

Okhissa's First Open Fishing Tournament: a participant perspective

by Rob Doherty

Some weeks ago a friend of mine called me up and asked if I was planning on fishing the Big Bass Event at Okhissa Lake. I asked what date, quickly scanned my calendar and said "Yes!" I let the Outdoor Sports Radio Network I wouldn't be available on Saturday, April 26 and scribbled one word only in sharpie on my calendar! "OKHISSA"

John and I had fished opening day at Okhissa Lake, but in different boats, in November of 2007. Since then the fish have seen a lot of lures and a lot of different presentations.

John's strongest technique is flipping and pitching jigs and the man is like a fishing machine when you put a jig rod in his hand. My strong points are finessing hard to get bass to bite, and constantly asking myself, "why did that fish do that"?

We both pre-fished the lake. John caught all of his fish on a jig. I caught one on a jig and several on a Gambler Super Stud during our pre-fish, but the "why" is what put me on a pattern. I told John I thought the fish were feeding on a shad pattern and if we found the shad around cover we should put fish in the boat. I found that one particular tree had produced two slot fish and one under and told myself that was where I wanted to start. I found John all the way back in the South end of the lake and what do you think he was holding????? A bream rod with crickets in the boat!!! Some pre-fish! "John, you know we can't weigh bream tomorrow!", I told him. He just laughed and kept on catching bream.

Tournament day did NOT start well for me. When I got to the lake, and reached for my plug, I noticed it had bounced from the well. A frantic series of phone calls and asking people in line if they had a spare plug ensued. Thankfully, a gentleman about 5 vehicles back had 4 extra plugs and offered me one...but refused to take a penny for it. Thank you, sir. I looked for you after the tournament, but couldn't find you to return the plug.

Now John and I had never fished from the same boat, for pleasure or for tournament, but we both fish tournaments and have both fished with numerous partners. We have however been friends via www.fishingwitheddie.com for years. When John got in the boat we didn't start needling each other until like 5 minutes into the tournament. We motored to the point just before the cove with my tree I wanted to fish, and waited for it seemed like 3 weeks for John's watch to show 6:00 a.m. so we could cast.

As the fish were feeding on threadfin shad, we knew we would have to mimic their bait fish. John had made a white Thumper jig and added a pearl trailer when I told him the fish were keying in on shad tight to cover. I had on the Crystal Shad Super Stud by Gambler, two completely different styles, whichever started catching fish, we would swap to.

Now let me take a break from the story to explain something to you. John is a Power Fisherman. He often will be found with a Jig Rod pitching and flipping, or maybe a big Zara Spook or maybe a big spinner bait. My strong points are subtly mimicking shad

with soft plastics and for 3 years John has been giving me grief over my style.....So the rest of the story is particularly sweet to me!

We rounded into the cove, my tree staring at me, winking, telling me to come hither, but a boat had just fished right by it. I looked at John and nodded, he said "Go dawg, you ain't gonna be able to fish anything in here without a boat near by." We moved up to the tree and my first cast produced an under fish! One we could weigh.... 15" of mean green swimming machine. That got the attention of the Tracker boat that had just passed over the area, and they came back in. I caught two slot fish off the tree and that's all it took for John, the power fisherman to rig up on a Gambler Super Stud. We caught about 9 fish out of the area, trees lining the road bed we were fishing, and had three weighing fish in the boat. But all were unders. In this time, John and I had been arguing and jibing at each other, him questioning my manhood for fishing such a pansy style of bait, me saying they are catching fish. I just grinned and said hey, swap back to your jig, he said he would give the fish what they were asking for. At one point, the gents in the other boat asked us how long we had been fishing together to give each other so much grief. John grinned and said, "This is our first time fishing together!"

We left the area, knowing the tree would replenish, and motored around the point to the South side of the cover. Then we figured out why THAT tree. It was the only green willow tree in 10 feet of water. Willow has lots of stuff for bait fish to hang in. We figured this out, when we saw another boater that said they had caught a few fish off another willow tree. Now we're wondering where more willows were.

It was getting close to weigh in time so we started idling toward the North Side of the lake, John was going to weigh one, I was going to weigh two. The plan was for me to weight one in the first weigh in period, and already have another on the board for the second period. On the way North we saw schooling fish, just South of the South Ramp Cove. We killed the motor and threw at them. I threw a top water, dog walking style bait and had two blow ups that didn't connect, John quickly through in the follow up Super Stud and stuck another weighing fish for him! We raked through the school catching maybe six or seven fish, then, John said, "Man, we gotta go if we wanna make it."

Weigh in time: We pulled up to the weigh in tent, and I put the foot of the Mariner in the red clay grabbed my fish in a weigh-in bag, he did the same, then, we got in line. When I turned around and saw that my boat was starting to drift off, I handed my weigh in bag to an official and went to catch the rogue boat. Unfortunately for me, the clay bottom, being as clay bottoms generally are, was slick as snail snot, and I slipped down thoroughly making me the butt of many jokes! I did retrieve the boat and weighed my fish. When the count down finished for the first weigh in period, John and I retrieved our fish for the second period. John held the lead with 1.62 and I had second with a 1.59. We knew it wouldn't hold but we were up there when we left to go hunt for bigger fish.

As we were leaving, the Sun came out and we started complaining. Our fish that were suspending about a foot under water and would go deeper, and we knew we could forget the top water bite. Where was that 50% chance of rain when we needed it?

We went back to our willow tree and the boat we had originally started the day off with and the gents in the Tracker, were still in the area but had moved out some. As I suspected, the bite had slowed down, but the fish were still there. We decided to go back to search mode with John and his jig, and me left to my devices. I threw a Gambler Flappin Shad thinking the tail change might work, but I couldn't get it deep enough for the fishes' liking. I knew the fish were still there, but I figured the sun had them drop in depth. I figured they would stay around that thermo cline, four or five feet deep.

Suspended fish are tough to catch. Jigs blow by, Super Studs don't get deep enough. *Click*, Time to put a Senko style, stick bait and let it drift slowly by them. I didn't have a pearl color to mimic shad, so I did what I could. I had a watermelon chartreuse laminated bait that John nearly fell out of the boat laughing at when I tied it on. John said the only fish that would bite that bait would be the crack head fish. After connecting and getting two fish to the boat before loosing the slot fish, he said, "I can't believe I'm saying this, gimme one of them crack baits." We started keying in on big trees in deeper water, and were still catching fish. We just had to change to what the fish wanted. And they wanted crack head lures dead sticked to them, by big trees. We caught another 10 or so fish, but none that would do anything at the scales.

I had a blast fishing with John. There was an ease about both of us. Like we should have been fishing together for years, but John lives about three hours from me. John is an awesome fisherman, and I hated we didn't pick up fish on jigs, because I wanted him to school me up on his pitching technique. He can pitch like I roll cast, and his jig enters the water so quietly and with no disruption that you have to ask him where he is. My pitches have all the subtlety of a cow falling into a pond (or a Bassin' Fool falling into a lake!).

Tournament Stats and numbers can be found, I'm sure, in any number of stories at Okhissa Lake. I wanted y'all to hear about a day on a lake between two friends!