

# ETBU angling for top collegiate bass fishing program

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MARSHALL—Angling to become one of the nation's best competitive collegiate bass fishing programs, East Texas Baptist University will launch a bass fishing team in the fall semester.



Jeff Stone, Skeeter Boats vice president, and Blair Blackburn, president of East Texas Baptist University, sign an agreement making the boat company based in Kilgore as the sponsor of the university's new Bass fishing team. (Photo / Mike Midkiff) "We are looking at how to expand our sports opportunities to students that desire to be at the university, and bass fishing is an emerging sport across the country in high school and college. There are over 300 college angler teams across the country, and we wanted to be a part of that," ETBU President Blair Blackburn said.

Kilgore-based Skeeter Boats will sponsor the program and equip the team with bass boats. Holmes Thurman made the prototype "Skeeter" bass boat in Marshall in 1948.

"We are extremely excited to partner with East Texas Baptist University in

their efforts to bring the sport of bass fishing to their great school, but most importantly, to join them in achieving their mission of standing as a Christ-centered institution of higher learning,” said Jeff Stone, senior vice president of Skeeter Boats.

“Most recently, we have seen the sport of bass fishing explode at the collegiate and the high school levels, and we are very proud to have ETBU become the first university that we have sponsored at Skeeter.”



During a tour of the Skeeter Boats facility in Kilgore, Senior Vice President Jeff Stone (left) of Skeeter explains to East Texas Baptist University President Blair Blackburn the craftsmanship that goes into the making of Skeeter Boats. Skeeter and ETBU signed a sponsorship agreement that will launch the ETBU Bass fishing team. (Photo / Mike Midkiff) Offering scholarships as a club sport, ETBU expects to attract the top student anglers in the United States.

“We want the very best anglers coming out of high school and other community colleges, and there might be some other anglers at other

institutions that decide ETBU might be a better fit for them,” Blackburn said. “We welcome them if God calls them, and we are going to try to help them as best we can to try and make their college experience more affordable.”

ETBU will provide \$5,000 scholarships annually for each angler on the team.

The students will compete throughout Texas and the South against other top collegiate bass fishing teams.

Blackburn praised the Skeeter Boat staff as “quality people who are committed to a high standard, and that conveys to our anglers how they need to live their lives.”

While he was an administrator at Dallas Baptist University, Blackburn helped start the school’s bass fishing program, now among the top 10 in the nation.

Blackburn met Stone when he spoke at First Baptist Church in Longview, where Stone is a member. The two met for lunch and talked about developing a bass fishing program at ETBU.

“Jeff has a love for the Lord and is a man of strong Christian faith,” Blackburn said. “He believes in what we are doing and that we will use bass fishing as an instrument for evangelism and ministry.”



Skeeter Boats will sponsor the new East Texas Baptist University bass fishing team. (Photo / Mike Midkiff)“The Bible tells us that Jesus wants us to become ‘fishers of men,’ and that is what the

ETBU bass fishing program will stand upon. ... ETBU wants to bring in the top Christian anglers in the United States to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ through fishing and through their daily actions in life.”

Each ETBU Skeeter bass boat will be imprinted with Mark 1:17: “Follow me, be my disciples, and I will make you fishers of men.”