

# **Jeff Currier** *global fly fishing*

## **U.S. fly anglers plan on some podium time**

By WILLY ZIMMER

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The basketball version of Fly Fishing Team USA recently claimed a bronze medal at the World Basketball Championships by finishing in third place. That finish seemed to disappoint the team, the sports media machine and more than a few basketball fans.

If the fly-fishing version of Team USA were to do the same thing next week at its world championship, it would make everyone involved deliriously happy.

Fly Fishing Team USA competes from Saturday through Sept. 17 in the 26th World Fly Fishing Championships in the waters near Coimbra, Portugal. Team USA has never medaled at the international level, coming closest in 2003 when it finished eighth in the Spanish Pyrenees.

But there is reason to believe that may change this year. One reason is the team has a different look. Jeff Currier, who won an individual bronze in 2003, and Pete Erickson, the top American finisher in 2004 and 2005, are the only returning veterans.

The rest of the anglers -- Lance Egan, Brett Bishop, Mike Sexton, George Daniel and Anthony Naranja -- qualified by competing in regional tournaments.

That means some familiar Wyoming anglers like Sam Paul Mavrakis are staying home. But Currier, who manages the fishing operation for Jack Dennis Sports in Jackson, said the new system also means Team USA is more tournament-tested.

"I think Pete and I are the only veterans this year ... which is good," Currier said. "We've found some good anglers from all over. We've got pretty good feelings about this."

A best-ever finish is a real possibility. Coimbra is on the west edge of the Pyrenees and is home to small rivers with brown trout that are partial to dry flies, an American specialty. Currier excelled in similar conditions in Spain in 2003, which is why he was invited.

Dry fly fishing at the international level, of course, ain't exactly a wade below Gray Reef. Currier did well in Spain because he was willing to crawl on his belly to catch fish, and Team USA will have to do the same in Portugal.

"I plan on coming home limping. ... A lot of times you're literally casting from your stomach and it's super low water, so I won't be crawling on the bank. I'll probably be crawling over the rocks in the river," he said. "One of the reasons I crawl so much is because I want to be close to the fish when I hook them. One of the hardest things is keeping an 8- to 9-inch fish on to the net. I figure if I hook them with about six inches of fly line and a 9-foot leader I can almost just flip them into the net before they have a chance to flip off. ... It would be a real heartbreaker if one fish would win the thing and you lost the fish because you couldn't get it to your net."

Yes, Currier did say win the thing, so it's obvious the team is confident it can compete. The U.S. is hardly the favorite, though. The venue is in the backyards of the Spaniards and French, so they've been practicing nonstop for months.

And there are a couple of lake beats, and Currier admits lakes are an American weakness.

But it's obvious this is the best chance Team USA has ever had to medal. And although ESPN probably won't notice, a team full of Americans on a podium is a good thing.

"In Spain we got eighth place, so if we got seventh or better I think everybody would be pretty happy," Currier said. "But a medal? That's why I'm going."

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