

SUSKIE BASSMASTERS WEDNESDAY NIGHT SERIES — 2026 CHAMPIONSHIP

Thirteen Wednesday nights. Thirteen weeks of changing river conditions, close finishes, big fish, small fish, Wildcards, Bubbles and a Championship race that wasn't settled until the final regular-season weigh-in.

It all came down to Sunday.

The **2026 Suskie Bassmasters Wednesday Night Series Championship** brought the Top 15 back to the Susquehanna for one final tournament. But this time, the format was different. After spending the regular season looking for that one fish to bring to the scale, Championship Sunday was about putting together a **three-fish bag**.

And Mother Nature wasn't exactly interested in making it easy.

It was cold. It rained. Then it rained some more. What had been a stretch of some pretty impressive fish during the final weeks of the regular season suddenly looked very different. The bigger fish apparently checked the forecast Sunday morning and decided they'd rather stay home too. 😊

But this was the Championship. There wasn't another week to wait for better weather.

So the rain gear went on, the boats went in, and the 15-team Championship field went fishing.

CHAMPIONSHIP SUNDAY

The Wednesday Night Series had been about finding **one fish** each week. Sunday required something completely different. Teams could bring their three best fish to the scale, with the largest fish in the bag also eligible for Championship Lunker. Instead of finding one good bite, teams had seven hours to put together the best three-fish bag they could.

Despite the cold, steady rain and generally miserable conditions, the field still managed to put plenty of fish on the scale. Fourteen of the 15 teams weighed at least one fish, 12 teams brought back a full three-fish limit, and a total of **41 fish weighing 58.25 pounds** crossed the scale. The average fish weighed 1.42 pounds.

 **Date:** Sunday, September 20, 2026

 **Championship Field:** 15 Teams

 **Tournament Format:** 3-Fish Bag

 **Total Fish Weighed:** 41

 **Total Weight:** 58.25 lbs

 **Average Fish Weight:** 1.42 lbs

 **Paid Places:** Top 5 + Championship Bubble

The big fish we'd been seeing over the final few weeks of the regular season seemed to go into hiding. There were still some good fish caught, including a 2.16-pounder from Team Russo (Anglely / Aufiero), but only one fish broke the 2.20-pound mark. The biggest of the day tipped the scale at **2.28 pounds**.

Without a bunch of heavyweight fish to create separation, every ounce started to matter. By the end of weigh-in, only **0.36 pounds separated 2nd through 5th place**. After seven hours on the river, less than six ounces separated four teams. One better bite, one small upgrade or one fish lost at the boat could have completely changed the order.

The Championship paid the Top 5, but we also decided that after an entire regular season of giving the Bubble a hard time, maybe 6th place deserved a break.

For one day only...

THE BUBBLE ACTUALLY PAYS. 😄

After seven cold and wet hours on the river, everyone headed back to weigh-in where teams were joined by friends, family and fellow club members. Pizza and wings were waiting, along with what may very well have been **the best chocolate peanut butter oatmeal squares you will ever have**. The fishing tournament may have been the official reason everybody was there, but those oatmeal squares made a pretty strong case for their own trophy. 😄

Championship weigh-in was also about more than Sunday's tournament. It was the culmination of the entire 2026 Wednesday Night Series, and we had a season's worth of hardware to hand out. Team of the Year, Lunker of the Year and, of course, one of the most coveted honors in all of Suskie Bassmasters fishing — **Small Fish of the Year**. 😄

Those awards were earned over 13 weeks of regular-season fishing, and we'll get to each of them before this Championship recap is finished.

But first, there was still one pretty important piece of business to take care of.

Fifteen teams launched Sunday morning, 41 fish crossed the scale, five places were paid, even the Bubble finally got something, and after 13 weeks of regular-season fishing and one long, cold, rainy Championship Sunday...

we crowned the 2026 Suskie Bassmasters Wednesday Night Series Champions. 🏆

🏆 **CHAMPIONSHIP SPONSOR — 570 TATTOOING CO.**

Our **2026 Championship Sponsor** was 570 Tattooing Co., and this one comes from someone who has been a familiar name around Suskie Bassmasters for a long time.

Ron Russo of Team Russo isn't just a longtime club member and competitor. Ron and 570 Tattooing Co. have stepped up to sponsor and support Suskie Bassmasters numerous times over the years, including once again for our biggest tournament of the season. That kind of continued support means a lot to the club, and we sincerely appreciate Ron continuing to be there for us year after year.

Ron is the owner of 570 Tattooing Co., a custom tattoo studio serving the Wyoming Valley area. The shop specializes in custom tattoo work, including color realism, portraits and other detailed custom pieces.

If you're considering some new ink and want to support someone who has continually supported our club, keep Ron and 570 Tattooing Co. in mind.

 570 Tattooing Co.

390 Pierce Street
Kingston, PA 18704

 **(570) 852-5900**

 **Ron@ron570.com**

A huge **thank-you to Ron Russo and 570 Tattooing Co.** for sponsoring the 2026 Championship and, more importantly, for the continued support you've given Suskie Bassmasters over the years.

We truly appreciate having longtime members and sponsors like Ron supporting the club.  

 2026 CHAMPIONSHIP — NOW FOR THE RESULTS...

Five places were paid in the 2026 Championship, and because this was Championship Sunday, even the Bubble got a little love.

So after spending the entire regular season picking on whoever landed one spot outside the money, it seems only right that we start there.

 CHAMPIONSHIP BUBBLE — TEAM MATTY CENTAK

 **Fish: 3**

 **Bag Weight: 4.28 lbs**

 **Place: 6th**

For once, finishing on the Bubble didn't mean walking away empty-handed.

Team Matty Centak put together a full three-fish bag weighing **4.28 pounds**, landing them in 6th place and just outside the five regular paid positions.

But this was Championship Sunday, and after spending an entire season giving the Bubble a hard time, we figured it was finally time for 6th place to catch a break.

This time, the Bubble actually paid. 

Team Matty Centak's biggest fish measured 14 $\frac{7}{8}$ inches and weighed 1.49 pounds, helping them put together a solid bag on a day when good fish weren't exactly jumping into the boat.

Congratulations to Team Matty Centak on the Championship Bubble!

5 5TH PLACE — TEAM HAMM

 **Fish:** 3

 **Lunker:** 16 inches — 1.77 lbs

 **Bag Weight:** 4.82 lbs

 **Place:** 5th

Team Hamm has been near the front of the pack throughout the 2026 season, and they weren't about to disappear when Championship Sunday arrived. They also had their **star angler Jace back in the boat** after a short absence with school getting started. Apparently a little time away didn't hurt the fishing skills. 😊

With the crew back together, Team Hamm brought a full three-fish bag to the scale weighing **4.82 pounds**, anchored by a 16-inch, 1.77-pound smallmouth. That was enough to secure 5th place and the final regular paid position.

On a day when the bigger fish seemed to have disappeared, Team Hamm still managed to find three quality fish and put together a competitive bag. Their 4.82 pounds ended up only **0.36 pounds behind 2nd place**.

A few ounces here or there and this Championship board could have looked completely different.

Welcome back, Jace, and congratulations to Team Hamm on a strong 5th-place Championship finish!

4TH PLACE — TEAM RUSSO (ANGLEY / AUFIERO)

 **Fish:** 3

 **Lunker:** 16½ inches — 2.16 lbs

 **Bag Weight:** 4.96 lbs

 **Place:** 4th

Team Russo (Angley / Aufiero) found one of the better fish of Championship Sunday and used it to help build a **4.96-pound three-fish bag**.

Their biggest fish measured 16½ inches and weighed **2.16 pounds**, one of only two fish recorded on the weigh-in sheet above the two-pound mark.

That fish proved important because there wasn't much room between the teams at the top. Team Russo finished only 0.14 pounds ahead of Team Hamm and just 0.13 pounds behind the next team on the board.

That's basically a handful of ounces deciding three Championship positions.

When the scale settled, 4.96 pounds was enough to put Team Russo (Angley / Aufiero) into **4th place**.

Congratulations on a great Championship finish!

3RD PLACE — TEAM JOHN CENTAK

 **Fish:** 3

 **Bag Weight:** 5.09 lbs

 **Place:** 3rd

After everything Team John Centak accomplished during the regular season, it probably shouldn't surprise anybody to see them near the top of the Championship board too.

Team John Centak brought a full three-fish bag to the scale weighing **5.09 pounds**, becoming one of only three teams to break the five-pound mark Sunday.

And they came incredibly close to moving another spot higher.

Only **0.09 pounds** separated Team John Centak from 2nd place.

Less than an ounce and a half.

After seven hours of fishing in cold rain, that's about as close as it gets.

Their 3rd-place finish was also a fitting end to a season in which Team John Centak spent most of the year setting the pace. There is another piece of hardware waiting for them from the regular season, but we'll save that for the season awards.

For now, congratulations to Team John Centak on a **5.09-pound bag and 3rd place in the 2026 Championship!**

2ND PLACE — TEAM LACOMIS

 **Fish:** 3

 **Lunker:** 15¾ inches — 1.75 lbs

 **Bag Weight:** 5.18 lbs

 **Place:** 2nd

Team Lacomis picked a pretty good day to put together one of the best bags on the river.

Their three fish totaled **5.18 pounds**, anchored by a 15¾-inch, 1.75-pound smallmouth. That put Team Lacomis into 2nd place, just 0.09 pounds ahead of Team John Centak in one of the closest battles on the Championship board.

On a day when the bigger bites were hard to come by, Team Lacomis didn't need one giant fish to carry them. They simply put together three solid fish, and when all three went on the scale, only one team in the entire Championship field had a heavier bag.

A **5.18-pound three-fish bag** in those conditions was a heck of a way to finish the season.

Congratulations to Team Lacomis on a huge 2nd-place finish in the 2026 Championship!

2026 CHAMPIONS — TEAM VITALE JR.

 **Fish:** 3

 **Championship Lunker:** 17¼ inches — 2.28 lbs

 **Bag Weight:** 6.06 lbs

 **Place:** 1st

All season long, the Wednesday Night Series was about finding one fish.

On Championship Sunday, Team Vitale Jr. found three.

And they saved their best bag for the day that mattered most.

While four teams battled within ounces of each other behind them, **Team Vitale Jr. was the only team in the field to break the six-pound mark**, bringing a three-fish bag weighing 6.06 pounds to the Championship scale.

The centerpiece of that bag was a **17¼-inch, 2.28-pound smallmouth** — the biggest fish caught by anyone in the Championship field. On a day when the larger fish seemed to have gone into hiding, Team Vitale Jr. managed to find the one everybody else was looking for.

But this wasn't a one-fish tournament anymore.

That 2.28-pounder certainly helped, but it still took two more fish to build a Championship-winning bag. When all three hit the scale, the number stopped at **6.06 pounds**.

And that gave them some actual breathing room.

Team Lacomis finished 2nd with 5.18 pounds, meaning Team Vitale Jr. won the Championship by **0.88 pounds**. In a tournament where only 0.36 pounds separated 2nd through 5th, that was a significant gap.

Cold rain all day. Big fish tougher to find. Fifteen of the best teams from the regular season on the water. A completely different three-fish format.

And when it was all over, nobody had a better bag.

They also didn't just win the Championship. Team Vitale Jr. caught the **Championship Lunker** while doing it.

Three fish. 6.06 pounds. A 2.28-pound Lunker. And the 2026 Championship trophy.

That's how you finish a season.

 **CONGRATULATIONS TO TEAM VITALE JR. — YOUR 2026 SUSKIE BASSMASTERS WEDNESDAY NIGHT SERIES CHAMPIONS!**  

 **A NEW AWARD FOR NEXT YEAR?**

We may need to add a new award next season — Best Scream of the Year. 😂 During the Championship, Curt Nocera of Team Gillott hooked into a roughly 36-inch musky on a topwater lure. The fish came straight up from underneath at the boat, smashed the lure and apparently miscalculated exactly where the boat ended. It launched itself about halfway into the boat and smashed its jaws off the back just inches from Curt's feet.

Curt responded with a scream that sounded less like someone catching a musky and more like someone being attacked by a Great White. 😂 The fish didn't make it into the boat, Curt survived, and unfortunately there was no trophy available for what was easily the best scream of the tournament.

We'll have to work that one into the 2027 budget. 🏆 😂

🏆 2026 TEAM OF THE YEAR — TEAM JOHN CENTAK

Championship Sunday wasn't only about what happened during those seven hours on the river. We also had some unfinished business from the previous 13 Wednesday nights.

The biggest regular-season award of them all belonged to **Team John Centak — our 2026 Suskie Bassmasters Wednesday Night Series Team of the Year.**

Team John Centak finished the regular season with a **Best of 10 total of 17.45 pounds**, earning the top spot in the final standings and the Team of the Year title.

The Best of 10 format rewarded something that isn't easy to do over the course of an entire summer — consistently bring quality fish to the scale. One great Wednesday can win a tournament. Team of the Year takes an entire season.

And just to put an exclamation point on the year, Team John Centak came back on Championship Sunday and put together a **5.09-pound three-fish bag**, good enough for 3rd place.

Congratulations to Team John Centak, your 2026 Team of the Year! 🏆

😬 2026 LUNKER OF THE YEAR — TEAM NEALON

There were plenty of good smallmouth brought to the scale throughout the 2026 season, but Team Nealon waited until just about the last possible minute to claim this one.

👤 **Team:** Team Nealon

⚖️ **Weight:** 2.73 lbs

🏆 **Award:** 2026 Lunker of the Year

That **2.73-pound smallmouth was caught during the final week of the regular season**, sliding into the top spot with absolutely no time left for anybody to answer.

Talk about squeaking one in under the wire.

After an entire summer of teams taking their shots at Lunker of the Year, Team Nealon showed up in Week 13, dropped a 2.73-pounder on the scale and basically said, *Thanks, we'll take that.* 😄

There wasn't another Wednesday left for anybody to do anything about it.

Congratulations to Team Nealon on the biggest fish of the 2026 Wednesday Night Series — and on having some pretty good timing! 🏆 🎯

🐟 2026 SMALL FISH OF THE YEAR — TEAM SAYPACK

And now for the award everybody secretly hopes somebody else wins. 😄

We recognize the biggest fish of the season, so naturally it only seems fair that we recognize the other end of the scale too. And yes, **Small Fish of the Year is worth some money**, which at least makes admitting you caught it a little easier.

🐟 **Team:** Team Saypack

⚖️ **Weight:** 0.85 lbs

💰 **Yes, there's money involved**

🏆 **Award:** 2026 Small Fish of the Year

At **0.85 pounds**, Team Saypack's fish survived every challenger and held onto the title all the way through Week 13.

Some records are meant to be chased.

This one is probably better left alone. 😄

When it came time to accept the award, **Brian Oppelt of Team Saypack apparently tried to keep a little bit of a low profile and hide his identity.** We can't really blame him. It's one thing to walk up in front of everybody to collect money for the biggest fish of the season. It's another thing entirely when everybody knows you're collecting money because **nobody managed to weigh a smaller one.** 😄

Nice try, Brian.

We figured you out.

There was no escaping it. The fish was weighed, the records were kept, and the evidence was pretty convincing.

So congratulations to Brian Oppelt and Team Saypack on the **2026 Small Fish of the Year!** Enjoy the money. You've earned it... although we're still not entirely sure that's something you want to brag about.

😄 🐟 💰

ONE LAST WEIGH-IN

By the time the final fish crossed the scale Sunday afternoon, everyone was wet, cold and probably more than ready to get out of the rain.

But Championship weigh-in was about more than handing out checks and trophies.

Teams, friends and family gathered together for pizza, wings and those now-famous **chocolate peanut butter oatmeal squares** that may have generated more excitement than some of the fish. 😄

We handed out the Championship awards, recognized our regular-season award winners and got to spend some time together without anybody worrying about making it back between the bridges before **8:00 PM**.

After 13 Wednesday nights and one Championship Sunday, it was a fitting way to wrap up the competitive portion of the 2026 Wednesday Night Series.

THANK YOU FOR A GREAT 2026 SEASON

A tournament series like this doesn't happen because of one or two people.

Thank you to everyone who fished with us this year, whether you were there every Wednesday or only able to make a few. Thank you to the families and friends who came down to the weigh-ins, the people who helped with registration and the scales, and everyone who pitched in throughout the season to keep things moving.

A special thank-you goes to **all of our 2026 sponsors**. Their continued support helps make the Wednesday Night Series possible, and we encourage everyone in the club to support the businesses and individuals who support us.

And, of course, another big thank-you to **Ron Russo and 570 Tattooing Co.** for sponsoring our 2026 Championship and for Ron's continued support of Suskie Bassmasters as both a longtime member and sponsor.

From the first launch in June to the final weigh-in in September, we had close finishes, changing river conditions, plenty of laughs, a few fish we'd rather forget, and more than a few that we'll probably still be talking about next season.

Most importantly, we got another summer of Wednesday nights on the Susquehanna with a great group of people.

Congratulations again to **Team Vitale Jr., our 2026 Championship winners**, and to **Team John Centak, our 2026 Team of the Year**.

Congratulations as well to Team Nealon on Lunker of the Year, and to Brian Oppelt and Team Saypack on the honor they tried unsuccessfully to hide from — **Small Fish of the Year**. 😄

The trophies have been handed out. The Championship is in the books.

But we're not quite ready to put the rods away yet.

With our permits continuing into October, keep an eye out for information on some **fun tournaments open to the entire club** as we take advantage of what's left of the fishing season.

On behalf of the entire Suskie Bassmasters Board of Directors — **President Ralph Aufiero, Vice President John Nealon, Treasurer Dave McGovern, Acting Secretary Mike Gillott, Tournament Directors Matt Miller and Tom Shaffer, and Board Member Chris Ostrowski** — thank you to every angler, family member, sponsor and supporter who helped make the 2026 Wednesday Night Series what it was.

We appreciate everyone who showed up week after week, supported the club, helped when something needed to be done and, most importantly, made Wednesday nights something we looked forward to all summer.



LOOKING AHEAD TO 2027

As we close out the 2026 season, it won't be long before we start looking ahead to next year. **Keep an eye on the Suskie Bassmasters Facebook page for information on upcoming club meetings and planning for the 2027 season.** Meeting dates, times and other updates will be posted there as they become available.

We encourage everyone to stay involved during the offseason. The meetings are where we begin putting together the next season, discussing the tournament schedule, rules and other club business, and your participation helps us continue making the Wednesday Night Series better each year.

From all of us on the Board of Directors, thank you for a great 2026 season. We couldn't do it without all of you.

Good luck, tight lines, and heavy bags! 🎣 🏆