



BACKCOUNTRY BOY

FORMER PRO GOLFER ANDY BEAN BRINGS THE SAME DRIVE AND COMPETITIVENESS TO FISHING
SOUTHWEST FLORIDA'S MAZE OF MANGROVE ISLETS AS HE DISPLAYED ON THE LINKS

Andy Bean is the soul of economy as he fires a plug 30 yards, threading it through leaves into a dark hole between exposed mangrove roots. A marksman, he is sure, fast and dead-on accurate as he drifts along the mangroved banks of one of Florida's Ten Thousand Islands, peppering likely spots with casts from his flats boat. No wasted motion, no fumbling, no hang-ups in the snarl of roots and branches and leaves.

"I much prefer to catch fish than to just fish," says Bean, 62, speaking with the good-old-boy Southern drawl of his native Lafayette, Georgia — as in luh-FAY-ette, which is how natives pronounce it, he says.

Bean is just as competitive an angler as he was a pro golfer, a career in which he earned \$10.2 million on the PGA and Champions tours. "I've seen people who just like to go out and fish," says Bean, now semiretired from golf and clearly unable to fathom why anyone would fish and not fish hard. Very hard.

"I've got a real competitive streak," he says, "a pretty wide streak."

On the water before dawn and home after dark, Bean will run 100 miles in a day through the labyrinth of creeks, rivers and bays in his 21-foot Maverick, looking for fresher water, cooler water, the right tidal flow, the promising point or bank, baitfish and tantalizing holes amid the mangrove roots — all in pursuit of snook.

"I fish for snook," he says. "Snook are a challenge." Almost like getting that little white dimpled ball into the cup.

"He's awesome long, he's straight, and he can putt," former Masters and PGA champion Raymond Floyd once told *Sports Illustrated* about Bean's golf game. Powerful and straight off the tee, a soft touch in his short game. Six-foot-four with big, rough, red hands and beefy — the Champions Tour lists him at 260 pounds — Bean cuts an imposing figure on the forward casting deck, which is his domain. "The front of the boat is the best place to get the first shot at the best lay," he says.

A powerful cast puts the plug right where a snook might be waiting to ambush unsuspecting prey. A fine touch flits the lure across the water and draws out a small fish. It attacks the orange Rapala Twitchin' Rap, and Bean quickly reels it in and releases it. Bean is a plug fisherman. "I like to see fish attack the plug on top of the water," he says.

He came to savor that while fishing for largemouth, which he learned as a teen fishing with friends from the shallow edges of the phosphate pits around Lakeland, Florida, his home for 46 years. A bait-casting outfit and artificials remain his tools for snook fishing.

Bean ties his plug to an 18- to 24-inch fluorocarbon leader (30- to 40-pound test) and ties that to 50-pound braid. Tommy Greene, owner of Custom Rod & Reel in Lighthouse Point, Florida, persuaded Bean to use braid on a fishing trip after pulling a 15-pound snook out of the mangroves in 30 seconds without breaking it off. Greene had been pestering his friend to use braid for five years. "Tommy, you just made a believer out of me," Bean told Greene after that performance.



Bean finds it easier to navigate the skinny water of the Ten Thousand Islands by sight and by memory, even at night. Like a migratory bird, he seems to have an internal GPS.

FISHING THE HAZARDS

On the pro tour, Bean found that many of the water hazards on the courses he played were stocked with prize-winning bass. After a round of tournament play and then practice, Bean often finished off the day fishing — on or off the course. He, Boo Weakley and George Mc-Neal — two other angler-golfers — regularly decompressed fishing the links' lakes.

"We did our job," Bean says. "We practiced. We prepared for the next day. Fishing was our way of relaxing."

One course he remembers well is Miami's Doral, where he won his first PGA tournament, in 1977, but also landed some big bass and tarpon in its lakes in the evening during tournaments. Bean has fished the TPC Sawgrass in Ponte Vedra Beach, the Disney golf course lakes in Orlando, the Augusta National in Atlanta, the Twain Harte in California, the Castle Pines in Colorado. Perhaps the most memorable was St. Andrews in Scotland, where he played the British Open and the St. Andrews Fishing Club invited him to fish — a real honor.

"We went out on the loch, and it was cold, the coldest I've ever been, I think," Bean says. "The wind was blowing hard. It was in the 40s."

As tradition dictated, they fly-fished with a sinking line. Their platform was a pulling boat. Bean appreciated the invitation, but when one of his party finally caught a fish — a 6-inch trout — and exclaimed, "Ah, now that's a nice one," he thanked his hosts and asked to go back to the dock. "I should practice," he told them. It was just too cold and the pickings too slim.

Bean says many golfers are anglers — Jack Nicklaus, Greg Norman and his son Gary, Ray Floyd, Nick Price. He has fished with many of them over the years. "I love going to the Bahamas with Jack Nicklaus," Bean says, spending his days stalking bonefish on the flats, fly rod in hand. "Jack is just as competitive bonefishing as he has been on the golf course. I think we share the love of the hunt."

THE GO-TO PLACE

That's what keeps drawing Bean to the Ten Thousand Islands, a maze of mangrove isles laced with creeks, rivers and bays running south along Florida's southwest coast from Marco Island through Everglades City and into Everglades National Park. Bean has been fishing the Ten Thousand Islands for 40 years. "This is my go-to place," he says. "I don't do Vegas. I don't do a lot of fancy stuff."

Bean fishes to unwind, and the farther into the backcountry he goes — away from the rat race — the better he likes it. "I tell you, once

you get back a ways into some of those creeks, you are off the beaten path," he says. "I just like the peace and the quiet when I'm there. I'm tuned in — to the splash of a fish, the wind, the current, the bars, the sun, the whole thing."

When he was on tour, this was about as far as he could get from the grueling demands of tournament play. "When I'm focused on putting that plug right next to the bank between the roots of mangroves, I'm not thinking about anything else," he says. "It's the focus that you have when you're stalking fish, hunting fish."

He likes to go into the backcountry with good friends — "his buddies," he calls them — and with family, his "girls" — wife Debbie and daughters Lauren, Lindsey and Jordan. He'll also fish alone "to give myself time to work things out if something's going on."

"Andy knows the backcountry part of the Everglades as well as anyone, from Goodland all the way to the Shark River," says Bill Bella, one of the first friends Bean made when his family moved to Lakeland in 1968.

And there's just about nowhere Bean would rather be. Maybe out West fly-fishing. Or in the upper Amazon on the Rio Negro River — "600 miles from the nearest Coke machine" — fishing from a small boat for 20-pound peacock bass. Or bonefishing in the Bahamas. That's about it. He's never had much of a hankering to run offshore or do any big-game fishing. He likes the backcountry and stalking his quarry from a small boat. Hunt, cast, present, catch — that's what he likes to do.

"He's true to his passion," says Dragonfly Boatworks' Mark Castlow, a friend of Bean's who built the golfer's custom boat when he was a partner at Maverick.

NIGHT DRIVING

"Until you've run the backcountry in the dark with Andy Bean, you'll never believe that he didn't grow up there or run drugs there like just about everyone else who lives in those parts," says Greene, Bean's friend for 25 years. "I've never run aground with Andy in the dark. Never."

Bean isn't a technophobe. He carries a smartphone with a weather app that keeps him apprised of storms when he's dockside. "You've got to work around the weather," he says. "You're crazy if you don't."

Deep in the backcountry, however, he's out of cell range, so he reads the sky, wind and clouds. He doesn't carry a depth sounder. The water's too shallow for it to do much good. He knows the depth by memory or reads it by the color of the water or the ripples and glassy spots on the surface. "Local knowledge



Bean has excellent control with a rod and a club. "I want birdies, and I want to land fish, too."

PUTTING THE PUZZLE TOGETHER

Bean's *modus operandi* is to spend the day fishing where he has caught snook before, then a few hours exploring — looking for new spots so he never stops learning about this place. His favorite haunts: the banks and creek mouths in Alligator Bay and Dad's Bay.

He approaches every fishing trip as a puzzle. "Like golf," he says. The weather and tides must be right. He prefers an east wind and an outgoing tide because together they push the baitfish out of the mangroves, which draws the snook. Then he puts the rest of the puzzle together.

He hunts for the right salinity (fresher water is better) and temperature (he prefers cooler). These change with the seasons and from place to place. He looks for the right structures (banks, points, holes), keeps an eye out for baitfish, searches for places where the tidal flow carries bait past snook hideaways. He changes plugs, varies presentation. "You've got to get the right speed," he says. "Sometimes they like it slow, sometimes faster, sometimes at the top, sometimes below the surface."

And like golf, he adds, "There are days when you do everything right and you don't catch snook, and days when you do everything wrong and you don't catch snook." The puzzle is always evolving.

BEAN'S DNA

Andy Bean was born to be a very good golfer

and a very good fisherman. It's in his DNA. Bean is blessed with a photographic memory. As a golfer, he maps out in his head the length of the holes, the width and contours of the fairways, their firmness and speed, the condition and slope of the greens, height and density of the roughs, layout of the bunkers, location of the holes.

"That's something a golfer has to do," he says. He remembers every nuance of a fairway or green, just as he recalls every flat and oyster bar, every freshwater creek and mangrove island along the route to his fishing spots. Bean points to a dead tree in the water near the point of a mangrove stand on Alligator Bay. To the uninitiated it looks like a hundred others, but ...

"There's a big snook there," he says. "I've seen her once. I've had her on once. I've not caught her. She took me back into that tree and broke the line." He casts to the lair but won't catch her today, either.

Bean runs fast across the bays where the law permits, skirting the shoals. "You read the water ahead with your eyes, looking for the glassy surface or change of water color," he says.

His eyesight is sharp. He sees the telltale concentric circles of a dolphin surfacing, a fish jumping, a manatee feeding. He sees the clear water of a freshwater creek feeding into the bay, spots egrets and alligators and redfish prowling along the edges of the mangroves. When he stops to drift and fish, Bean vows with the precision, power and finesse of his casts.

When golfing, he says, "I visualize the hole. I visualize the shot." That nexus in his brain between intention and execution guides his casts to their target. "I've been blessed with good hand-eye coordination, better than a lot of the people I golf and fish with," Bean says. And with superb depth-of-field vision, too. "I've done a lot to develop it," he continues. "I want birdies, and I want to land fish. I do it with hunting, too. I love to eat quail."

PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

The son of a golf pro, Bean was schooled early that in golf and fishing, as with most things in life, good genes aren't enough. "It's hand-eye coordination and lots of practice, 40 years of practice," Bean says. Good anglers, like golfers, "have knowledge that comes from repetition." Just like a good golf swing, a good cast is seared in his neurons.

"Andy casts very, very good — better than anyone I've fished with in my whole life," Greene says. But when they fish together, Greene chuckles, "Andy's fishing with Tom Greene, who casts better than anyone he has fished with in his whole life."

On one of those outings, the boat came around a point with Bean fishing the bow and Greene in the center. They both saw a log that looked like a likely hangout for snook. "I make my cast, not knowing that Andy also is casting from the front," Greene says. The two lures sail 120, 130 feet and collide in midair.



The lures hit the water together, Bean and Greene reel, and they find the same hooks on each lure snagged on the other. They unhook them, silently. “There’s nothing at all said about that cast,” Greene says. “We both saw the same thing, reacted the same way, cast to the same place.”

Practice, practice, practice.

IDYLIC CHILDHOOD

Bean carries a Bible on the front seat of his muscular SUV. He says grace before dinner at the Island Café in Everglades City, where we map out our fishing for the next day and talk about golf and fishing, family and friends, which next to his faith are the rock-solid priorities in his life. We chow down on fried snapper, the house specialty. He orders a sweet tea, and breakfast the next morning will be a bowl of grits — no butter — and a couple of slices of bacon.

Andy Bean is down-home Georgia and proud of it. Lafayette, where he was born, is a town of about 7,000 in the mountains of northwest Georgia. When Bean was 2 years old, his dad, Tommy, an amateur golfer and runner-up in the 1955 Public Links Championship, moved his family to Jekyll Island, Georgia, once the winter getaway for the Rockefellers, Morgans, Cranes, Goulds and others, who together represented more than one-sixth of the world’s wealth. By the time the Bean family arrived at Jekyll Island, it was a state-owned resort and wildlife refuge. Tommy Bean was hired as the resort’s superintendent and resident golf pro.

“Our family and the game warden’s family were the only ones with homes on the island,” Bean recalls. Young Bean had the run of Jekyll — the Intracoastal Waterway on one side, the ocean on the other, a nine-hole golf course and later 36 holes in between.

“There were two or three types of deer on the island, imported animals — Russian boars, turkeys — lots of hunting and fishing,” he says. “Fishing was a part of my life since before I started grade school at Jekyll. My dad was chiefly responsible for that.”

Bean fished for bluegill, bass, redfish and trout on the ICW and earned pocket money during the summer catching crabs and selling them to resort guests. “Talk about having a cool place to grow up,” he says.

FATHERS & SONS

Still, his boyhood was heavily freighted with the expectation that one day he would play professional golf, a dream that had eluded his father. Before the era of golf and tennis academies for kids, Tommy Bean had a plan to teach his son to become a golfer — a professional golfer — and he did it with an iron fist.



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Tommy Bean coached his son for much of his career. “He wanted to control everything, and I didn’t know how to deal with it,” Bean says. “You respect your parents, but you move on and have your own family. Dad still tried to run everything.”

Coaching was one thing, controlling behavior another. In his mid-20s, Bean finally told his dad to back off. By then Tommy Bean already had instilled in his son a fiercely competitive and hard-driving spirit, and although Bean was finally establishing some boundaries with his dad, father and son just kept butting heads.

The family left Jekyll Island in 1969 when Bean was 16 and moved to Lakeland, where

his dad built another golf course. “We moved there to give me a better chance to develop my golfing skills,” Bean says.

He already was shooting par, and Florida’s junior golfing programs were notable for turning out golf prodigies. “Truth be known, we moved to Lakeland because that’s where the best bass fishing in the country was at the time.” And his dad loved to fish for bass. “I got my love of fishing from him.”

Fishing catch-and-release in his later years, Bean would get an earful from his dad when he’d return with nothing in the cooler and a report that he and his buddies had caught 100 snook. “Show me,” Tommy Bean would demand.

Ten years ago, Andy Bean and Bill Miller — “my buddy, a crusty old dude, a cracker” — had been catching snook in the backcountry for two days, finally growing tired and stopping at 104. Bean called his dad, then 81

years old, and challenged him. “We’re catching fish. You want to come down? We’ll catch 100 tomorrow.”

Tommy didn’t believe him. “Boy, you don’t know what you’re talking about,” he told his son. Finally persuading his dad, Bean called a limousine to pick him up that evening, saving a seven-hour drive in his own car. “We went out the next morning. He was going to see firsthand what we were talking about,” Bean says.

By 10 o’clock, they’d caught 100 snook. Then Miller led them to his “go-to place,” a creek not 20 feet wide. “He says, ‘right here,’” Bean recalls. “We pulled over to the side and caught 43 snook out of that creek. Everybody had fish on at the same time. My dad sat down at 11:35 and said, ‘I’m tired, I’m happy, and I want to go home.’ That pretty much summed it up.” Most of the fish were 18 to 22 inches, the biggest 34.



Bean developed his love of catching at an early age and still chases fish long and hard.

Tommy Bean would chide his son for fishing too much and not practicing his golf enough. “I’d tell him, ‘Well, you’re the one who taught me to fish,’ and he’d just laugh,” Bean recalls.

CHEWING ON GOLF BALLS

A 1979 *Sports Illustrated* profile of Bean, then a newly minted pro golfer, tells of him biting the cover off a golf ball to stifle his temper as a standout on Buster Bishop’s University of Florida NCAA national champion golf team. (Make the mistake of misidentifying Bean as a Florida State Seminole, and his face clouds over. “I’m a Gator. I’m very proud of them.”)

Coach Bishop had threatened to drop Bean from the team if he lost his temper and threw his club one more time, so after missing a couple of easy putts in one college tournament, “he stifled a shriek, grabbed the ball and took a chomp out of it, then threw it into the bushes,” *SI* reported.

Bean suffered from the malady of many a young and promising player. Driven by his father’s ambitions for him and by his own expectations, he struggled with his emotions when he didn’t suddenly take the pro tour by storm. “The older I got, the more patience I got,” he says. “I think because I wanted to be one of the top players, I was too impatient.”

And frustrated. “I played frustrated because there wasn’t something right between my dad and me. My swing, my putts, the fundamentals were pretty rock solid. But when things aren’t going well, attitude plays a big part.”

Bean had to learn to wade through the tough stuff without sinking under the weight of his father’s expectations. He would become an 11-time winner on the PGA tour, a two-time member of the U.S. Ryder Cup team and the winner of three tournaments on the Champions Tour for players over 50.

Three years ago, Bean injured his wrist, finger and hip in an auto accident, jeopardizing future play on the Champions tour. He has just recently gone back to biking without

hip pain. “I can stand upright now, which is a wonderful thing. Some things we take for granted,” he says.

Best of all, he can fish long and hard again, taking a break at midday to lie on the deck and stretch his muscles. But golfing again on the pro tour remains an unknown.

“I just don’t want to play poorly,” he says. “I hope I can get to where I can play again, and practice,” he says. That decision has yet to be made. “If I can’t, I’m not going to complain about a thing.”

FAMILY AND FRIENDS

“Competitive, yes,” Greene says of his friend. “Driven, yes. Family, yes. Friends, yes. Mother and father, yes.” Golf and fishing, yes. That’s Andy Bean.

Toward the end of Tommy Bean’s life, he was not a well man. “The last three years, he just didn’t want to be around,” Bean says.

He had lost his wife, Marjorie, 3½ years earlier. “He couldn’t do what he used to do anymore,” Bean says.

Still on the mend from his auto accident, Bean became Tommy’s caretaker as his dad declined. The man who had taught him to play golf and catch fish, who had fought him tooth and nail for so many years, became his charge. Bean says that at times it seemed father and son might come to terms, but the fact is they both were strong-willed — a euphemism for “hard-headed,” Bean says — and kept butting heads right up to the time Tommy died.

“It was tough,” Bean says. His dad was dying. Bean couldn’t play golf. He couldn’t train to get back on the tour. “At least I could go fishing and do some good [caring for his ailing father],” he says.

Tommy Bean died in 2013. It was a wake-up call. “No one is guaranteed tomorrow,” Bean says. “Why not live this day the best that you can and spend what time you have with your family and other people?”

“Andy is just a really kind and generous

person, no ego involved,” says Dragonfly’s Castlow. As competitive, hard-driving and successful as Bean was as a professional golfer, he also is “really grounded,” Castlow says. “It’s an incredible balancing act.”

Nowhere is that more evident than in his relationship with his “girls.” When Bean ordered his Maverick, he asked Castlow to modify the console so his daughters could sit comfortably on the forward console seat and fish with him. When they didn’t fish, he’d drive around on the boat with them with no particular agenda but to talk with them.

“Having the opportunity to bring the girls down here to fish and experience the Ten Thousand Islands — the eagles, ospreys, gators, all of the nature we have down here — has really enriched their lives,” Bean says. “I love to share it with my kids.”

Greene remembers Bean tied with four other golfers for a qualifying playoff scheduled for the next morning at Doral in Miami. Instead of resting that afternoon, he jumped in the car and drove four hours to Lakeland to watch one of his girls in a school sports event and drove back that night. “That’s the kind of family man he is,” Greene says.

It’s also the kind of friend he is. Bean counts among his friends and “fishing buddies” — the highest accolade he can bestow on someone — master plug maker Jim Bagley, the founder of Bagley Bait Co., who died in 2004.

“Jim loved golf as much as I love fishing,” Bean says. The two golfed and fished together, Bagley keeping Bean stocked with plugs, Bean supplying his friend with all the golf balls he could lose.

Then there are the four Tommies — his dad, who introduced him to the Ten Thousand Islands; Tommy Greene, whom Bean met through a Gator teammate whose brother repaired reels for Greene (Greene was reputed to be one of the planet’s best snook fishermen); Tommy Sparks, now retired, who regulated the water flow through the lakes at Walt Disney World Resort in Orlando — “one of my all-time bass buddies” — and introduced him to the superb bass fishing at Disney; and Tommy Ricketson — “one of the best snook fishermen I know,” and also a golfer. Bean met him at a pro-am tournament.

Bean will phone a friend out of the blue. “Heeeeey, buddy. You want to go fishin’?” Greene tells of Bean calling one day and asking, “Hey, you want to go to Brazil, fish for peacock bass?”

Bean had just won the Charles Schwab Cup by nine strokes. He was in California and could be in Lighthouse Point in two days so they could fly to South America together. It

was the first of five trips to the Rio Negro that they would make. Still celebrating his win, Bean gave Greene, who is also a golf aficionado, a flag from the Schwab tournament as a keepsake.

Bean loves to win, whether it be golfing or fishing. Conversely, he hates to lose. Greg and Bryan Watts, who are professional redfish anglers, also fish and play golf with Bean. And the Watts brothers are every bit as competitive as Bean is. “I have to spot them points on the golf course, but they won’t spot me any points when we’re fishing,” Bean says.

Every time the threesome goes out, they fish for the same \$5 bill, which the loser signs after each outing and gives to the winner. “I’ve lost more times than I’ve won,” Bean says. They are, after all, fishing pros. “But I do beat them,” Bean says, “and that’s so sweet.”

Greene tells of Bean and a friend fishing with \$1 riding on who caught more fish, but the fish weren’t biting and Bean wanted to win so badly. “Andy fished 12 hours without stopping, didn’t even stop for lunch, to try to win that dollar,” Greene says.

DON’T GIVE UP

The fish aren’t very hungry on our outing, either. We catch a handful of small snook, a couple of good-sized redfish, a ladyfish and a few small trout. Lack of rainfall this past summer had driven up the water temperature and salinity in the backcountry, likely shuffling the fish around and pushing their feeding schedule to night, when the water is cooler.

“When snook aren’t eating, it doesn’t matter what you throw at them,” Bean says. “They’re not going to eat. When they’re eating, they’ll take the plug away from you.”

At day’s end, with little to show for fishing the backcountry, Bean heads for the outer islands along the Gulf of Mexico, where he spots some big redfish cruising the banks.

Instead of catching one, this writer drops a plug on their backs, spooking them. It’s a frustrating end to a long day, but Bean will be back at dawn the next day, casting again to the edges of mangroves, hunting for big snook. “I hate giving up,” he admits. “I don’t have that in my system.”

Bean is still pondering whether he will golf again professionally. “I miss the camaraderie. I miss the competition,” he says. “But right now if I went out, they’d beat me to death.” Fishing the Ten Thousand Islands is another matter. After 40 years, it’s in his blood. He’ll keep fishing there — hard, very hard — as long as he can go back into the mangroves and catch.

“I’ve always had the fishing, and I’ve always had friends and family,” Bean says. “If you have that, you’re a very fortunate man.”



The former PGA champion approaches fishing with zeal. He doesn’t have “giving up” in his game.