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World title on the line - Bend Oregon man to captain U.S. team at World Fly Fishing Championships Bend angler leads U.S. team into this month's World Fly Fishing Championships in New Zealand

By Mark Morical / Bend, Oregon - The Bulletin



Bend's Scott Robertson fly fishes along the Deschutes River in Bend in 2005. Robertson is the captain of Fly Fishing Team USA, which will compete in the World Fly Fishing Championships in New Zealand later this month.

For fly anglers, the World Fly Fishing Championships are probably the closest thing to the Olympics.

So Scott Robertson of Bend no doubt was thrilled when he was recently named captain of Fly Fishing Team USA as it prepares for the most prestigious event in competitive fly angling. The 28th world championships — scheduled March 22-30 in Rotorua, New Zealand — will include more than 100 anglers from 24 countries.

Robertson, 47, was selected captain based on his experience in competitive angling and his sixth-place finish at the National Fly Fishing

Championships in Colorado last October.

Typically, team captains in the world championships do not actually compete, so Robertson does not expect to have a line in the water. But as captain, he will be the only team member allowed to communicate with the U.S. competitors as they're fishing, offering tips and advice.

"I'll have a lot of responsibilities," Robertson said this week. "I can compete if somebody decides they're not feeling well or they didn't practice well. Of course, everybody wants to compete. But just to be picked as one of the seven (members of Team USA) is a great honor."

Each team at the world championships includes five competitors, one alternate and one captain.

Robertson, a guide for Sunriver Fly Shop who also works at Sportsman's Warehouse in Bend, has competed in fly-fishing tournaments since 1997. In 2005, he took part in the Fly Fishing Team USA trials in Central Oregon. He didn't qualify for the team then, but he didn't give up.

In August 2005, Robertson paid his own way to Sweden for the World Fly Fishing Championships to scout the water and map the venues for Team USA.

Robertson was chosen as a member of the U.S. team in 2006 after a strong performance at the national championships in Boulder, Colo.

Last year, he won the individual silver medal and captained Team USA to the bronze medal at the Oceania Fly Fishing Championships in Tasmania.

This January, Robertson and Team USA traveled to New Zealand to practice for the world championships. The team consists of anglers from all over the country who do not fish together regularly but who know each other from competitive events.

"This is our best chance ever for a medal," Robertson said. "(Nearly) everybody on this team has competed in previous world championships. We have big hopes to win a medal."

The United States achieved its highest placing ever at the world event in Finland last year, finishing fifth as a team.



FLY FISHING TEAM USA

The members of the U.S. team for the 2008 World Fly Fishing Championships:

- Scott Robertson of Bend (captain)
- Lance Egan of Sandy, Utah
- George Daniel of State College, Pa.
- Brett Bishop of Boise, Idaho
- Anthony Naranja of Grand Junction, Colo.
- Mike Sexton of Pagosa Springs, Colo.
- Josh Stephens of Robbinsville, N.C.

Anglers will fish from the bank on the rivers, and from aluminum row boats on the lakes. All the competition sites offer only wild rainbow and brown trout, up to 25 inches in length, according to the world championships Web site.

All venues were closed to angling as of two months prior to the event.

The 2008 World Fly Fishing Championships will be staged in the Rotorua region on New Zealand's North Island. According to the world championships Web site (www.2008worldflyfishing-champs.com), Rotorua is the heart of New Zealand's geothermal area, with hot pools, scenic areas, and renowned fishing lakes and rivers.

The championships will include both river and lake fly-fishing. The river fishing will take place on the spring-fed Waihou, Ohinimuri and Wanganui

In past world events, European countries — who make up the majority of the competing nations — dominated at European sites, where grayling was the main catch. France won last year's world title in Finland and the 2006 championship in Portugal. Robertson said U.S. anglers are somewhat unaccustomed to grayling, which like to lie on the bottom of rivers and lakes. But the Americans are no strangers to trout.

"There's no European grayling in New Zealand," Robertson said. "It's all trout, and we know how to catch trout."

At the world championships, countries compete within a ranking system that awards points based on the number and size of fish caught. A "controller" waits nearby to measure the fish before the competitor releases it back into the water.

Each competitor is allowed three hours to fish at each water body. Anglers are in a hurry because they are fishing against the clock and, if a caught fish dies before it is released, no points are awarded.

Participants can use any fly they want so long as it includes no more than one bead at the head. The bead can be no longer than four millimeters. Flies can be weighted, but the weight must be concealed within the fly. Competitors can use up to three flies at a time, as long as the flies are 20 inches apart on the fishing line.



Robertson said he's not so nervous for the event, partly because he likely will not be competing, but also because of his experience.

"It's not so big anymore to me," he said. "I've been to it before. I know a lot of the people from other countries. It's not scary anymore, it's a lot of fun. I used to get really nervous before a competition, but not anymore."