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Bags full of bass

By: Louie St. George

When is a 32-hour, cross-country road trip a good time?

When it ends with thousands of scholarship dollars, a new boat and a lifetime of memories, of course.

Good fishing helps, too.

Thus, when Jordan McMorris and Robert "Chase" Rahm loaded up their fishing gear earlier this month and set out for New York, the goal was a first-rate showing at the Junior Bassmaster World Championship. The plan came to fruition as McMorris hooked a world title and Rahm netted a third-place finish at Onondaga Lake in Syracuse, N.Y.

"It was the most amazing thing to ever happen to me in my life," McMorris said Tuesday afternoon of his victory in the 11-14 age division. "I couldn't have asked for more."

Rahm, who competed in the 15-18 age division, was similarly thrilled to have left his mark on an event that brings together the best young anglers in the world. Each division consisted of 46 participants, with representation from Canada and South Africa.

"It was my first year of fishing all these tournaments, and then to go to the world championships with all the best fishers in the world — it's pretty amazing," Rahm said.

Likewise for the fact that the Four Corners sent two of its own to the podium stand at a prestigious event some 2,200 miles away. McMorris and Rahm are both 15-year-old sophomores at Bloomfield High School — McMorris just recently turned 15 — who regularly hone their skills at Navajo Lake and Morgan Lake.

They secured a spot at the Aug. 9-10 tournament by competing in four local qualifiers over the past year, and both won their respective divisions at the 2007 state championship, held at Tucumcari's Conchas Lake.

"I think it just kind of shows how we're just as good as anybody else," Rahm said about the local fishing scene.

McMorris admitted it was improbable that two anglers from Bloomfield — and fishing buddies, no less — could fare so well provided the level of talent.

"I think everybody around here was surprised that we did so good," he said.

McMorris emerged with a win by hauling 15.03 pounds of smallmouth bass to the weigh-in. The tally gave him a considerable edge over Tyler Dennis of Oklahoma, who finished second with 14.08 pounds. Even better: It landed him a \$5,000 college scholarship, good for any school in the United States, and a brand new Triton boat.

Rahm's bag weighed in at 15.05 pounds, helping him to a \$2,500 scholarship. On his final cast, Rahm said he had a trophy bass on the line but couldn't net it. With an already impressive sack,

he wasn't worried. But when Rahm got to the scales, he learned "the one that got away" could have given him the top spot.

"It didn't really bother me that much because I figured I had won," he explained, "but then when I got there, it probably would have helped me."

Nonetheless, it was a remarkable showing for two anglers who made the journey to New York in the same truck. When they arrived, they were paired with pros from the Bassmaster Elite Series, who offered advice during an Aug. 9 pre-fish.

Near the end of the pre-fish, McMorris and Rahm found a lively hole swarming with bass.

"We found a great spot in the last part of pre-fish and spent most of the day there," McMorris, who used drop shots and deep crankbaits en route to his five-fish limit, told "BASS."

As the tournament progressed Aug. 10, the hot spot began to attract an influx of competitors. Rahm estimated that 300 fish were pulled from the hole as "16 or 17 boats bunched up."

"The second day, we started catching 'em and everybody started moving in," Rahm said.

"Me and Chase were the first two boats there," McMorris added. "I don't know how they found us, but they all just started showing up."

So, was the two-day trek to New York — and back — worth it?

"Oh, definitely," Rahm concluded.