

THE INSIDE LINE...

FAMOUS figures talk exclusively on matters close to their own hearts. This week we talk to **Jamie Hughes**, the new *Angler's Mail* Kamasan Matchman of the Year, and Maver Midlands/ Bag'em Baits-sponsored scaffolder from the Wirral.

**THIS WEEK
JAMIE
HUGHES**

What's it like being Kamasan Matchman of the Year finally after being runner-up twice?

I was over the moon when I had official confirmation that I was nine points ahead on the Friday before the final weekend. Until then I didn't know if any of the others had scored any points. Everybody had phoned me to tell me I'd won during the week but it wasn't official.

Were you trying to win it before the final weekend?

I wasn't really thinking about getting points. I drew a nice peg, but didn't think it was capable of framing. It was a peg that had never been in before, but luckily I had a few big fish right at the end. I scored two points, which put me nine clear.

How did you get the big fish?

I fished bread again. I'd had 120 little carp on pellets for 34 lb and then seven fish up to 7 lb on bread, for another 30 lb, including three in the last three casts. It meant the pressure was off for the final weekend.

You got the trophy before the match on the final Saturday.

Yes, and a bottle of Champagne, which I had before the match, so the first hour was a bit wobbly. Once I'd sobered up there were a few fish there and I was on a really good peg. My team captain made me do the draw because I seem to pick quite good ones. I gave him the envelope and walked away and he came and told me I was on one of the best pegs.

Have you ever had Champagne at 8am before?

No, and it was a little bit early,

especially before such a big match, but it was a special occasion so I was allowed. I lost my first fish, which was down to me pulling too hard, but after that I sorted my head out and concentrated on what was happening to me to make sure I got the most points I could for my team.

And you won the match.

With an hour to go I knew I'd won my section, so I tried a few different things and managed to catch 30 lb in the last hour, which won it. I'd been catching carp up to 2 lb 8 oz, but when I dropped down the shelf I had much bigger fish to 6 lb on 4-6 mm bread punch without feeding.

Fishing bread and not feeding has earned you a fair few points this season.

It must have got me 15-plus points. It's a method that is very much associated with Heronbrook, which is my local venue, so I've done it a lot more than most. It works a bit at Tunnel Barn, too, and I got points at

Bannister on it earlier in the season. It seems to work anywhere where there are big fish that don't feed in winter. It's a way of catching them, but as soon as you feed you don't get a bite.

In the end you won the title by quite a margin.

Twelve points, which is a massive gap. As it turned out, I'd got enough points to win it by Christmas, so it's been three months of a lot of worrying for no reason. But it's always been close. I was always catchable until the last couple of weekends. Geoff Vallance was four points behind me at the end of January. I was really worried for three weeks, and then I managed to get a two-pointer at Heronbrook so he needed to score twice, and then I scored a point at Tunnel Barn Farm, and that made it more comfortable with three weeks to go.

How did you score points just when you needed them?

I just had to make sure I was fully prepared for every match. I've been sober for every match and everything has had to be ready. And I've been confident with every peg I've drawn, even if it's been a bad one, just to go to it believing that potentially I could frame. Venues such as Tunnel Barn are extremely fair, and it can surprise you what your peg can throw up.

Is there anything that you did differently in terms of tactics?

Tunnel Barn Farm was all pellet fishing for small F1s, but instead of feeding pellets I was feeding Bag'em Xpanda Groundbait, which didn't feed the fish off, and that created more bites and enabled me to catch fish for longer and got me four points.

So, are you back on the beer now?

I went out with Neil Machin and all of the lads on Saturday night and we all celebrated in Stoke, and that got a little bit messy. We were up 'til 5am and then we went straight to Heronbrook for the Sunday match. I had an hour's kip there and then went fishing. It was a bit of a struggle for the first hour, but I'd drawn a really good peg and I finished second over all, though there were only 44 on it so there were no points.

You escaped the traditional ducking.

It was too cold for that. I refused to go in. Andy Moors wanted to throw me in on Saturday, but it was too late by the end and I was too hung over by the Sunday. I wouldn't have

got out. It could still happen, though. I won't trust them for another couple of weeks yet.

Was there a moment in the season when you decided to go for the title?

I had four points on the second weekend of the season at Garbolino Lindholme and then a couple of weeks later at Heronbrook I scored another three. Neil Machin won it and I said

“ I think I'm going to have a go at keeping hold of it. There hasn't been two on the trot since Andy May in 2002.”

**KAMASAN
Matchman of the Year**

to him then that I wanted to go for it and wanted this to be my year. Then in about September I had a six-point weekend (four at Hampton Springs and two at Heronbrook) and that stretched my lead to double-figures and I thought I'd got a really good chance. I told myself to make sure I

didn't blow it. Jon Arthur had been leading up to then, but I didn't get overtaken after that.

Does winning it involve major sacrifices, apart from the beer ban?

The amount of miles I've put in has been unreal. I've been travelling up to 400-500 miles every weekend. I've done Tunnel Barn twice a weekend on some occasions, which is Coventry and back, so it's 230 miles a day. I had to make sure I was always fishing 50-peggers if they were available, and at one point there weren't any, because of the weather, though at least everyone else in the country was in the same position. All I wanted to do was get fishing and get more points to try to stretch my lead.

Was it hard fishing big matches against top anglers to be sure of getting a 50-pegger?

It is harder to score points in high profile matches. You really have to draw good pegs. But the Tunnel Barn league is probably the best league in the country. The fishing down there is brilliant, and I've enjoyed that despite the high quality of anglers I was up against. You learn a lot by fishing against those anglers, and eventually it improves your fishing as well.

What is the biggest lesson that you've learnt from them this season?

Probably not feeding as much in winter, and not feeding baits that are going to fill fish up. I've learnt that you can catch huge weights feeding next to nothing as long as you approach your peg in the right way. I have as

many lines as possible, to last the whole match. I can have up to 10-15 different lines when it's really cold, and then when fish end up at the limit of the peg for the last hour I use as much pole as I've got to reach them. I've got a Daiwa Tournament Airity and I can fish it happily at 20 metres when I have to.

And drawing is important.

Definitely. Some people say I'm quite good at that. I have drawn some very good pegs the past few weeks. It's the luck of the draw, but you have to make the most of those pegs when you do get the chance. You can't come away feeling you should have done things differently. You should always feel you could improve on what you've caught, but you need to make the most of them. It's about being confident in your approach.

Is it also important to watch what's happening around you?

Very. It gives you a good idea of where the fish are and what depth they are at, watching what other anglers are catching. You always have to adapt what you are doing to what is happening around you.

You were right in thinking 40 points would be enough to win it.

I was judging by previous years' points. Other than Neil Machin, no one has had 40 for the past few years, so I felt that would be a comfortable target and should give me a really good chance. It also meant I got my 40-points Kamasan cap. I've got the full set of 20 through to 50 now. I keep them in my bedroom, because I won't wear them outside.



JAMIE HUGHES
- winner of THE top UK individual match title, the *Angler's Mail* Kamasan Matchman of the Year. Points are scored by anglers in the top four at weekend Opens and leagues with 50-plus anglers fishing, during the June 16-March 14 season.



Jamie toasted his success on the bank – and then out in Stoke.

THE INSIDE LINE...

» Any plans for the £2,000 prize money?

I think I'm going to do the sensible thing and keep it for a house deposit. I want to move into my own house. I live with my mum and my sister, but I'm 26 and it's getting to the time when I want a bit more independence. I'll still keep my fishing gear at my mum's, though, just in case, as it's safer there.

What age were you when you started fishing?

I started when I was five. My grandad took me to local ponds on the Wirral. I started fishing club matches when I was around 16 or 17 and I won my first Open when I was 19. It was at Burton and there were about 48 anglers on it. I won with 45 lb of bream on pellet. I fished for Sensas Rod & Reel, and Chester Tackle Locker, and now I'm with Maver Midlands. I fish team matches in winter, and in summer I get the freedom to fish individually, which is what I like. I stopped fishing canals altogether when I was 23 and decided that the Kamasan British Open was the thing that I wanted to have a go at. I wanted to qualify for that and ended up finishing the season second to Kieron Rich by two points in the Matchman of the Year and that sparked something off and I was determined to win it.

What fishing are you going to do now it's over?

For the next three months I want to enjoy my fishing and relax and not take it so seriously, but in the Kamasan season I will enjoy going for it again. Qualifying for the British Open is really important to me every year; that's a brilliant match to fish. That's my first priority every season, to try to get 20 points and guarantee a place. Anything else is a bonus.

You plan to defend your title?

I think I'm going to have a go at keeping hold of it. There hasn't been two on the trot since Andy May in 2002. I was joking with Neil Machin that I'm going to have his record score next year, but that's not possible with his having had 80. It's nice to wind him up, though.

What about other competitions?

I'd like to qualify for the Fish'O'Mania final again, though I've only got two tickets this year. I got there in 2008 and finished half way up the scoreboard. Winning that could be my next goal, or winning a White Acres festival. I haven't been down there yet and I can't get



» FULL stretch – Jamie Hughes' long Maver Competition Pro landing net handle gets more vital ounces in the net towards another victory, and four more Kamasan points, last season.



there this year because I've already decided to fish the Larford festival and the Heronbrook festival and the Garbolino Lindholme festival, and also to have a couple of weeks fishing with the lads.

Do you ever go pleasure fishing?

I'm too competitive. I'd much rather go and practise a method. I do enjoy learning new methods. I enjoy practising a method until I get it right. I do a lot of that in the summer.

What will you be working on this summer?

I need to do a lot more rod and line fishing. I depend on a pole quite a lot at the moment, so I need to improve my skills on feeder and waggler. It's nice in the summer to have a chance to get the rods out and go to bigger venues instead of just fishing snake lakes, which is what I do in winter. I'm going to spend quite a lot of time on Maver Larford, which has nice big lakes that are full of fish, and I'm going down to Boddington Reservoir twice this year and also to Makin's twice.

What other ambitions have you got left?

I've never caught a weight of 300 lb

in a match, so that's something I want to try to do this year. My best weight up to now is 241 lb, and I'd like to improve on that, hopefully at Boddington Reservoir this year. The fish there are frightening – they are all 6 lb-plus and there are millions of them, and all they do is eat. But I'm not into going abroad boat fishing for exotic species. I went to the Dominican Republic six years ago and tried it but I got really sea sick, so I can't do that. I just like sitting on my box catching fish in this country.

■ Jamie Hughes was talking to Greg Meenehan.



F1 drivers now drink alcohol-free champers but match anglers have yet to catch on to that trend.

WHAT I LAST CAUGHT



A 2 lb F1 on 14.5-metre pole and pellet on peg 15 Canal at Heronbrook.

WHAT I LAST BOUGHT



A 4 m Maver Competition Pro carbon landing net pole, which is brilliant. I like to have the longest landing net pole I can use, so that I can scoop the fish a bit quicker. This one costs just over £100, but it's worth it.

NEXT WEEK – JAMIE'S TOP TIPS You'll learn loads.