

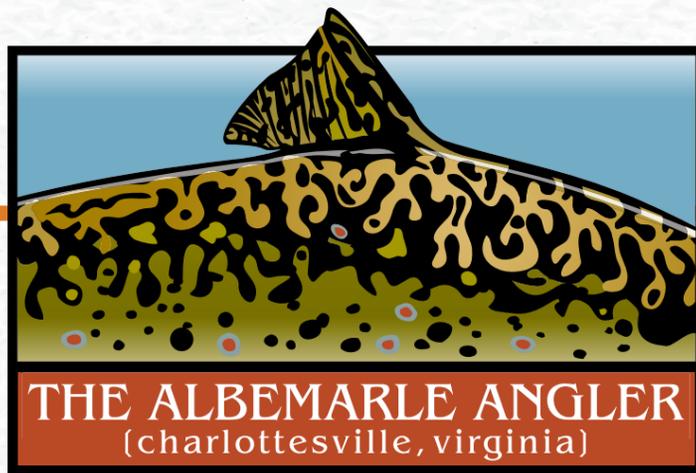


BRADEN MILLER

A 13-YEAR-OLD FLY-FISHING
AND FLY-TYING PRODIGY

BY TEE CLARKSON

FALSE ALBACORE
CAUGHT ON FLY BY
YOUNG PHENOM



F OR OVER 15 YEARS,

the Albemarle Angler has served Central Virginia as a guide service and fly fishing shop. Their first-hand knowledge of their products and the surrounding fisheries sets them apart. Fishing and instructions takes place all year long. They teach and guide fly fishing for trout during the spring, fall, and winter on the state's most picturesque cold mountain streams. Trout are not the only species that anglers can pursue with a fly rod. During the summer months, you will find them floating the historic James and Shenandoah rivers, fly fishing for smallmouth bass and other warm water species such as largemouth, gar, catfish, and more. For those who have never tried the sport, beginners are welcome. Fly fishing is not as hard as you think.

After anglers have explored Virginia's fish species, they often start wondering where else in the world they can travel with their fly rods. With The Albemarle Angler, fisherman can book trips to catch species such as tarpon, bonefish, permit, giant salmon, cutthroat trout, and much more. Fisherman can travel to locations such as Idaho, Belize, Cuba, Mexico, and Bahamas. The price of the trip through this shop is always the same as the price would be if you book directly through a lodge. When booked through the shop, they will even give 20 percent off any gear a customer needs for their adventure.

All employees are educated fly fishermen who are available to answer angler's most challenging questions. For those of you who are beginning, take advantage of the intimacy of their small business where learning opportunities take place daily.

PRICE MATCH ALWAYS GUARANTEED

ALBEMARLEANGLER.COM



SHOOTING HOOPS WITH STEPH CURRY, TOSsing THE PIGSKIN AROUND WITH TOM BRADY, SHAGGING FLIES WITH BRYCE HARPER. THAT'S HOW MOST 13-YEAR-OLD BOYS WOULD SPEND TIME WITH THEIR SPORTS HEROES GIVEN THE OPPORTUNITY.

Braden Miller, a 13-year-old seventh-grader at Hungary Creek Middle School in Henrico County, Virginia, had a different day in mind, however, when he was given the opportunity to spend some time with his mentor and idol, Blane Chocklett, renowned fly-fishing guide and fly tier. "We like to mess with him and call him Blane Jr.," his mom, Casey, joked as she and Miller relayed the story of an epic day on the water with Chocklett. Fishing for musky in December with the temperatures stuck in the 30s isn't for everyone. Neither is tossing a 400-grain sink tip on a 12-weight fly rod all day. For Miller, it was a dream come true.

Perhaps more amazing than the story of the day's fishing is how Miller came to find himself on the bow of Chocklett's boat in the first place. Several years ago, Miller's grandmother dropped off a fly-tying vise and some tying materials along with an old rod and reel for him to try as she was downsizing some of her equipment. Miller taught himself how to tie flies from a how-to book. His first fly, a wooly bugger, fell apart when he first fished it. However, it wasn't long before, with a little help from YouTube and Instagram, he was cranking out more varied and



durable patterns. Soon, Miller was casting his fly rod and his own flies for the bluegill and small bass that inhabit the lake in Crump Park near his house. Miller discovered Chocklett's patterns online and was drawn to streamers, particularly Chocklett's internationally recognized Game Changer pattern. "When I am tying dry flies, I get bored really quick," Miller said. "I like tying streamers because they take time and patience, and there is nothing like watching a big fish smash a fly you tied." When Miller was 12, his parents followed him from booth to booth at the Virginia Fly Fishing Festival as he showed off his streamer patterns, asking for pointers and feedback. "The first year we spent a few minutes at each booth," his mother said. "By the second year it was more like 45 minutes," she joked. "Vendors and tiers were impressed with his flies. Miller was lucky to meet so many great people, including Lefty Kreh and Bob Clouser."

They say musky are the fish of 10,000 casts. Maybe that's why Miller wasn't quite ready when the line jumped from his hands on just his first cast. The strong tug of a musky take, the raising of the rod (a mistake), an unexpected opportunity lost so quickly. Some anglers don't recover from such events. Miller went back to casting. It wasn't long before his line tightened again. This time he kept the rod low, set the fish with a hard strip. He was on. Miller played the musky toward the boat, never giving slack, turning his head toward the cradle. Then the unthinkable happened. The "fish of 10,000 casts," the second one of the day, was gone as quickly as it had arrived. The fly pulled. The line went slack. Miller's connection to the fly-fishing world changed in January of 2018 when he, his mother and his grandfather were at the Virginia Fly Fishing Festival. They made the usual rounds, stopping at nearly every booth, Miller pulling his fly boxes from his backpack,



MILLER WOVES SHOW ATTENDEES WITH HIS FLY PATTERNS.



discussing patterns with the various vendors.

At the Norvise booth, he spoke with Tim and Tyler O'Neill, the owners. He tied a few flies for them. They asked him to do an Instagram live piece.

The rest of the afternoon was a bit of a blur as Miller completed an interview with Alex Colonna at Temple Fork Outfitters and also appeared on Rob Snowwhite's, The Fly Fishing Consultant podcast. That evening when Miller returned home from the show, he and his mother decided to make his Instagram (@flyfisher0906) public so Miller could share his fly-fishing adventures. It wasn't long before Miller and his mom heard from Tyler O'Neill, who encouraged Miller to attend some of the other upcoming shows.

Soon Miller and his parents were on the road to the New Jersey Fly Fishing Show, where Miller met famous tiers Bob Popovics and Pat Cohen. Two weeks later, they attended Lefty Kreh's Tie Fest in Maryland. Within a year, Miller was a Junior Ambassador for Norvise and Temple Fork Outfitters and at least a half-dozen other fly-fishing companies.

"Everyone in the fly-fishing community has been just amazing to Braden," his mother said.

Finally, Miller met his idol, Blane Chocklett, at the Lancaster, PA, Fly Fishing Show in the spring of 2018, where he was asked to be TFO's first Junior Ambassador. The two made a plan to go fishing.

There is a certain feeling that comes with fishing for difficult species like musky. You go out for the day just hoping to have one opportunity, one time when a fish eats the fly. It could come on the first cast or the last. If you are lucky enough (or skilled enough) to get that opportunity and you don't capitalize, it's difficult to think you will get another chance, much less a few more chances.

BRADEN MILLER (LEFT) MAKES THE ROUNDS AND SHARES HIS FLY PATTERNS AND TALENTS AT FLY-FISHING SHOWS AND FESTIVALS.

"IT WAS A SPECIAL MOMENT WE SHARED WITH THAT BEAUTIFUL FISH," CHOCKLETT SAID. "BRADEN IS A DELIGHT TO BE AROUND AND A TRUE BRIGHT SPOT IN OUR SPORT'S FUTURE. IF HE KEEPS WORKING HARD AND STAYS THE COURSE, THE SKY IS THE LIMIT FOR HIM IN THE WORLD OF FLY FISHING AND TYING."

That's how things stood when the fly pulled on Braden's second chance of the day. An angler has a choice to make at a time like this; he or she can sulk, lament the one that got away, curse his or her bad fortune and head for the ramp, or stand up and do the only thing that makes sense in fly fishing and in life: keep casting. And keep casting is what Miller did.

Neither he nor Chocklett saw the fish before the take, a violent grab that nearly yanked the rod from young Miller's hands and essentially set the hook. After all, this was fortune's fish, and Miller played him successfully all the way to the cradle: a 46-inch, 25-pound Musky.

"I am not sure who was more excited," Miller's mother said, "Miller or Blane."

The trip with Chocklett marked the realization of one dream and the beginning of another for Miller, who will be on the road come next winter, teaching fly fishing and tying with his two families: his mother, his father and his brothers—and his newfound fly-fishing family. (L)

Tee Clarkson was the outdoors columnist for the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* and has written articles on conservation and outdoor pursuits in Virginia for nearly 20 years. He owns and operates Virginia Outside (www.virginiaoutside.com), which runs youth fishing, mountain biking, and outdoor adventure programs. Clarkson also owns Atoka Conservation Exchange (www.atokaconservation.com), which helps landowners with conservation-easement projects throughout the state. He can be contacted at tclarkson@virginiaoutside.com.



**JOIN TODAY.
PROTECT TOMORROW.**

BTT is a membership-based organization that works to conserve and restore bonefish, tarpon and permit fisheries and habitats through research, stewardship, education and advocacy. We are scientists, anglers, guides, manufacturers, lodge and shop owners, and outfitters who are taking action today to conserve and restore our flats fisheries for tomorrow.

Please help us in our mission by joining at: www.btt.org



ORVIS // AHEAD OF OUR TIME SINCE THE BEGINNING

VISIT AN ORVIS STORE NEAR YOU!

ARLINGTON BETHESDA, MD CHARLOTTESVILLE
LEESBURG RICHMOND - 2 LOCATIONS ROANOKE
TYSONS CORNER WOODBRIDGE