

# Loftus Takes NY Fed To



**Explain what you did differently than the average Federation angler to put yourself in the position to qualify for the state team?**

I always put a lot of prep time in. Before the tournament season even starts, I always look at what my top goals are and I schedule things around what those goals are. Sometimes people look to fish every tournament they can, my goal has always been, at least for the last 12 years, to get to the Classic. To do that, you have to consistently make that state team every year. I make sure to give myself enough practice time to be able to be very consistent. The other thing, Frank Giner and I have, I think this was our 3rd year of rooming together and

working together at the tournaments. Obviously he was Angler of the Year, and I made it through the Divisionals and the Nationals. It's been a pretty strong track for the two of us. I've always worked completely on my own, and that's been bit of a transition, working with someone else, and I tell you at this point, we're starting to get the system down very well. We know how each of us needs to hear the information, we know when we just have to give a clue, we know when we have to shake the other person and say "Hey you're going in the wrong direction..." How we kind of work is, if we're both going in good directions, we just kind of let each other go. If one of us is really struggling...the strategy's come down to the point where you can't afford to have a disastrous tournament. You don't have to win every one. You want maybe a great one and several good ones and that's a good year. So I think that's what we're really learning how to do, how to really make sure neither one of us has a disastrous tournament. If you're heading towards disaster, you figure how to split things up in some kind of way so both of you can have at least a good tournament.

**What did you do to prepare for the National Championship and what patterns or lures did you employ to get you to 3rd place?**

I spent a lot of time, and I looked through all the results of tournaments that had happened in Florida waters, all the big tournaments at that time frame, and I watched two of them that I had on video. As I kept watching them, over and over again, the

## On The Line

things that I really saw were rattletrap, crankbait bite that dominated. That's what they were doing. I caught 14 of my 15 fish on a trap. Down there, I knew I hadn't flipped a lot of hydrilla. I just don't have a lot of experience doing that and I didn't want to fish into a weakness of mine, I wanted to fish into a strength. I knew that crank bait bites are always good that time of year, and I knew that was something I was very comfortable doing, so I was committing to that. You have to do what you're good at. The first day of practice, by 2:30 in the afternoon, I hadn't had bite and it was torture, it was frustrating. Then I finally came across one area and I had 3 or 4 bites in that area in like 20 minutes. I still wasn't too confident, but I walked away with two things: one this area has some fish, and two they bit under very short windows, under low light conditions. The next day I decided to just put the trolling motor down and go and cover water to see if I could come across a group of fish. I was the 3rd boat out because they send you out just like at tournaments, and every one has these new boats with 250's on the back. It's like a boat race because everyone's adrenaline is pumping. I didn't want to get caught up in that because boat racing doesn't match up with practicing. Practicing supposed to be a little looser, you're supposed to not be focused on where you're going and let the fish tell you what's going on. I put the boat on plane for about 100 yards, started on the grass beds by the boat launch and just started going down. Close to a mile away I came across a group of fish, bass, crappie, pickerel, they were all in there. That's where I ended up fishing in the tournament. They ended up schooling in the dead center of a channel far away from everything.

**How were you able to boat a limit each day when so many others didn't?**

Not only did I have my limit, but take-off is 7 am, so depending what boat you were, you left somewhere between 7:00 and 7:15, I had my limit by 7:50, 7:55 and 8:30 on the final day. I culled once or twice the first day. I culled a good one flipping later on, and I dropped a few good ones later in the day. But

# New HEIGHTS

## With The Classic Contender

that happens; I'm not going to cry about that. **Did you make any decisions on the water that dictated your eventual success, or did you pretty much stick to your plan?**

The plan going out the first day was just to start on hydrilla. I had two areas where I knew there were fish, and I had one area where I like the way it looked. Once I saw what was there I kept on GPS-ing everywhere I got a bite so I had a good map of where they would come up and school. I'd see one come up and get a clue then I'd just listened to the fish.

**What was it like the first time you realized you were going to the Big Show?**

It was the 3rd day, as they backed me into the water... I'll try and describe this, but emotions are hard to describe. There's probably 10 to 15 boats already in the water... It's even a big scene in the morning. You have to understand, you have 50 boats that are all sitting there, two rows of 26 boats, basically 3½ million dollars worth of identical boats rigged up. They bring you all down together in a bus. They have these Toyota Tundra's alternating around to get these boats in and out of the water. I knew where I had to go to pick up my camera guy. Maybe I was about the 15th boat going into the water. It was the first time in the morning I had been alone, they back the boat into the water, and the boat slides off. Until that point it was just another tournament day, I knew what I wanted to do, I had my mindset and to be honest with you, even though I knew what was going on, you kind of don't really process it. The boat slides into the water



and I go to start the engine and all of a sudden it's like this complete breakdown, tears started coming to my eyes. If you had asked me a question I wouldn't have been able to talk, and it was just this feeling. The the best that I can describe it, is it was just this feeling, all of a sudden I realized this has been 20 years of my life, dreaming about this day. This has been 12 years of my life with everything I do with this tournament; you get the feeling how much I've prepared for it. People say it's their goal, but I put everything behind hitting this goal. As the boat's coming off, all of a sudden it just swelled up through my body, I'm like "Oh my God, this is the day." And it wasn't like it might come true, this is the day, it's going to happen today.

**Is the prospect of going to the Classic overwhelming, or do you think you'll be able to focus when you get there?**

I kind of wonder about that too. The one think I can tell you is, the first time at Nationals was kind of big, but the second time I'd seen it once before, the only thing I needed to worry about was fishing. So I'd like to say at the Classic I'll be able to put it all aside and focus, but I think it's going to be a little challenging. One side of me knows I have an advantage because it's not do or die for me, it's not like I have to win the Classic to keep my career. I won't have all the spectator boats following me. I'm going there to take those advantages. But I can't say for sure yet, I'd like to tell you without a doubt that it's not going to be overwhelming, like we didn't have a helicopter at Nationals, so all that stuff is a little different. I'm still going to be fishing out of my boat, that's really nice. I think it's going to be nice that Matt's (Sphar) there. Jeff Freeman, who was a National champion, we're actually going to be working together in this tournament. I'm not with Matt, because I didn't want to put him in that position. I'm there to do well, but Matt's got his career to think about. It's most advantageous for him to work with someone he'll be working with the whole year. **What advice would you give to other anglers about competing in the Federation?** You've got to focus on your ability to find

fish. To me that's one of the biggest growth opportunities for most fishermen. One of the biggest differences between going from club to state level, state level to regional level, is your ability to find fish. That's one thing I keep on trying to promote. I think it's really critical that you fish in lots of different bodies of water, that's how you really develop as an angler. A lot of people get a little uncomfortable when they're going outside of their element, the lakes their comfortable with. You got to learn to keep it simple, focus on one section of the lake and learn to figure out what's going on in that section. So Number 1 is learning how to find fish, really put an effort into that. That includes just going out and fishing for fun. Go to bodies of water you don't feel too comfortable on and learn how to find them. Number 2 would be focus on your mechanics, the "golf swing" fishing. Just like a golfer, you not only have to be good with the driver, you have to be good with the putter in the short game; it's

**"I wish him all the best.**

**I hope he finishes second in February." (laughs)**

**- Matt Sphar**

*Bassmaster Elite Series Angler, Pavillion, NY*

the same with fishing. You have to feel comfortable with fishing vertically, with a drop shot and light line, and you have to be able to have a jig on 25 pound test on a flipping stick and put that on the back piling of a dock when you only have four inches of clearance every time.

**How valuable has your Federation experience been? Do you think that laid the groundwork?**

Without a doubt. With what I learn from fishing such diverse bodies of water in NY, especially now that we're really moving around with going to Lake George in the fall, going to Lake Erie, going to Mohawk, it makes for some really diverse bodies of water. And then the other thing, you start to make a lot of these divisionals. They really put you fishing outside the comfort zone, learning. That's where my reservoir of experiences come from, that's where I really learned how to adjust to fish 3-day tournaments versus 1-day tournaments.

