

Jeff Currier *global fly fishing*

World Medal Chronicles : Jeff Currier

Trout Legend – Premier Fly Fishing League

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In the history of North American competitive fly fishing there have been only two individuals to win Medals at the Fips-Mouche Adult World Fly Fishing Championships: Donald Thom of Canada and Jeff Currier of the United States. I caught up with Mr. Currier recently to discuss his achievement in the world of competitive fly fishing.



Hamann: Jeff, wanted to thank you again for taking the time to do this interview. Looking through your blog (<http://flyfishingbum.blogspot.com/>) you're a busy man flying around the world fishing incredible destinations, so let's jump right in. Quick recap: your bronze medal was

earned at the 2003 World Championships in Spain. Could you walk us through the team you traveled with and a recap of the venues?

Currier: I fished on the team previously and in Spain we had the best team ever. Not to knock older anglers, but we were young. We could handle long demanding days, tough wading, change flies faster than a speeding bullet and crawl. Crawling was mandatory in Spain. The venues consisted of four rivers and one lake. Three of the rivers were small and crystal clear. In these rivers were small brown trout that were as spooky as any trout I've ever met. They weren't always rising, rarely now that I think of it so you belly crawled along to stay out of view. I'd often spot one then attempt him with a dry first. If he didn't eat the dry I'd do a dry dropper and by then you had him or spooked him. The fourth river was high and very off color. You just had to Polish Nymph it and pray. I lucked into three fish here. The lake was tough. Some beats were on the shallow end of the lake others were near the dam. You wanted to be as far from the dam and the deep water as possible. I got screwed; I was the third beat from the dam. It was a miracle I caught a fish in my beat.



Hamann: Backtracking just a bit. How did you gain a position on Team USA? What was the organization like at that time? Who were the key players/coaches? Did you win trials regionals to make the team?

Currier: Back in the days I got to fish there were no trials. You had to know the right people, such as a man named Walter Ungerman. Walter was a customer of mine in Jackson at the fly shop for years. I had a great relationship with him. When the competition was held in Jackson,

WY where I lived at the time, I didn't fish but I donated a lot of my personal time to help it run. Walter appreciated that and took me to the Poland Championships in 1998 as an angler. That was my opportunity to show I could help the team. I did well and I think the team scored 13th Place. 13th doesn't sound too good, but it was the best Team USA ever did. I was 20th overall. I earned the right to go again next year and we continued to improve and I continued to get to go. Best of all, we added younger anglers each year.



After I retired from the Worlds, I participated in the first ever regional/nationals. It was held in Oregon and I got 2nd place. That helped me get chosen to come out of retirement for Portugal in 2006. That was my last competition as I never had the funding or time off from work to compete in the Nationals again.



Over the years the key players would have to be Jay Buchner, Pete Erickson and Sam Mavrakis. These guys can fish like you can't believe. They can tie flies, something I suck at. They are fun. They're not afraid to go out and mingle with the other teams and try to get them to cough up some information that you normally can't get. And most of all, they were great sportsmen and well respected by all other teams. That's important. Towards the end of my run, Jack Dennis was coaching. He had some weird fishing ideas at times but he was fun. I liked having him around.



Hamann: Could you tell us some of the back story behind this passage: “Jeff Currier crawled, swam chilly waters cradling netted fish, and risked intestinal illness in an attempt to reach the pinnacle of his sport.” (Quoted from an article by Michael Pearlman)

Currier: That quote came from an article after winning the Bronze in Spain. I already said crawling was mandatory. Honestly, these were the spookiest hard to see trout I've ever found. If you didn't crawl you didn't have a chance. The bad news however, you even had to crawl in the water. Sometimes I would be crawling up a riffle. The water would be gushing over the top of my waders dragging me downstream. Occasionally it would get in my mouth. I couldn't let it stop me. If I stood up I'd spook every fish and there weren't many fish.



Swimming to opposite banks was something I became well known for. One time the famous Thomas from the Czech Republic pulverized my beat before me. He had it in the morning and I had it in the afternoon. So imagine fishing a piece of water that was pounded by one of the world's greatest anglers only three hours earlier. You are in bad shape unless you know where Thomas didn't fish. Of course he fished all the good spots. On big rivers where you could not wade across, you knew the other bank was always virgin. I swam a lot of rivers. And in particular, I swam the muddy Aragon of Spain. This river skunked more people than any other river in the history of the Worlds Competition. I was the fourth angler to this beat and not a fish had been caught. I wasn't about to fish the same water where everyone failed. You should have seen my judge's face when I swam across to start. I caught my first fish in about 8 minutes and carefully held up my netted fish in one hand and swam best I could with the other. This action made me take in a lot of water. But I turned around and swam right back. Over the three hour

beat I swam two more fish across. I was a drown rat and I did end up with some bad intestinal issues.

Because of my crazy crawling and swimming, I won a medal. I gave my body and soul for that medal and it was worth it.



Hamann: Heading into the final lake session you needed to “not blank” to win a medal? Tell us about that scenario? Must have been some heart-thumping pressure.

Currier: I never felt the pressure. I was expected to fail. Not a fish had been caught in this particular lake beat. Plus, I was American. Americans can't win a medal – right? Nonetheless, I just went into the last session feeling confident. Somehow I knew a fish would swim by and he was mine. All I had to do was be myself and I'd catch his ass.

Up to this point, temperatures had been scorching hot. But between the morning session and the beginning of the lake session we had several monster thunderstorms and temps plummeted. Our coach, Ed Opler was waiting for the bus to drop me off at the lake. I got off and he said here's the lake rod the team has been using. I looked at him like he was nuts. I said, “Ed, Team USA has yet to catch a fish on the lake. They all used that stupid rig. Why in the world would I use it when I absolutely need to catch a fish?” Ed really didn't know what to say.

He smiled and he followed me and my judge a mile walk around the lake to my beat.



Honestly, my body ached. I'd crawled and swam rivers for three days. My stomach problems were kicking in. And it was so cold I couldn't believe it. I was actually shivering in my wet clothes and waders from my river session in the AM. When we got to my beat I pulled out my 5-weight and tied on a favorite fly of mine, the Thorax Mahogany Dun. Ed looked at me like my hair was on fire. I promised him that if a fish swam by he would not be able to resist the fly.

By the time the session started, it was calm and cold and the sky was thick with clouds. I leaned against a rock on shore in the best looking spot and cast out my fly. I stared at it for a few minutes and recast. Exactly 14 minutes into the three hour beat a 9" trout ate it and in three long strips he was in my net. Ed, me, my Polish friend Vladi and the judge were in shock. Do you believe in miracles?

I still thought I'd get 4th place to Simon Kidd of England. It turns out; our scores were so close it took hours after the competition ended to see who won. Not only that, we were dead tied in points. The over ruling factor was number of fish. I'd caught 27 in three days he'd caught 16.

The bronze was mine.



Hamann: What were some of the advanced techniques, gear, flies that you utilized in your victory?

Currier: I kept it pretty simple. I realized right away, it wasn't fancy flies and special Euro tactics that were needed. In Spain, you just try to get your fly to the fish before you spook them. You will laugh, but I fished a size 16 elk hair caddis with an olive pheasant tail nymph tied by Jay Buchner two feet below. Only once did I Polish nymph to catch a fish. That was on a particular river and I caught two with this method. That gave me 7 that session and a 3rd place in that session.



Hamann: Hindsight is always 20/20, but where did Team USA finish at that Championship and how do you think you guys could have also earned a team medal?

Currier: I believe we finished 5th. We were very, very close.



Hamann: Have you been following the sport of competitive fly fishing since your departure from Team USA? If so, how have you seen the techniques change since those days?

Currier: Yes. I root hard for our current team. When the team is off competing I check results on the internet ten times a day. I get really ticked when the results are late. The guys on the team now are exceptional anglers, and they have plenty of competition practice. That makes a difference. It's like shooting an 8 ball to win a pool game. You may have never missed that shot in your life. But because of inexperience in competition you miss. The experience these guys have make them very good. I do hear of some new techniques. But I'm not too familiar with them. Now that I don't compete, I just go out and vacuum rivers for fun with my fundamentals.



Hamann: How old were you when you won your medal? Could you comment on the “energy of youth” vs the “wisdom of experience” in competitive fly fishing?

Currier: I was 37 years young. The aches and pains were just starting to hit me. But in the heat of competition I didn't feel a thing. At the same time, I was becoming a very wise angler. I thought things out well – presentations, the stalk, and what fly would be best. And, my experience allowed me to totally keep my cool. So basically I was at that one time in life where my body could still handle the beating of crawling, swimming etc and I got the bonus of having a clue of what I was doing. A great combo.

Hamann: Have the techniques you acquired as part of Team USA fueled your “recreational fishing” life? Or have you found that leaving those purely competitive focused techniques behind have led to your enjoyment of the sport?

Currier: When I go fishing, I go to catch fish. Sure, the famous line, “It’s just nice being out there”, has some truth to it, but if there’s fish to be caught I need to catch them. At heart I’m a dry fly guy and rarely nymph anymore. But if there’s a half hour left and I haven’t caught a fish, and I know Polish Nymphing will catch me one, I do it. I’ve also noticed that when I fish with friends they kind of gun for me a bit. They want to out fish me. Normally I couldn’t give a hoot, but if they start to do better than me and point that fact out, I step it up and enjoy teaching them a lesson. It’s great fun. People have no idea how many tricks I learned in the few years of World Competition. And if I need to fall back on one I will. I enjoy that in my recreational fishing days.



Hamann: And in that vein, do you think you may compete again some day? Or where some hat in the competitive fly fishing world?

Currier: I doubt I’ll ever fish in the Worlds again. That’s a young angler’s game. Unless it was a mostly lake tournament I probably won’t. However there are other competitions out there. I already do the annual “Bass on the Fly” held in Ririe, Idaho. This has been held for about five years now and I’ve placed in all but one. It’s a one day deal and my blood pumps hard during it. I love it. In addition, last year I fished in the Jackson Hole One Fly and I loved that too. I’ll be doing it again here soon. So the answer to your question is yes. I really enjoy the competitions and perhaps as long as they are convenient for me I’ll be there.

Hamann: With a great deal of time to reflect, what would you say are the key elements, whether physical or emotional, that elevate an angler from just “competitive” to medal worthy?

Currier: You need to be a damn good angler for starters. Once you have that going then you just need to elevate the rest. First you need to be in top shape. A three day, five session competition will brutalize the body. You need to learn to live without sleep. Be a superb swimmer, runner, and build your core – ever try crawling for three straight days? It's the hardest thing you will ever do. Especially over rocks in cold water. And don't let pain slow you down. You will be in a lot of pain but that can't stop you. Standing up just once to stretch your back during a session could scare a fish you need.

Then it's the kill instincts. In a competition you should never be satisfied. If you caught fifteen fish and that's enough to win the session, who cares. Catch more. If there's five minutes left in a session and you see a 9" fish but ten feet further up there's a 12" fish. Don't skip the 9 incher and go for the 12. Catch the 9 incher fast then catch the 12 incher. Every fish counts and every fish must be caught. I scored numerous fish in the last minute over the years and in Spain it won me a medal.

Last, there is the mental factor. You must be confident. You must know and expect that you will catch a fish. No matter what terrible beat you have or conditions you face. You will catch one if not more. And you can't mess up an ordinary opportunity. You can't get nervous because its competition. If a trout is rising and eating away he can't be botched. You calm down and get the job done. If you're netting a fish, you net him. You don't lose him with a bad sweep of the net or knock him off. These are fundamentals that you are great at. You don't screw them up just because its competition and you're freaked out. The bottom line is you can't make any stupid mistakes. None. Have your head together.

Hamann: Thank you again for the interview. Are there any closing reflections or thoughts you'd like to relay to those currently competing in the North American competitive scene?

Currier: Enjoy it. Enjoy fishing for a meaning. Enjoy working to prove you are the best. And along the journey learn as much as you can. There are so many great anglers out there and if you compete you have the good fortune of being surrounded by them. Every trick you can learn and apply to your own fishing makes you better. Even though your competition days may go away, these tricks of the trade will come in handy the rest of your life.

