

Ethan Jones of Father McGivney Catholic High School claims IHSA Bass Fishing title

by Brent Feeney, Sports Writer
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For a school that has yet to graduate its first class, Fr. McGivney Catholic High School has already done something big.

Actually, it was the Griffins' bass fishing team that did something big.

Not only that, the team consisted of just one person – sophomore Ethan Jones.

Jones, a sophomore at McGivney, was the third-year school's sole representative at the recent IHSA Bass Fishing state tournament at Carlyle Lake – and Jones gave the Griffins their first-ever state championship, catching six fish for a total of 19 pounds, 6 ounces to defeat Highland by four pounds. Durand finished third at 14 pounds, 13 ounces, the No. 2 team of Minooka was fourth at 12 pounds, 2 ounces and the coop team of Arthur-Lovington and Atwood-Hammond was fifth at 12 pounds, 1 ounce.

“It was a huge achievement to win the tournament,” Jones said of winning the state tournament, which took place for just the seventh time. “Since we're a new school and we won something like this before our first class has graduated, it's a big accomplishment.”

Jones has been interested in fishing since he was little. “I watched a lot of fishing shows, like Bill Dance and Bassmasters,” Jones said. “I was hooked on it and wanted go fishing all the time. My dad would take me fishing too and it was always fun.”

The IHSA has held a bass fishing tournament – the first of its kind in the nation – since 2009, when West Frankfort won the inaugural tournament over Zion-Benton. The competition is held over two days, with a participant accompanied by a driver/coach (the coach for the Griffins was Brian Helm) and another adult who operates a trolling motor. Participants are released to the fishing area in a designated order and attempt to catch as much fish within a time limit; once the boats return to the dock, the total amount of fish caught is weighed.

Tournaments are held on a catch-and-release format, with fish caught placed in a special container that keeps them alive until they are weighed. Penalties are assessed for fish found dead in the container during weigh-ins.

The McGivney team was started when Jones himself talked with school officials about starting a program. “I had a friend, Dalton Wesley, who helped start the team at Edwardsville,” Jones said. “He went to the state tournament a couple of times. I talked to him about what I needed to do to start a team at my school, and he suggested I talk to the administrators at McGivney.

“I went to them and asked about it, and they said it wouldn't be a problem.”

Jones had to qualify for the state tournament through a sectional competition, which took place at Coffeen Lake in Hillsboro; he finished second to the Bulldogs in the tournament to advance to the state tournament; also advancing from the sectional was Triad.

On the state tournament's opening day, Jones came in with the day's largest catch, a 6-pound, 5-ounce fish that certainly helped the Griffins' cause; Jones brought in two fish weighing in at 10 pounds, 9 ounces, which put him in contention on day two.

Jones came in with four fish weighing in at 8 pounds, 13 ounces to clinch the title on day two. The first-day leaders from Arthur-Lovington failed to catch any fish on the final day.

“I was shocked when I found out I had the biggest catch of the day,” Jones said. “I knew we'd have a shot at winning it all after that.”

The state tournament, Jones said, was a well-organized and well-run affair. “There was a trailer representing FLW (Fishing League Worldwide, an international fishing tournament organizer) there, with an announcer and a lot of things you would see at a fishing tournament,” Jones said.

Now that Jones has brought the Griffins their first state title, he's hoping to repeat in 2016. “I'm hoping to repeat,” Jones said. “There was some luck involved, but I fished as hard as I could and will still fish as hard as I can. My friends were really excited about what happened.

“Representing a new school and winning a tournament before we graduate our first class, that's something really exciting. I'm definitely wanting to win it again.”

