



Photo Credit: Santy Pan

Winners Caught Cheating in Fishing Competition

BY OLIVIA LAUBE

ON SEPTEMBER 30, 2022, the Lake Erie Walleye Trail Tournament in Ohio hosted several fishermen from multiple states. These fishermen competed in teams to see who could catch five of the heaviest walleye in Lake Erie. The competition was tough, but things got fishy when the team of would-be winners were disqualified, losing a prize of almost \$29,000.

This team, consisting of Jacob Runyan and Chase Cominski, was found to have stuffed the walleye they caught with lead weights and fish fillets in an attempt to win the grand prize. These stuffings were discovered when the director of the tournament, Jason Fischer, thought the weights of the fish were suspicious. The fish looked as if they would weigh around four pounds each, but the measured weight indicated they were at least seven pounds. Not only did Fischer question this result, but so did the crowd.

In order to investigate the questionable fish, Fischer decided to slice them open. He thought he had felt objects inside the fish, and his concerns turned out to be valid. While surrounded by competitors, including

Jacob Runyan from the cheating team, Fischer pulled out a lead ball. 10 weights, ranging between 8-12 ounces, were found in the five walleye, as well as some of the fish fillets. When the crowd found out, they were angry and started throwing insults at Runyan. The team was immediately disqualified, and the tournament officials got into contact with local authorities. The fish were collected as evidence.

On Tuesday, October 11, a boat, trailer, and fishing gear belonging to Chase Cominski were confiscated by the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, the Hermitage Police Department, and the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission. These items were used by the team in the fishing tournament. The next day, the two men were indicted of felony charges. These charges included cheating, attempted grand theft, possessing criminal tools, and misdemeanor charges of unlawfully owning wild animals. This misdemeanor comes from the fish fillets that were stuffed inside the walleye. The men are due to be arraigned on October 26th. On top of these charges, Runyan and Cominski

were investigated in April after allegedly cheating in a different walleye tournament. There was not enough evidence to charge them.

So what do these charges mean for the men? If convicted, they would face up to a year in prison and up to \$2,500 in fines. Their misdemeanor would cause them to have their fishing licenses suspended for an indefinite amount of time.

Many people are rightfully upset with Jacob Runyan and Chase Cominski as they believe that the pair were extremely dishonest and tainted the sport of competitive fishing through the scandal. They put their greed and ego in front of all of everything the other competitors had worked towards. People sacrificed their time and money in order to compete to the best of their ability, and the opportunity for a win was stolen from them. Runyan and Cominski have already been banned from multiple future fishing tournaments. The directors of these events want to restore honesty and integrity within the world of competitive fishing, and with cheaters participating, that is not possible.