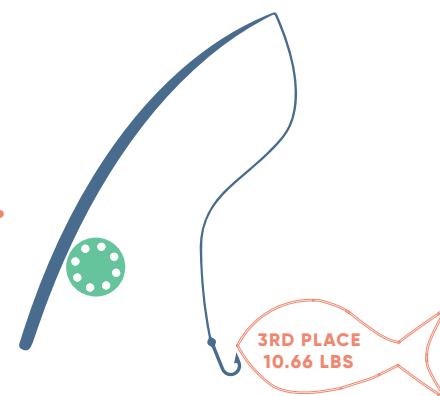


## GONE

East student and alum move on to the Bassmaster High School National Championship after placing third at State

## fishing



by catherine erickson

Senior Ty Neidlein and East alum Werner Brundige qualified for the Bassmaster High School National Championship that will take place Oct. 22-24, after placing third in the Kansas High School State Bass Fishing Championship.

The pair, alongside their team captain, Werner's dad Tyler Brundige, caught 10.66 pounds of fish over the course of the two-day tournament, which consisted of 20 teams and took place on Sept. 12-13. However, the qualification came as a shock after an unsuccessful first day left them with a ninth place standing.

The team didn't catch their first "keeper fish" — a fish large enough to weigh-in by competition standards — until 2 p.m. on the first day, seven hours after the competition started. But by 3 p.m., the competition day was over, forcing them back to shore. Returning the next day, they drove their boat to the location where they caught their previous fish, suspecting that they found a pattern.

Finding a pattern is an important fishing technique — it involves a combination of discovering which bait to lure the fish with and where in the lake the fish will be most active.

"They had switched to sort of a different pattern, using a plastic lure that didn't have a weight on it, and they're fishing in the trees [at the end of the first day]," Tyler said. "So then that pattern, they thought, would probably hold up for the next day."

The boys were right — they had found a pattern. The second day of the tournament kicked off at 7 a.m., and by 7:45, Neidlein and Werner had already caught two keepers using the pattern they discovered the previous day.

Normally, Neidlein, Werner and Tyler go pre-fishing before a tournament to scout the lake and discover a pattern. However, the tournament was postponed from the summer to September due to coronavirus, leaving the boys unable to take days off of school to pre-fish.

As captain, Tyler's role is to drive the boat and give the boys insight into possible successful locations or lures to use, but he's not allowed to fish. Tyler went pre-fishing himself before

the State tournament, but did not find a significant pattern and couldn't give the boys many tips.

"I thought that really the coolest thing about that tournament is that they figured out what they thought could be a good pattern themselves," Tyler said. "Then they stuck with it the whole next day and had the biggest catch of the day out of anybody in the tournament on that second day that took them from ninth place on Saturday to third place on Sunday."

Finding the pattern wasn't the only challenge faced during the State competition. According to Werner, a virus circulated the lake before the tournament, killing many of the fish.

"Basically there was just an abundance of food and hardly any fish to accommodate for it," Werner said. "So even if there are fish there, they're overfed, probably. So, it's tough to get the bites...There was probably a good amount of teams that didn't catch [any keeper fish]."

Due to these unfavorable conditions and the results from their first day, the team was expecting to come out in fourth or fifth place by the end of the tournament, and only the top three finalists qualify for Nationals. The teams with the highest weights from the first day weighed in last, leaving Neidlein, Werner and Tyler unsure of their placement until the final team weighed in.

"We thought we were kind of screwed because we placed like dead middle the first day and then we knew that... there were three teams that had nine pounds on the first day," Neidlein said. "So if they were to catch like one fish, we would have been

done for, but none of them caught fish so we were pretty lucky."

Werner also said he was surprised when he found out they placed high enough to qualify for Nationals.

"I really wasn't expecting to do very well," Werner said. "It was just a good feeling to be able to say I was actually decent, because I hadn't done super well leading up to that point [in the qualifying tournaments]."

As soon as Neidlein got home from State, he watched the 2019 Bassmaster National Championship to get a feel for the competition set-up. According to Neidlein, Nationals will be a competition on a much greater scale than anything they've ever done before.

Before this year, the team had never qualified for State, and had only participated in local competitions and the four State-qualifying competitions that take place each year. Now, on their way to Nationals in Tennessee, the stakes are higher than ever— instead of 20 boats on the water like they're used to, they'll be accompanied by over 200.

The team is guaranteed to compete in the first two days of competitions, but by the final day, the amount of participants will be cut to the top 12.

No matter how they end up placing at Nationals, Werner is proud he and Neidlein have gotten as far as they did and is excited to have the chance to advance to Nationals.

"[Qualifying for Nationals] felt really good, just to get that opportunity," Werner said. "I mean, I thought [State] was going to be my last tournament too, because obviously I graduated so I can't [participate in more high school tournaments]. So it was nice just to be like, 'Oh yes, I get one more.'"



TOP TWO STATE QUALIFYING  
TOURNAMENTS

6TH & 12TH

