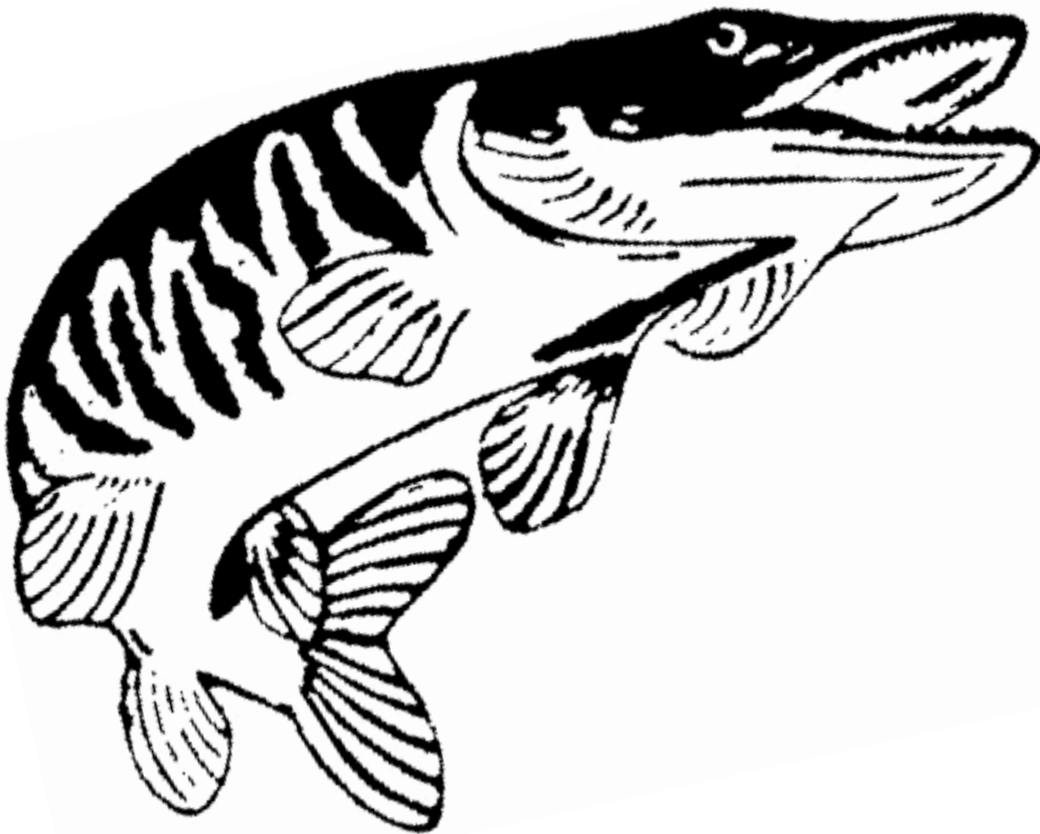


National Championship Musky Open Remembered



**31st Anniversary
August 19th - 21st, 2016**

OUTDOORS

Mathison wins Musky Open topping record 1,296 anglers

BY GARY RIDDERBUSCH
NEWS-REVIEW EDITOR

The National Championship Musky Open was once again a record-setting event, as what is likely the most popular fishing tournament in the Midwest attracted 1,296 anglers to 72 Eagle River area lakes last Friday through Sunday.

Hunter Mathison of Sugar Camp was the top angler in the tournament, while Jim Peter of Prairie du Sac was the luckiest ticket holder in the 31st annual tournament, headquartered at the Vilas County Fairgrounds.

A total of 185 tournament-size (34 inches and over) muskies were registered in the three-day event, short of the record 219 set in 2013. While most anglers fished just Saturday and Sunday, fishing on Friday was optional. Anglers had to battle rain all day on Saturday.

The tournament is sponsored by the Eagle River Area Chamber of Commerce & Visitors Center and the Musky Clubs Alliance of Wisconsin. The record number of anglers from 16 states topped the old mark of 1,266 anglers last year.

Top anglers

Mathison won the tournament by catching five muskies. He had fish measuring 37, 37, 38½, 39 and 40 inches, for a total of 191½ inches. He won a first-place trophy for his effort and was proclaimed the national champion by tournament master of ceremonies Steve Heiting of St. Germain, editor of Musky Hunter Magazine.

Fishing on lake family five, the Sugar Camp Chain of Lakes, Mathison said he caught all of his fish Friday morning casting in weed beds in 7 to 12 feet of water. Mathison also boated two fish in



The top anglers in the 2016 Musky Open were, front row from left, Arin Jensen, fourth; Chad Lang, fifth; and Aron Bakovka, sixth; back row,

Hunter Mathison, first; Dave Stewart, second; and Eric Larson, third.

—Photo By Anthony Drew

the tournament last year, when he placed fifth.

The largest fish of the tournament was boated by Dan Van Zeeland of Kaukauna. He caught a 48-inch muskie on Lac Vieux Desert using a Buchertail Sunday morning.

For the largest fish of the tournament, a replica will be created by Fittante Taxidermy of Antigo and the replica will be presented to Van Zeeland at next year's tournament.

Boat winners

Peter won the grand door prize of a Ranger boat and Mercury outboard motor valued at \$40,000.

While only anglers who entered the tournament for \$65 had a chance at the top door prize, a second identical fish-

ing boat package was given away by the Musky Clubs Alliance following a summer-long fundraising raffle.

The winner of that boat was John Horn of Waunakee. He was not a tournament participant and did not have to be present to win the boat.

Besides a boat as a top door prize, anglers had a chance to win more than 200 other door prizes Saturday evening and Sunday afternoon — ranging from muskie baits to rods and reels to huge landing nets. All anglers received a free hat and T-shirt.

More winners

The 185 muskies registered in the tournament were caught Friday, Saturday and Sunday on seven lake groups comprised of 72 bodies of water. The fish were registered

by other tournament anglers right on the water to improve the muskies' chance of survival.

Trophies, courtesy of Miller Beer of the Northwoods, went to the top fishermen and -women.

Second through fifth places all caught three fish each.

Placing second in overall points behind Mathison was Dave Stewart of Rhinelander, who caught three fish measuring 36½, 38½ and 45½ inches, good for 120½ points. Third place went to Eric Larson of South Milwaukee. He caught fish measuring 35½, 39 and 44 inches. Fourth place went to Arin Jensen of Stevens Point, who had fish measuring 34, 35 and 39

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inches. Chad Lang of Greenfield placed fifth with fish measuring 34½, 37 and 38½ inches.

Sixth place went to Aron Bakovka of Port Edwards with two fish measuring 44½ and 45 inches.

Trophies also went to the anglers catching the largest fish on each lake family as follows: family one, Al White of New Berlin, 47½ inches, Kentucky Lake; family two, Dave Stewart of Rhinelander, 45½ inches, Long Lake; family three, Dan Van Zeeland of Kaukauna, 48 inches, Lac Vieux Desert; family four, Robert Luce of Aurora, Ill., 46½ inches, Big St. Germain Lake; family five, Steve Scheel of Marshall, 46 inches, Little Arbor Vitae Lake; family six, Mark Lynch of Hatley, 44½ inches, Pickerel Lake; and family seven, Mark Johnson of Nekoosa, 43 inches, High Lake.

Brian Sonier of Colgate was presented a reproduction Sunday afternoon of last year's largest fish registered in the tournament. Joe Fittante and his son Ben Fittante of Fittante Taxidermy presented the replica, measuring 49 inches.

The husband-and-wife team trophy went to Matt and Kimberly Symons of Janesville with three fish measuring 35½, 39 and 41½ inches. There were 70 husband-and-wife teams in the tourney.

Ethan Brehmer of Hartford took home the youth trophy with two muskies measuring 34½ and 38 inches. There were 73 youths age 15 and younger entered in the tournament.

The guardian/youth trophy went to guardian Matthew



Anglers catching the largest fish by lake category in the National Championship Musky Open included, front row from left, lake family five, Steve Scheel; lake family six, Mark Lynch; and lake

family seven, Mark Johnson; and back row, lake family one, Al White; lake family two, Dave Stewart; lake family three, Dan Van Zeeland; and lake family four, Robert Luce.

Klink of Rubicon and Brehmer for registering three muskies. Klink added a 38-inch fish to Brehmer's catch. There were 70 guardian/youth teams.

Other awards

The 2016 Bob James Sportsmanship Award, presented in honor of the late Bob James of Ranger Boats who helped start the tournament, was given to Dave Allen. His father, Gene Allen, had previously won the award, and this was the first time the son of a former recipient has been given the award.

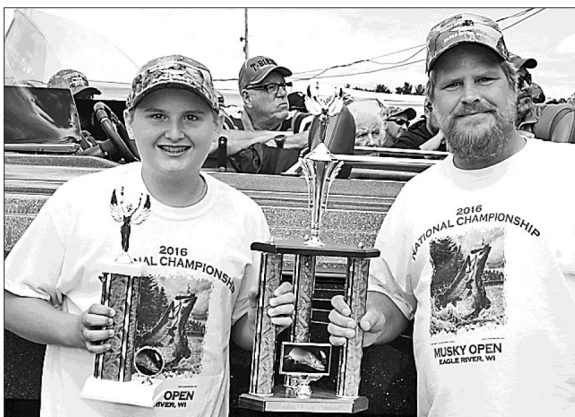
Heiting told the big crowd at the fairgrounds Sunday afternoon that the tournament, the major fundraiser for the Musky Clubs Alliance of Wisconsin, has raised more than \$1.25 million for muskie fish-

ing research and stocking in the state.

All the anglers also were congratulated for the 12th annual Help Fight Hunger program in support of the Vilas Food Pantry. Each angler was asked for a nonperishable food item and in return, each angler would receive one chance at winning many muskie fishing items for their donation.

Participants donated more than 3,500 pounds of nonperishable food items to the Vilas Food Pantry and gave about \$1,500 in cash donations.

Before sending nearly 1,300 fishermen and -women on their way home Sunday, Heiting reminded the muskie hunters that next year's tournament is set for Aug. 18-20, 2017.



The winners of the guardian/youth trophy were Ethan Brehmer of Hartford (left) and Matthew Klink of Rubicon. Brehmer also won the overall youth trophy for the tournament.



The husband-and-wife trophy went to Matt and Kimberly Symons of Hartford. They caught muskies measuring 39, 41½ and 35½ inches.

NEWS



THE WINNERS — The Musky Clubs Alliance of Wisconsin held its National Championship Musky Open on 72 area lakes Friday through Sunday, with a record 1,296 participants. Two of the big winners were Hunter Mathison of Eagle River, who won the fishing title by catching five muskies, and Jim Peter of Prairie du Sac, who won the Ranger boat and Mercury outboard motor.

Above: Hunter Mathison, left, gets interviewed by tournament emcee Steve Heiting after winning the Musky Open.

Left: Jim Peter waves to the crowd and tournament officials on stage after hearing his name announced as the grand-prize boat winner.

—Photos By
Anthony Drew

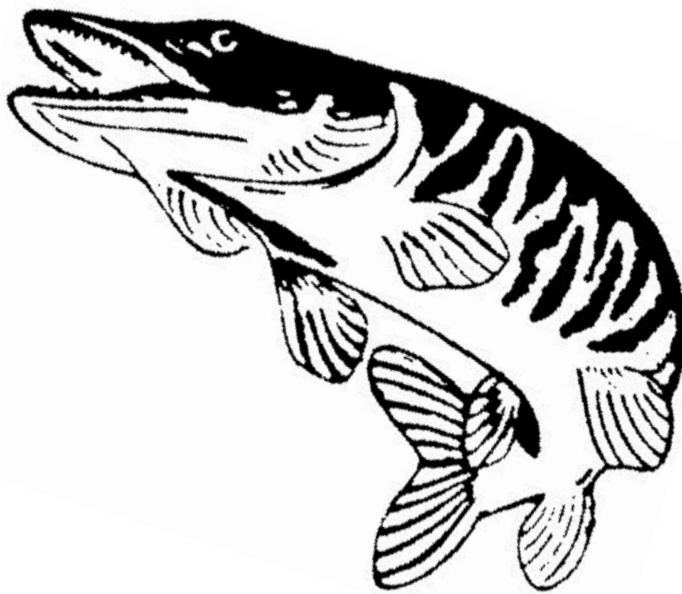
OUTDOORS



Brian Sonier (left) caught the largest fish in the 2015 tournament. He was presented a reproduction during the awards program Sun-

day. Ben Fittante (center) and Joe Fittante of Fittante Taxidermy presented the trophy.

—Photos By Anthony Drew



Our View

Musky Open's format still extremely popular

About the time people were thinking it couldn't possibly get bigger, the 31st annual National Championship Musky Open drew a record 1,296 anglers from 16 different states last weekend.

Congratulations to top angler Hunter Mathison of Sugar Camp for catching five muskies that measured a total of 191½ inches. Catching the largest fish was Dan Van Zeeland of Kaukauna, whose 48-inch muskie from Lac Vieux Desert will win him a free replica trophy.

The fact that these "muskie hunters" caught 185 muskies in just three days of angling, under not so great conditions, shows the general health of the muskie fishery and the quality of the lakes in Vilas and Oneida counties.

The credit goes to a conservation-minded state that protects its water resources and muskie anglers who not only practice catch and release, but also support stocking efforts. This event has raised \$1.25 million for research and stocking over 30 years.

And one small raffle opportunity involving donated food items showed the power of a major fishing event, as donations to the Vilas Food Pantry produced 3,500 pounds of food and \$1,500 cash.

The luckiest contestant was Jim Peter of Prairie du Sac, who won the drawing for a 2016 Ranger tournament boat. The success of the event over all these years shows once again the popularity of a format where anglers fish muskies for the sport of it and win prizes based on a drawing.

Behind the editorial 'we'

Members of the Vilas County News-Review editorial board include Publisher Kurt Krueger, Editor Gary Ridderbusch and Assistant Editor Doug Etten.

