

EIBENS PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

DUBUQUE -- There was a time when B.J. Eiben didn't care much for walleye fishing.

"To be honest, when I was a kid I absolutely hated walleye fishing," the Dubuque angler recalls. "My dad would take me out on the river every weekend and we were happy to catch two or three walleyes. I said, 'Dad, this isn't fun.'"

Dad would be Jerry Eiben, who grew up on a resort in Minnesota and was guiding anglers by the time he was 12 years old -- mainly for bass and crappie. After graduating from college, he moved to Iowa and began his education on river fishing for walleyes.

"I worked at Interstate Power and there were a couple of guys who were big walleye fishermen," Jerry recalls. "We were in on that Dubuque rig thing early on, pouring one-ounce jigs down at work. They took me out walleye fishing. I bought a small boat that first year and never quit."

As his children grew up, Jerry introduced them to the outdoors and fishing. Eventually, B.J. took to it more than most.

"As time went on, dad got better and we started catching more," B.J. explains. "But my first love was still bowhunting and fishing got pushed off to the wayside. After 2000 when I graduated ... I was always an athlete and always competitive and tournament fishing was a way to get that competitive adrenaline rush again."

Clearly, Jerry has a competitive streak, as well.

"I do," he says. "I've been competitive all my life. That got me going with the tournament fishing. There's something about it. It's just a good feeling when you're taking off in the morning."

Lately, it's been a good feeling when they put the boat back on the trailer at the end of the day, too.

The Eibens are the hottest father-son team on the W.A.T. In fact, when they won the first 2018 tournament of the season on the Illinois River in March, it was their second win in the last three W.A.T. events to go with a sixth-place finish at last year's season championship.

"We think alike," says Jerry, who is also an accomplished taxidermist of some 38 years. "We're not afraid to suggest something or try something. It's just smooth. We never argue, hardly. I think we know what each other is thinking. We're just a lot alike."

"No matter how bad things get, we always find a way to push it off the wayside," adds B.J. "We're always thinking the same thing. We love fishing the same way."

"With our (MinnKota) i-Pilot, we have two remotes so we each have our own. Sometimes, I think we need to move out a little more and by the time I grab the remote he's already doing it. Fishing with the guy you grew up fishing with your whole life, we click that way."

And, there's nothing quite like winning.

"There's nobody in that field (the W.A.T.) you can ever count out," says B.J. "It's a who's who of river fishing, it really is. It's a tough field to finish well in. Even second or third feels good."