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Butcher leapfrogs Fralick in Classic race

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ESPNOdoors.com

DENISON, Texas — With the Bassmaster Classic on the line, much is at stake going into the final day of the Central Open on Lake Texoma. Holding onto the unofficial lead in the point race is Texan Michael Burns with 809 points. Billy Mccaghren remained in second with 762 points, while tournament leader Terry Butcher took over third place with 753 points.

Burns solidified his position atop the Central Open standings after bringing in 14 pounds, 2 ounces, the biggest bag of Day Two.

"It was a good day — a pretty early bite for me today," Burns said. "I did lose two pretty good smallmouth in the morning though."



Texas native Michael Burns is one day closer to a Classic berth.

Even with the weight of the Classic looming in his future, Burns insists that he's not looking too far ahead and wouldn't divulge just how much qualifying would mean to him.

"I'm just out there having fun and fishing the Classic would just be a bonus."

That pressure is weighing more heavily on Mccaghren, who spent the majority of the time after weigh-in looking for a replacement for the lures he lost on Day Two.

"I lost both of the baits that I've been catching them on today," he said. "I'm trying to round some up right now."

Mccaghren had a much tougher go of it on the water and only managed to land four keepers. "I pretty much went back out there, put the trolling motor down and covered water," said Mccaghren of his Day Two performance. "I got every keeper bite in the boat, but just didn't get many bites today. I hope they aren't running out."

Even with the tougher fishing, Mccaghren still managed to maintain his place in the standings, something that Elite Series pro Jami Fralick struggled with on the second day.

Fralick only brought three keepers to the scales and currently sits in 23rd place.



Billy Mccaghren is second in the Central Open points and a berth into the Classic.

"Today started out really well. I caught those three fish that weighed 7 pounds, 5 ounces in the first

hour and a half," he said. "Then I lost one on a jerkbait and it went south from there. I tried doing a lot of different things and they just didn't bite in the afternoon."

That said, a decent final day performance can have him right back in the mix as he currently sits only five points out of contention for a Classic berth.

The one angler that benefited from Fralick's slide was Elite Series pro Terry Butcher.

Bolstered by his big first day, Butcher was able to back that up with 13-9, allowing him to extend his lead to more than 3 pounds.

"I'm not following the Classic race," he said. "My idea coming into here was try to win the tournament and lead every day to get my bonus points — if I make it, I do."

Even if Butcher were to win the tournament Saturday and get the bonus points for leading, he could still be passed by Fralick or Rick Clunn if either one were to have a strong finish.

Clunn believes that a good day is on the horizon for him.

"With only 30 boats out there tomorrow, I'll be able to run to more of my places and fish them the way I like," Clunn said. "Even a guy like myself (a non-local) has a chance to catch a big bag."

While the Classic race is grabbing most of the headlines, there are also 10 invitations to the Elite Series that will be handed out at the end of this tournament. Former Bassmaster Tour pro Roger Boler said he will try to be ready to accept that invitation should he remain in the top 10.

"I miss the guys out there," Boler said. "Katrina put a damper on everybody in south Louisiana. I'll have to go to my sponsors and mainly my family, but I hope I get the chance to fish on the Elites."

Boler finished just outside the cut in 39th place with 14-13, which means he will be watching from shore Saturday to see if anyone knocks him from his ninth place position in the standings.



Vince Fulks is obsessed with qualifying for the Elite Series.

Vince Fulks has a more solid standing after posting back-to-back 10-pound bags. He sits in eighth in the Central Open points and was stoked about a potential invitation to be an Elite Series pro.

"I can't keep from thinking about the Elite Series," Fulks said. "It's on my mind all the time. I can hardly sleep."

The inspiration for his run in the Opens can be traced back to his teaching job that a friend helped him get so he could afford to fish tournaments.

"In the class room, the kids finally stood up and said 'Coach, how can you tell us to follow our dreams when you aren't following yours?'"

All points standings referred to in this article are unofficial until the completion of the tournament.

*Visit **Bassmaster.com** for full coverage of the Central Open 3 from Lake Texoma, Texas., Oct. 30-Nov. 1, 2008. Daily weigh-ins with live streaming video and real-time leaderboards start at 4:35 p.m. ET.*

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