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[00:00:00] **Speaker 1** Let's start by telling me like how how did you start you grow up fishing?

[00:00:03] **Speaker 2** Yeah I grew up fishing when I was little I this might sound weird here but I grew up as soon as I come out hanging out with my mom from two years old I was fishing like I said we went to a pay Lake a normal or pay Lake that was run by some friends that you paid eight dollars a person to go fishing you catch four catfish and you want to pay another eight dollars you get another four more and I did that all through junior high up to high school just fishing and that's all I knew was get my rod ready get my big bobber I got to go get some worms I got go to the creek and get some minnows and oh I got get this kind of meat to do whatever so to go catfishing you know every Friday night it was a basketball game or football game and I I wasn't no nerd or nothing I just chose that I'd rather go home after the game get some sleep because I knew I was ready to go fishing at five o'clock and I wasn't driving in so I'd be up at 4 35 o'clock 40 get closer to six I'd say let's go I need to just get to the lake get a good spot and I just loved it and I think at that time gangs had been getting really bad in the town of Joliet and I think that's the way to save me and bless me when I wasn't running around with friends and gangs which I had no problem with them that's their choice I wanted to go fishing I want to go hunting I want to do something not that I want have fun and that was my fun that was thing so from that is two three years old till to this day right now I'm slowing down I'm gonna go older but I still love it I'm I still give it but and then the challenge for me for fishing was I can catch catfish and catch a bluegill that's kind of easy you know and I come to the state of Wisconsin and everyone's talking walleye is the best eating fish I've heard of them I've seen them in books but I've never caught one myself so I go to Minnesota with a guy and he said are we going to jigging mental as I was earlier I throw it down I felt something but I didn't I was starstruck I didn t set the hook I didn't know bring it up no mental and I was getting frustrated like I gotta learn how to do this so I got jigging down so I'm like all right I can jig with the best now after a few years learning this that and the other and then you hear it about trolling trolling shad wraps and crank baits well how do you do that how do you know how much line to put out or do this or that or when do you do it so I was fortunate enough to go down in the Mississippi River in Wisconsin for years and I knew a local guy down there came in good friends with him and he offered to take me on his wing to take me to a couple FLW national walleye tournaments and help out with gas and hotels and stuff like that so I went with those guys and so I was a guy in the boat helping them with things and they were showing me how okay this how much line this how many feet this is that and how to put planer boards on I've never seen a planer board for my life I don't know what these are so I learned how to do that and that was one thing I wanted on how to to is troll so then I got pretty good at trolling but still not mastered the way I want to but okay I could I could make it and then one tournament down the Mississippi River out fishing just a local little tournament and the big tournament was going on the same time and I run into my buddy Joe Carter like a brother to me now and we passed boats and I kid you not we were only about four feet apart we were going this way and I kind of looked at him and like okay I got talked to him he's doing something I want to learn how to do and so I didn't get to see him after the tournament but I ran into him at another tournament a and I say hey man I want to talk to you and he's okay and then we got away from each other and there's months go by again and ran to each other another tournament and this story is kind of funny here but I had took sixth place in the NWT tournament I was excited and my partner traveling partner at the time drove off and left me at the boat landing I'm in Detroit Michigan with no ride nobody I'm just got a check in my pocket and it's raining and I'm calling and calling calling his phone is dead so now I'm like man I don't have no ride I don't let me see if I can find that guy I seen the Mississippi River and so I ran into him he was in his car and he was sick he had what they call a gout so he was in a lot of pain and it's raining so I come up to the door and bang on the door he's like oh man this guy I don't know who he is so he rose down to when I say man we need to talk I need to hook up with you I want to learn how to get going to the next level how you are and we exchanged numbers and I think within a week or two I say I gotta call Joe I just want to talk to Joe so I called him up and we talked and we kept talking once or twice a month we talk and talk and and he had some tournament teammates and I had fished with some local little small tournaments with some other friends and we got talking more he said hey man why don't you come fish with me and you can help me out you know be my traveling partner well heck that's all I need to know Joe I'm ready where we going I get it I was gonna quit work if I had to get there to meet you fish and I'm gonna make sure we got I got there and he took me on his wing and introduced me about four of the guys that I fished with learned a lot and every day it was a different I don't know a different technique of this person does it this way and that person does that way and I'm like I'm trying to take all this in it's like I should have been writing things down or taking video or something but I just sunk it all in and once I sunk it in and then getting the trust from these guys they just took me in like you ain't leaving Brett what times Brett gonna be here we're picking him up whatever I mean I was I was part of a team and from that point on I just been going forward and working hard and I've had some close ones I took some seconds I took some thirds I had some lot of four failures going backwards but I still learned I met a lot of great people on a tour I've only had one issue with one person and I say 20 something years on the tour so I think that's a good good percentage for me right there thumbs up I'm just hoping to get to that next level and Joe was helping me and these other teammates that we used to piss with that retired now they're pushing and they know and there's other friends of mine said hey you know you can do it so I'm just hoping one day I get my blessing that hey I get more on both that can say all right I'm gonna go jump in the tournament you got a crawl before you walk I might be I might be last but I I'm going to be out there and I'm gonna keep working and working working and God willing he's gonna bless me with a win or get me up there and get what I need and that's that's that's all it's about and my my son he loves the fish and I taught right off the bat that I never knew about how to jig he loves a jig he likes a drag bite he hates trolling I want to learn how to troll he hates it I can't get him to go to Great Lakes with me trolling and I have to tell him we're going cast and to get him out in the boat with me they go out on the Great Lakes but we have to troll because he thinks it's boring I think it's effective because you're covering more water but in the new game now with the Ford facing someone all right these guys are seeing these fish and pinpointing them that's another thing on my bucket list I got to learn how to do that and so I've learned a few of those tricks with a couple these guys doing some tournaments I just got to do more of it and I'm hoping it's gonna happen soon

[00:07:37] **Speaker 1** so what is it about the challenge is it a challenge or is it the curiosity or what what drives you to master all these elements of wall

[00:07:47] **Speaker 2** the challenge for me is that people look at me and think I can't do it people say why is he out there fishing walleyes I'm not breaking any laws so I like the fish to fish and it tastes great so I want to I want to challenge so walleyes to me is the biggest challenge and so I'm gonna go do it until you tell me I can't fish in the world I can't physically go out there do it I'm going to fish and that's that's about my I'm want to go out and fish my heart out and if someone wants to take me on the wing and teach me something I'm going to take that knowledge and I'm all I'm appreciate it if someone wants to sit there and look at me and throw their eyes and and say I'm crazy that's your opinion I'm not going to sit and argue with anyone I'm just gonna my dad's famous word kill my kindness I'm gonna do my thing and one day it's gonna happen

[00:08:40] **Speaker 1** so it was is part of the the the I mean obviously walleye is it you know it's it's one of the species but as part of it just that the idea that some people think that you don't belong in that space

[00:08:51] **Speaker 2** there are people that say that I don't belong there because who I am and I don't understand that I mean I'm a citizen I'm person I'm man I like the fish so why can't I go fish that fish that fish got a target on the back saying for just that person no that fish is out there swimming looking to eat and I can feed them just as well as you can so why I can't do it there are people out there like that and there are people out there rooting for me to try to get get to that level and like I said I'm going on one day I'm gonna do it I am gonna get to that level and then if I win that'd be it that's a that's a blessing there and for me but I want to be seen I want be known that I can do this and then ain't gonna happen overnight it's gonna take a year or two or three but I'm want to do it and despite what they think about me and other people like me we we can do this we can't do this in enjoy just as much as anyone else out there and have fun at it and hopefully succeed in it

[00:09:52] **Speaker 1** for you what's the difference between fishing and catching a fish when you're doing it in your own free time versus in a tournament what is it a an adrenaline thing or what's what's the difference between those two

[00:10:04] **Speaker 2** to me is not it's not too much adrenaline thing because when I'm out fishing just play fishing I have more fun with it when I am out there in a tournament I'm I'm focused I'm dialing want to be dialing and hopefully the fish cooperate the weather cooperates that hey I gotta go out there and play my a game because hey there's a lot of money at stake and pride and stuff like that so when I play fishing I'm not there lollygagging throwing whatever and we're talking giggling talking trash each other back and forth and I'm out there fishing a big tournament I'm trying to get locked in dialed in that okay I gotta be serious I might only get five bites I got to try to country all five bites hopefully I can hook up and get those fish in because there's there's a pride and some money and all that stuff on the line and I want to be the one on top

[00:10:52] **Speaker 1** what's that I mean you talked earlier about when you first started jigging you didn't quite recognize a bite like you might feel something but what's that like when you're actually know what you're feeling like that that sense of like oh there's one there

[00:11:04] **Speaker 2** well when I started fishing I used a rod that was so stiff I think it was like a telephone pole so stiff so then after learning hey you got to get a rod that's you know not as stiff you gotta get the right line I mean these rods right now I mean I got a rod I can bounce it off a rock and I can feel a rock I'm like yep it's a rock oh I got line that someone broke off up there's a fish I mean they're so sensitive now that now to me it's just it's an art just how do they want it you want a fast hop do they just a just a slide or just so then you put all those things together and figure out which way the fish want it and where they're at it's like night and day just it's just having fun catching fish

[00:11:43] **Speaker 1** it's almost like jazz just like oh yeah just like jazz you know yeah it's like I mean it looks like you're drumming there when you're doing that

[00:11:51] **Speaker 2** actually in that that's I never heard it put that way but if you were in the boat with me jigging you probably would say that then too because that's how I'm doing it I'm trying to figure it out they want hot do they want a low they want a hard they wanted this I'm just I'm just working it so I figured out

[00:12:04] **Speaker 1** so one of the things that's unique about walleye is they don't fight the most I mean bass are known for fighting the most and they're not the biggest muskies the biggest and the the easiest to catch are the panfish so what is it about wall eye that makes them so desirable when they're not I mean there's other things out there that you people could be targeting

[00:12:22] **Speaker 2** a lot of people target walleye can they say they're the one of the best eating fish out there to eat you know you got span fish you got your salmon you got your catfish and stuff like that but they always say the wall eye he's going to the best eatin' fish out There so to me if you can master catching something that is good eating and you can't ask oh I'm gonna eat then I'm not gonna starve I know I can go catch some fish to eat, that times you probably can't get some because either they're too big or too small whatever slides are in that state that lake or that area. But that's why a lot of people like to target those walleyes more. Bass fishing, I've never really got into it. I mean, it's so much in the bass world right now. If, honestly, if I could do it all over, I would probably go into bass fishing because that's where the money is. You see, people want to watch bass fishing on TV because they're casting, doing, using, stiffing stuff. They don't want to sit and watch eight hours or four hours of trolling in the boat. It's boring. But yet... Sometimes that's how you have to catch your fish. So, if I could do it all over, even though I like eating, I love eating fish, if I was going to do it for just to try to sport, to get into there and make some money, I would flip-flop the bass. Now, can I still do it? Yes. I'm kind of, I'm focused on walleye. I'm going to take one step at a time. I want to get to that level first with my walleye, to get that boat, get to the tournament, get maybe a sponsor or two to help me out, and then do it. And then, you know, then okay, I might want to go try a bass tournament and... Fall on my butt because I'm not used to it, but yet I would do it. I'm willing to work that challenge.

[00:13:55] **Speaker 1** So, when you're talking about moving, you're getting a new boat. You're testing out new lakes, you're going over to Green Bay. Is it always that edge of like, I need to learn this new thing? Is there ever a time when you are not learning and you're just enjoying?

[00:14:12] **Speaker 2** Um, I'm always learning. It's always something that, you know, you might be in a new boat, and you might feel like you know like the back of your hand, but then you got a new graph on your boat. So you're trying to work this, tweak this, this out, and that out to see, maybe I turn the knob this way that it's going to clear up something this way or that. So, with modern technology, like I said, with the foreign facing sonar out, that right there is a beast in his own that, you know... Guys are trying to figure it out. The older guys are struggling with it. The newer guys, they got it down. I mean, just like video games. The new guys, the new generation got these things down. Now the old guys are trying to catch up to it and it's kind of hard. Some of them got it or getting it, but you know, and like I said, I got to start from step one all the way up to step two to get to where I want to. And so, you know for me, it's, it's fun either way, but. When I go out fishing, fishing with the strands, we're just, I'm just out there fishing to catch fish, to give fish away or take fish home or just going out to have fun. But I'm still serious at the point that I'm trying to figure out how these fish want to react. They might want, like I said, they want it hot, they want a low, they want to slow, they might want it fast. I'm Still trying to pick it out. So I'm always working, trying to figure out something or different color, different style. But you know, you know whatever cadence they want, I'm tryna put that together and. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't. Sometimes you just want the old, old style, a hook in the middle and drop it on the mound and you catch a fish. I mean, all you guys, these new baits and all this stuff coming out nowadays, the fish doesn't have a chance. The sonars and everything, they really don't have a lot of chance to meet. They don't to bite, but yet you can see them. So that's part of the battle right there.

[00:15:51] **Speaker 1** So what's the enjoyment for you? You talked about you're fishing with your partner and how close you've become and fishing with you son. How key are those relationships to that time in the boat?

[00:16:01] **Speaker 2** That was a key with me, like my partner Joe, I love him to death, like I said, we're brothers. If he called me right now during this interview and said, hey man, I need you to be here right now and he lives in Iowa. I'm going, if he needs help, I'm there and vice versa with him. Fishing with my son, it was one of the things, that was something we bond. You know, that's something we'll always have together that he caught his biggest walleye when he was three years old. Heck, it took me 21 years to get a walleye that size. He gets them at three and he still rubs that in my face about them. Like, well, yeah, you got me. And so, but just, it's just more, it just relaxing. You going out there with your son or your best friend and just is no stress, there's no nothing. Just going out and trying to put a program together, put a limit of fish in the boat to go home and just relax. So I enjoy it to the utmost that I have the opportunity to fish with. My buddy, Joe, my buddy, Danny, my buddies, Scotty, my buddy John, that we all get out there and we just fish. And we have a little competitions in the boat and you know, nothing major. You know, who get the biggest one or whatever and who's got the smallest one or who didn't get the limit, stuff like that. So it's just awesome to get out there and have fun and play fishing. That's what we call it. We go pre-fishing for a tournament, we call a play fishing, we're trying to dial stuff in, but we're playing because we're catching fish, having fun. We're playing.

[00:17:23] **Speaker 1** Does fishing, will fishing ever get old for you? I mean, it's literally been in your life. You're talking about since you were tiny and sounds like with your son too.

[00:17:31] **Speaker 2** I don't think fishing ever get old for me until I can't do it. That's when I think, when I can physically put a worm on my hook or walk and get into a boat or something and then I will put fishing off and talk to people about fishing or hopefully my son is still fishing that I can tell him where to go or come get this bait or come get this ride and go fishing. I want some fish or something like that. But fishing until you put me six feet under, I think fishing is always gonna be in my life and I just love it. And I think. A lot more people should do it. I mean, it's not gonna solve your problems but it sure makes you feel better just being out there in peace and mother nature just relaxing. And when I come home, dang, I wish I had that money for that bill but I was fishing. I'm just, I'm okay, you know. I have that stress, little stress reliever right there. I'm going fishing. I don't have a stress ball to do all that stuff. I go fishing. And I just get my mind at, okay, what am I gonna use to catch a fish? What's the water? Current look like. Where do I need to cast? Where do need to be sitting? When problems aren't solved, I'm just having peace.

[00:18:37] **Speaker 1** So one of the things that you show up at any tournament and you can see it's pretty much overwhelmingly a white male space. What would you say to people to bring more people in to say that this is accessible for them? They can be welcoming.

[00:18:52] **Speaker 2** Don't be afraid. Just go out there. Do what you have to do. I mean, I've met Joe Carter, which is my buddy. I've another guy from Iowa named Rodney. I met another guy from Florida named Charlie and then myself and another guy named Ali Shakur. That's five people that I've meet. I African-American that fish and love to fish. I haven't seen Rodney in a while. I haven't seen Charlie in a While. I see Ali two or three times a year fishing the tournaments. And as you know, me and Joe, we fish every day. If he wasn't leaving to take the boat down this week, I'd be down there this weekend. We'd be on the Mississippi River casting. So I would tell people, just don't be afraid. I mean, I went out there. And I didn't know Joe and Joe didn't me and I didn't realize I was running to Joe. I just went out there to have fun and made friends and I fished. My first tournament, I did have a problem with a person. Did what I had to do. I fished, I got out of the boat and I went home and I fish the next day with someone else and I never let it bother me. I see the guy. I have no time for him. And I'm sure he probably thinks the same about me and I'm okay with that. I'm always saying long as they don't put their hands on me, they can say whatever they want to. That's fine. They put their hand on me then it might be something different going on then. But I would just, again, don't be afraid. Just do it. I mean, this world is out here. The water's out there. The fish out there, if you love the fish. Come on out there. Come on. I mean, when I see another person out there fishing, first thing I do is nod to them and they nod to me or they come up to me. I come up and say, hey man, how you doing? I'm Brett. Who are you? I'm so-and-so, where you from? Oh man, that's good. Man, good luck. Hope to see you then. I got a friend there because I see that person again. And just like we've known each other for 30 years that we just can have that bond. We just keep talking, you know? And I wish there would be more people out fishing. But I think some people are afraid. Some people think this game is just for certain people. It's not. This game is open. And like I said, I personally want to get myself to that next level to be, if you want to say it's a person game, I want to be there. I want be that person because I know I can do it. I just, I'm not there yet. I just need a little help. I'm gonna get there. And I wish more people would come out and fish. Heck, it's fun. It's fun

[00:21:23] **Speaker 1** So one of the other things that we're looking at in this story is all of the money that's poured into research. From the universities to the tribes and the DNR, like doing the samples and rearing fish and trying to stock the lakes and figuring out how they're being impacted. And one of questions that we've been asking everybody is, is that worth it? Is the amount of money that's being poured into keeping walleye alive worth it. In the big picture is that one species being important enough to enough people.

[00:21:56] **Speaker 2** So do they stock bass and all that too?

[00:21:59] **Speaker 1** They stock muskies.

[00:22:00] **Speaker 2** Stock muskies, I know that.

[00:22:01] **Speaker 1** Yeah, not really.

[00:22:03] **Speaker 2** I think it's well worth it. I mean, it's a sport that isn't as high on the pedestal as bass because bass has been out there for umpteen years. So walleye just start taking up, you know, in the last 20, 30 years, the FLWs, the NWTs, PWTs back in the early seventies and stuff like that. So walleyes just start going. I think, it would be a bad thing to stop. Stocking walleye in lakes or rivers, wherever you want to stock them at for that reason. I mean, it's a fish that's a great fish to catch is a challenge, just as well as bass. But I think that it would be a disjustice to stop stocking for walleyes and these lakes and tributaries, whatever, because it is a phenomenal fish to catch and it's challenge.

[00:22:54] **Speaker 1** It's worth it.

[00:22:55] **Speaker 2** It's very well worth it, well worth. I, like I said, I started fishing catfish. I never knew what a walleye was. I never know what a hair jig was. There was guys catching fish off of hair jigs. What's a hair jig? What do you, how do you fish a hairjig? No idea. They got the nice little small skinny rods and I got a fat rod with eyelids on like that big fishing catfishing throwing out trying to catch a walley. Had no idea what I was doing and I never did catch one when I was growing up. When I was little, I never caught a wall eye until I went to school.

[00:23:22] **Speaker 1** Never caught one. So did you, was it UW Eau Claire or would you?

[00:23:25] **Speaker 2** No, I went to school in a little town up and it's called Ladysmith, Wisconsin. Oh yeah. So I was up there and met some guys and that's, they took me under the wing. Some guys showed me how to fish and I just kept on doing it and doing it and doing so it was all right. All right, we're going walleye fishing. You ain't leaving me. Let's go.

[00:23:41] **Speaker 1** I'm there. Yeah, you get dropped in the Ladysmith. You're in the middle of nothing. I'm here.

[00:23:44] **Speaker 2** Oh man.

[00:23:45] **Speaker 1** It's good for hunting and fishing. Oh yeah.

[00:23:47] **Speaker 2** So my first walleye rod was the ugly stick. It was easy to get an ugly stick, something simple and not that expensive. So I got an ugly sick. So now I'm using St. Croix as something that's really, I can tell the difference when I'm fishing. That's a rock, that's a line, that a fish, you know. So yeah, I think it'd be a disjustice if they stopped doing it with the walleye. I think walleye fishing should be around for a while.

[00:24:12] **Speaker 1** Gonna get you to say and spell your name just so I have it correct.

[00:24:16] **Speaker 2** My name is Brett Rogers, B-R-E-T-R O-G-E R-S. I'm from Eau Claire, Wisconsin.

[00:24:25] **Speaker 1** Thank you so much for coming in. Really appreciate it. We're good here. So we'll unhook you and let you run and then we're gonna find time.

[00:24:37] **Speaker 2** Yeah, he said if you look at the NWT schedule for Monroe, I mean, that'd be a good one because we'll be there for a whole week.