

FOURTH PLACE (tie)—SENIOR ESSAY

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Age 14

CATCH ME SOMETHING, MISTER!

When people think of New Orleans, what do they think of? Great food, music, and Bourbon Street. Right? Well, when I think of New Orleans, I think of fishing in New Orleans' City Park.

By far, bass fishing is my favorite type of fishing to do in City Park. I enjoy fishing for perch and the invasive Rio Grande cichlids, but I will not tell you why bass fishing is definitely my favorite type of fishing in City Park.

On Mardi Gras Day 2013, my friend and I decided to go to the park to fish instead of going to parades. Despite the ghastly weather forecast, we decided to stick it out. We left as about 7:30 that morning, hoping to catch the tail end of the morning bite. Once my friend and I got there, we caught a couple of bass on the first few casts. Then it was just a dry spell after that. We had walked the bank for a couple of hours scanning for fat female bass cruising the shallows looking for beds or for females already on beds, but we found none. We decided just to cast out into deeper water looking for some female bass that hadn't moved up to spawn yet. I wound up catching one little male bass that was sitting on a bed right before a drop-off. Finally, my friend and I just decided to go back to our original spot to sit down and get a quick snack before getting back to fishing.

After we had finished out snack, we decided to stay in our original spot to fish, since we had caught a few bass there earlier in the morning. As we were fishing, a man was also fishing right next to us, and we talked to him very briefly about how the fish were biting. All three of us quickly got back to fishing.

The man walked across a bridge to an island no more than 40 feet away from where we were fishing. Right as he walked over to his spot on the island, my friend and I heard lots of splashing near where the man was fishing. The first thing I thought was, "That's either some male ducks fighting over a female, or that's a big bass." Sure enough, the man walked out from the island and across the bridge with not just a big bass, but a GIANT bass. I was amazed at how big the bass was. The biggest bass I had ever seen caught before in City Park was about 5 pounds. I had recently heard that there were really big bass in City Park, but I would have never thought that I would see somebody catch one.

The man who caught it was shaking and extremely excited, because it was, by far, the biggest bass he had caught in his entire life. Shortly after he crossed the bridge with the catch, my friend and I took out our cell phones and were rapidly taking pictures of this monstrous bass. We later found out that the bass was a City Park record bass, and the

man's name was Kevin Schilling. The story of the catch was in an article in the local newspaper a few weeks later, and I was overjoyed to see that he mentioned my friend and me in the article. The bass weighed on a certified scale 9 pounds even.

That catch on Mardi Gras Day and the opportunity to catch a big one of my own is why I love bass fishing in City Park. Not many people think about fishing in a park when they think about New Orleans, but that is the first thing that always comes to my mind.