Bass fishing is easily one of the most challenging forms of outdoor recreation available. Attempts to catch largemouth bass can range from frustrating to downright impossible. To the beginning angler success often depends more on luck than on skill. But to the professional bass fisherman success has little to do with luck. The skills of these bassmasters are put to the test in tournaments with cash prizes nearing $500,000. As bass fishing has matured as a professional sport, so has the competition. Only the most skilled anglers succeed in competitive bass fishing. In the past two years Kevin VanDam has dominated this competition like no other.

Only 24 years of age, Kevin VanDam has taken the BASSMASTER tournament trail by storm. Since turning pro in 1991 he has finished in the money an unprecedented eighteen consecutive times, winning over $200,000 in tournaments alone. Kevin has also received the highest possible award in professional bass fishing: B.A.S.S. Angler of Year. Dubbed "The Kid from Kalamazoo," VanDam has already rewritten the B.A.S.S. record books, setting six new records. VanDam doesn't seem to be slowing down either, heading straight towards his second title as Angler of the Year.

What has separated VanDam from most newcomers who unravel when facing the pressure of a tournament with veteran pros? It seems to be his positive attitude and self-confidence, combined with an uncanny concentration. In a tournament, bass pros are faced with many critical decisions: what lures to use, in what weather, where to fish, how to present the lure. Kevin has learned to deal with this pressure like a veteran, even through the fuss over his whirlwind success.

"I just go fishing and try to do the best I can," Kevin admits. "I learned to avoid pressure; it causes bad decisions and affects your concentration. I think that's what happens to some people. Without realizing it they fish differently under pressure." Even after a bad tournament Kevin still keeps a positive outlook towards the future.

"Hey, it happens," he laughs. "When it does, I don't let it bother me. I put it behind me and know I can make up for it in the next one."

A factor which strengthens VanDam's positive mental attitude is his unbelievable preparation before a tournament. He puts hours into studying maps of tournament lakes looking for good areas. He also spends many days on each lake before the tournaments, becoming familiar with the waters.
"Most of my time is spent driving around, studying the depthfinder, searching for areas that should fit the seasonal pattern at the time of the tournament," he says.

The night before each tournament VanDam personally respools all his reels with brand new test line. He trims the skirts of his spinner baits to perfection and keeps all hooks razor sharp. He keeps his 15 to 20 rods equipped and ready to go. This pre-tournament preparation keeps Kevin focused and positive.

"I'm adamant about it," he confesses. "The routine I go through at night helps me prepare mentally. When I get on the water the next day, I know my tackle is in perfect condition."

VanDam has also gathered much knowledge from the writings of other pros. Whenever he would read about a new technique he would go out on the lake and try it. But testing it wasn't enough for Kevin. He experimented with each lure to ensure its maximum effectiveness.

"I remember a pro saying that versatility is critical, so I decided to learn all I could about each lure, when to fish it and how to fish it," he explains.

All of Kevin VanDam's dedication and hard work has paid off. He's being paid big money to do something he loves. His positive mental attitude and self-confidence have ensured an enormous future. With his composure and skills, Kevin VanDam should remain atop the professional bass competition for many years to come.