



## **The Idaho Statesman**

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### **Boisean earns place on Fly Fishing Team USA**

While Bret Bishop's students were studying for their finals, their teacher was acing his own final exam by winning the National Fly Fishing Championship in Colorado.

Bishop is an English teacher at Capital High School in Boise. Last week, he outfished 64 other anglers to become the first-ever national champion.

The win earned Bishop a spot on Fly Fishing Team USA, a five-man team that also includes Boisean Pete Erickson. The team will compete at the World Flyfishing Championships in Portugal in September.

In the past, coaches selected members for the U.S. team. But this year, they went to a tournament format so anyone could earn a spot if they won.

"It was a bunch of hardcore fishermen going at it for the love of the sport," Bishop said.

He won the competition by fishing consistently and taking a risk at the end.

"I wanted to fish hard and have no regrets," Bishop said.

#### **Tournament adds pressure**

At the competition, the 65 anglers were divided into 13 "flights" that fished five different venues, both rivers and lakes.

Each venue was divided into "beats," which are sections of rivers or lakes assigned to each angler. Anglers fished all five venues and were randomly drawn for a beat at that venue.

They fished three hours at each of the five venues and earned points for the number of fish they caught and how large the fish were. All fish were measured by a scorer and immediately released.

Bishop was in second place going into the final venue and had to remain in the top two to be considered for Portugal.

"I really had my destiny in my hands," he said.

Bishop drew a tough beat on the final day at Lily Lake in Rocky Mountain National Park.

The trout hanging near the shoreline had been heavily fished during the tournament, he said. After an hour of fishing, Bishop was skunked.

If he couldn't raise a fish during the three-hour contest, he would be knocked out of the running for Portugal.

To make matters worse, Bishop could hear his competitors across the lake cheering when they landed a fish.

A shot at the buzzer

Then his luck turned, sort of. Trout started feeding on surface insects in the middle of the lake, but they were beyond his casting reach.

He had to decide whether to continue fishing for the ones that weren't biting, or go after the feeding fish.

Bishop tightened the belt on his waders and started wading across the soft, muddy bottom. Soon the water reached the top of his waders, and the lake's frigid waters started trickling in. He kept wading until it was up to his armpits.

"I was on my tippy toes. Sometimes I was floating," he said.

He still had about 50 feet to cast, and he didn't know how big the fish were. The lake was full of small cutthroat trout, and to earn points, a fish had to be at least 8 inches. Bishop cast a dry fly into the feeding fish, and within 10 minutes, he had one in his net. But he didn't know if it was big enough to count.

"I knew it was going to be close," Bishop said.

He turned and made the long, soggy wade back to shore, where a tournament judge was waiting.

"I was out of breath and exhausted, but the fish measured, which was a huge relief," Bishop said.

He returned to the water and made the long wade back to his original spot. He caught another fish, and repeated the trek to have it measured. He made the trip three more times during the final two hours of fishing. When it ended, he was soaked, shivering, suffering from cramps and exhausted.

"Fishing is supposed to be relaxing, but tournament fishing is anything but," Bishop said.

Joining a friend and mentor

Now he's got a summer full of fishing and guiding planned before turning his attention to the world championships, which will be the first international tournament in his two-year competitive career.

He will join Erickson, a fellow teacher and guide, and a longtime friend and fishing partner.

"Pete has been my mentor in this whole thing. He got me started in competitive angling," he said. "Now we're going to Portugal together as teammates."