I did. I am originally from Illinois, and it gets quite cold in Illinois in the winter. I tried that, but it didn't last for very long. I didn't catch any fish. It was an interesting experience, to say the least.

*Interviewer:*

How does the red tide affect you? Have you ever seen a red tide?

*James Eddison:*

Absolutely, and it's funny that you would mention that. I actually live on Lake Maggorie, which is a brackish body of water. It's one of the very few lakes in this area that you can get a smorgasbord of fish. You can get the best of both worlds, and I'm saying this on camera, which it's kind of like my best-kept secret. You get saltwater fish and freshwater fish.

I can be on one end of Lake Maggorie and catch a six-pound largemouth and be on the other end of Lake Maggorie and catch a fifteen-pound snook as well as a redfish. I can go on one end of Lake Maggorie and dip crawfish and go in the other end of Lake Maggorie and deep blue crabs.

There is a dam system that's there. When the red tide comes in, it finds its way into Lake Maggorie. At times, that whole lake, on one end of it, will look almost orange, because of the red tide that filters in.

The other end will be extremely clear. I will fish the end that's clear, and I may get sixty-five bites in two-and-a-half hours. Then I go and fish the other end, where the red tide is, and I may fish for three hours and get two bites, and so does it significantly impact that lake? I would say absolutely yes. I haven't seen any dead fish floating by virtue of the red tide, but I'm sure that it impacts that lake in some fashion negatively on one end of it.

*Interviewer:*

What kind of bait do you use?

*James Eddison:*

Typically, I only use artificial lures. I am an artificial lure type of fisherman, especially for tournaments. We can only use artificial lures. However, for live bait, I will use the golden shiner, and it is by far the best freshwater bait you

can put on a hook. If you want to go out and catch a fish in a freshwater lake or estuary or river system, put a shiner on, and chances are you will get bit in Florida.

*Interviewer:*

Back to the topic of red tide. When the red tide does occur and it only goes on half of the lake, do you prefer when that happens, because they're more compact on one side, so you can get more fish?

*James Eddison:*

Good question. Do I prefer that the red tide comes into the lake? I can't change it. It helps me a lot, by having the red tide only on half of that lake, because you're absolutely right that it seems to concentrate a lot of fish on one end of the lake versus the other end of the lake, and so it takes the guesswork out of trying to find fish, for me.

I don't have to use my electronics when I go to the water or I go to that lake and I look out there and I see an orange shade over the north end and the south end is grassy and clear. I don't even have to turn my electronics on. I run to the clear side and start catching fish until I'm tired, and then I go to the other side and try to hunt and peck and see what the red tide is doing to affect the bite ratio.

*Interviewer:*

Does your family enjoy fishing with you?

*James Eddison:*

Absolutely. I have two sons. They are nine and ten years old, and they love it.

*Interviewer:*

When you do the sportfishing, do you train or anything?

*James Eddison:*

Absolutely. I do train for tournaments. I practice. We go out and what is called scout, and that typically will be a week to two weeks before a tournament, no matter where that tournament is. If it's down in Clewiston, which is three hours away, I go. Sometimes my boys will go with me. The wife never goes with me when I'm training for a tournament, because it's intense practice. You can imagine Lake Okeechobee is thirty-one miles wide and thirty-seven miles long.

When you have hundred-degree temperatures or eighty or ninety-degree temperatures, it can be grueling, and we are out there from sunup. Three o'clock or four o'clock in the morning, we will usually put in our boats to practice for a

tournament, and I personally don't get off the water until around five or six in the evening. It's a long day, and you are putting waypoints in on your GPS, so that you can go back on tournament day, and hopefully these fish will be there for you on tournament day. Yes, it's a lot of training and a lot of practice.

*Interviewer:* How often do tournaments occur?

*James Eddison:* With Lakeland Bassmasters, which is a club that I am with, at least once a month. Some of those tournaments are two-day tournaments, which is a Saturday and a Sunday. Typically, the one-day tournaments are only on Sundays. If it's a two-day, it's going to be Saturday and Sunday, and it's once a month for ten months.

*Interviewer:* Do you go to all of them?

*James Eddison:* Every one. I wish they had more.

*Interviewer:* What is the rarest fish you have caught?

*James Eddison:* The rarest fish I have caught, I would have to say it was on the Lake Logan Martin in Alabama. It's part of the Coosa River Chain. It was an eight-foot-long alligator garfish, which totally just trumps all the garfish I've seen here. This thing looked prehistoric. It looked like a torpedoed alligator, if you will, and I was in a johnboat when I caught it, and I caught it on live bait, on a shad. I was just trolling a shad, and the thing was about half the length of that johnboat. It was a fourteen-foot johnboat, and that garfish was about half the length of that johnboat. Needless to say, it didn't come into the boat. I just cut the line.

*Interviewer:* Have you ever been fishing and thought you caught something, but you just picked up like pollution?

*James Eddison:* Absolutely, yes. I have been out fishing and caught pollution several times. Cans, and I don't know how my hook managed to get into a can, because I rig my worms weedless-style, what's called Texas rig. I guess when you're bumping around your worm on the bottom and it hits something hard, that hook is supposed to protrude through, and somehow I managed to get my hook inside a Coke can, and I thought it was a fish, because, of course,

the water is inside the can. You set the hook on this thing, and you think you've got Moby Dick on. You're reeling it in and reeling it in, and it's moving, because the can is now swimming with your line as you're reeling it in.

You're yelling to your co-anglers to get the net. Then it comes up and it's like, well, you might want to get some ice too, buddy, because it's a Coke. You just put the can in the boat and put it in your box.

*Interviewer:*

How does it make you feel when you catch pollution?

*James Eddison:*

Not good. Not good, because you start to wonder. A lot of questions go into your mind of was it inadvertent that the pollution is here? Did it fly out of a boat because someone didn't put it away inside of a locked hatch or did someone deliberately just throw it overboard? To me, it's easier to put your debris in a locked hatch than it is to try to keep up with it when you're running a high-performance bass boat that's running sixty or seventy miles an hour and trying to keep it from flying out of the boat.

You see quite a few guys that have empty worm packets and they throw them in the bottom of their boat. I have had co-anglers that were in my boat and they emptied their packets and they put them on the floor. I will tell them immediately that, hey, you can't do that. Just like today, with the wind blowing, all it takes is a gust of wind and I'm hooking a fish or I'm fishing and he's fishing and that debris flies out of the boat and no one notices it. Now it's in the water, and it starts to sink, which damages, in my opinion, the ecosystem.

*Interviewer:*

If you could influence the law at all, what would you add to try to keep the pollution out of the water?

*James Eddison:*

It's so hard to try to police that. The money wouldn't be there to hire enough law enforcement officials, but, if I could, I would try to enact some type of regulations within clubs, for one. If they witness another angler or a boater polluting or pollution coming out of their boat, that they would be disqualified from a tournament immediately, as in put your boat on the trailer because you're done.

*Interviewer:*

How many police boats do you see when you're at a



tournament?

*James Eddison:*

For freshwater, it's not as prolific with law enforcement as you see in saltwater, like out here at Fort De Soto. If you put your boat in out here, you've got marine patrol and you've got the sheriffs' department and you have FWC, the Florida Wildlife Commission. In freshwater, it's a little bit different. It's regulated differently. You have FWC, who is the governing body, and you have the sheriffs' department, because usually these boat ramps are in unincorporated areas, in the woods, if you will. It's the sheriffs' department who has jurisdiction and the Florida Wildlife Commission.

At every tournament, there is usually one or two Florida Wildlife or game warden officers that are at the weigh-in. They not only watch the length of your fish, because there is a certain length, and tournament fishermen get what's called exemptions from the state.

They make sure you have your exemption and they look at the length of your fish, because there is a criteria for that. It has to be a certain length, and they look at the creel, how many fish. You can't come to the scale with more than your creel. Not only is that against the law and you're probably going to get shackled up and taken to jail, but you will be drummed out of BASS-affiliated tournament from that day forward, and so there is usually one or two officers there.

*Interviewer:*

What are the different laws between freshwater and saltwater, like the amount of fish you can catch of a size?

*James Eddison:*

The difference in the laws between the amount of fish that can be caught in freshwater or saltwater, there are so many different laws. Like with snook, they have to be a certain length, and there is only a certain number. Redfish, there is a slot limit that you have to have, and those two species are saltwater fish.

The same thing with your mangrove snapper. You can only have so many. Then there is other fish you can't even bring into the boat, like your tarpon. If you go out and hook a tarpon, which I plan on going down to Boca Grande this July, you can't bring the tarpon out of the water

anymore. It's illegal. You have to release that tarpon at boat-side. We used to be able to take a scale off the tarpon to keep for a souvenir. You get a 150-pound tarpon, and you see these guys that, back in the day, they would keep the scale off of a 150-pound tarpon. Now, you can't do that. The fish has to stay in the water.

There is so many different laws. With bass, there is a fourteen-inch minimum, state law, and a five-fish per person per day. You can't release a dead or dying fish, and that applies for freshwater and saltwater, about releasing a dead or dying fish.

*Interviewer:* You said you would rather fish than sleep, and that is definitely not the case with me. Why do you like fishing so much?

*James Eddison:* My dad told me when I was a kid that I was vaccinated with a fish hook and I have monofilament running through my veins, and I just like it. I love everything about it. I love the outdoors, and I like the way it makes me feel. It just gives me a joy that is just unspeakable.

*Interviewer:* What is one of the clearest memories you have from fishing?

*James Eddison:* At five years old, when my dad taught me to fish, losing that three-and-a-half-pound carp. My dad wouldn't net it for me. He wanted me to get it in, and it was right there.

*Interviewer:* You said your dad was the one who taught you to fish?

*James Eddison:* Absolutely.

*Interviewer:* How did he start getting you to fish?

*James Eddison:* He just asked me if I wanted to go fishing. He asked me if I wanted to go fishing. My dad asked me at five-years-old if I wanted to go fishing, and I said yes, and we got in the truck and bought me a rod. The hardware stores back then sold rods and reels. We went to the hardware store, he bought me my first Zebco 202 plastic reel, and away we went.

*Interviewer:* During tournaments, do you ever encounter other boats

while you're out on the water?

*James Eddison:* Absolutely. I encounter other boats all day long. They're everywhere, competitors as well as officers of the law, game wardens, pleasure boaters.

*Interviewer:* Does anything happen or do you just keep to yourself, basically?

*James Eddison:* With the other tournament anglers, we get along. If you're asking if there is any controversy with other anglers, in the past, that used to be a problem, but now, with the new electronics, you don't have that issue anymore, because people used to think that -- Other anglers would think that that angler who is in that area is only there because one or the other knew there was fish there.

Now, with the electronics and the innovations in the new electronics, every angler has the same advantage, and you can put waypoints on those GPS and you can literally watch your lure go down on a school of fish and watch the fish come up and eat your lure. It's like a video game now. I wouldn't say it takes the fun out of it. It actually adds to the fishing experience, and so, no, rarely is there any issues between anglers and other boaters on the water.

*Interviewer:* What are a few of the oddest items you have ever found while fishing?

*James Eddison:* One of the oddest items I have ever witnessed or seen while fishing was down in Lake Okeechobee, a python. I did see that, near Observation Point, on a pile of cattail reeds, and I knew the pythons were in the Miami area and they were moving through the Everglades, which Lake Okeechobee is right down near there, and I had heard rumors that they were there. I did see a python. I have also witnessed a manatee in Lake Okeechobee, and there are manatees in Lake Okeechobee.

*Interviewer:* What attire do you wear for sportfishing?

*James Eddison:* The attire that I wear for sportfishing is exactly what you see me wearing now, other than sometimes I have on flip-flops. When it's raining, I wear my rain gear.

*Interviewer:* What problems have you encountered over the years?

*James Eddison:* The problems I have encountered over the years, outside of just the basic headaches with maintaining a high-performance bass boat and repair work on the engine, which is pretty exorbitant. You can spend a lot of money keeping your equipment up. Most of the problems that I run into usually deal with being able to get my hands on and secure the lures that I need to catch the fish at that given moment, which Zoom makes a particular frog lure that is really hard to get, and I was fortunate enough to have a friend who was able to somehow finagle his way to purchase a mold, and so now we're able to mold our own Zoom frogs.

*Interviewer:* What are some pros and cons of regular line and braided line?

*James Eddison:* Pros of regular line, or monofilament and fluorocarbon, is that you have the invisible factor. They are less visible. The pros of braided line, or your fusion line, is that it's strong, very durable, and highly-abrasive line. It's hard to break. I prefer monofilament and fluorocarbon. Give me strikes over strength.

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