

Joe Thomas

Angler. Author. Entertainer. Joe Thomas has done it all. From competing at the highest levels of professional bass fishing to authoring the definitive account of life as a pro angler to hosting today's most popular television series focusing on bass fishing, there's a common thread that runs through Joe Thomas' life. It's not hard to imagine a young Joe growing up as a kid in southwestern Ohio with dreams of one day becoming a bass pro. But it is difficult to imagine that even he could foresee the impact that his 30 year career would have on the sport. Today, Joe Thomas has achieved iconic status as an angler, author and television series host. And that's just the beginning!

Angler

In the summer of 1976, Joe Thomas told a lie, or really more like a small fib, that would change the rest of his life. Having been introduced to bass fishing by a friend, Joe wanted to join a local bass fishing club and compete against other anglers. The problem? You had to be 18 years old to join the club. So, with two full years left to wait, Joe decided to cross his fingers behind his back and tell the club officers that he was indeed 18 and ready to fish. It's anyone's guess as to whether the club members knew his real age, but it didn't matter. Here was a kid with a burning passion for bass fishing and it soon showed. Before long, Joe was beating anglers twice his age on some of the toughest fisheries in America like the Ohio River. He would go on to qualify and win the Ohio BASS Federation Championship and make the decision to turn pro in 1980 while still enrolled at Ohio State. Before long, he was fishing against Rick Clunn, Roland Martin, Larry Nixon and other legends of the sport. He fished. He watched. He learned. By the end of the 1980's, Thomas had become one of the top anglers in the sport and he proved it by winning the prestigious 1990 All American Championship on Lake Erie.

With a rocket sized confidence boost and a check for \$100,000 in his pocket, Joe Thomas would go on to become a fixture on both the BASS and FLW tournament trails. He would also pioneer efforts to bring sponsors to the sport that didn't have anything to do with boats, line or lures. Even before the phrase "non-endemic" was coined, Thomas had attracted a sponsor base that saw the potential in aligning their products and services with a traditional American pastime and the guys who travelled from reservoir to reservoir in hopes of winning the next big championship. Today, Fortune 500 companies like Pepsi, Wal Mart, Chevrolet, Toyota, Stihl and many more are associated with professional bass fishing and the sport has undergone dramatic growth matched only by NASCAR.

Author

It wasn't long after Thomas' All American Championship that people began to take notice that Joe was more than just another guy with a fishing rod looking for his next bite. He was soon becoming a spokesperson for the sport. When he was approached by legendary BASS writer Tim Tucker to write a book about the life of a professional bass angler, Joe jumped at the chance to show America what the sport was really all about. The result, "Diary of a Bass Pro" written with Tucker and published in 1992, would change the way America looked at professional bass fishing and fishermen.

In 2000, Joe Thomas was approached by a fledgling television network looking to sponsor a professional angler on the tournament trail. The network focused strictly on the outdoors, with both fishing and hunting making up a huge chunk of their programming. The network would grow to become America's

leader in outdoor television and Joe Thomas would become one of its most popular hosts. Today, Outdoor Channel reaches 40 million viewers and Joe Thomas hosts three of the networks most successful shows.

It began soon after Joe signed an endorsement deal to promote Outdoor Channel. He was approached by experts intrigued with his book "Diary of a Bass Pro" and who wanted to develop of television series along the same lines. It didn't take long. Production began on "Angler on Tour" in 2001 and the series was hailed by fans and critics alike as the most realistic look at the behind-the-scenes life of a pro angler. As the cameras followed Joe on tour, perceptions of the sport began to change. No longer were pro anglers looked at simply as people who got to go fishing for a living. Instead, Joe Thomas revealed the ups and downs of competing in a sport that demands total commitment while traveling 40,000 miles per year and putting your own money up for entry fees. "Angler on Tour" gave fans a look at what it's like to miss a cut, and a nice payday, by mere ounces. It also showed everyone why the sport had become so popular. Not only were pro anglers consummate professionals, but they were also great people. You could approach any of these guys at an interstate rest stop, introduce yourself, and be assured that you'd walk away with an autograph, a handshake, and a fishing story or two.

Today, Thomas continues his hosting duties on three Outdoor Channel series productions. As the play-by-play analyst on the wildly popular "Ultimate Match Fishing", a series developed by Thomas and his production company, Thomas draws upon his years as a pro to break down the action as two of the world's greatest anglers square off head-to-head in the same boat.

On "Stihl's Reel in the Outdoors", Joe travels across North America in search of the people and places that make angling a uniquely American pursuit and one of our favorite pastimes.