

BASS ELITE SERIES - SUNSHINE SHOWDOWN
Reservoir: HARRIS CHAIN OF LAKES
City/State: LEESBURG, FL
03/06/2008 - 03/09/2008

Practice March 3-5, 2008

Drove a little over an hour north and west to Leesburg, FL immediately following payment from the FLW staff at Toho and hooked up for practice w/ Kota Kiriya and decided to share a campsite as well. Kota and I had practiced for a tourney last fall at Pickwick and got along well. Still on an emotional high after a victory I tried to put the last week behind me, easier said than done. Kota would be fishing the next tourney on the Elite schedule at Toho and we were in the off-limits period for that tournament as far as gathering info for that event. Hard as it was to fish and stay together for a week without talking about my recent success, Kota did a very good job telling me to "button it" whenever I started to slip-up and talk about something I had learned the last week. The task at hand was even harder to figure out than the previous week.

We covered a lot of water in three days and fished every type of grass that was around; counted 9 different grass types that we fished, all with limited success. Every time we thought we were on something, as far as a pattern was concerned, the next spot or the next day would not pan out. What we did figure out was fish were in all phases of the spawn. Plenty were done and plenty were still on the way up with some on beds at the time.

All the lakes are connected by little canals that are perfect spawning grounds. They are sheltered from the elements and were also full of competitors. We ended up concentrating our practice efforts in a couple different canals trying to define a pattern a little better. We shook off several fish that final practice day that felt decent (2-4LBS) in a fairly small area. Kota knew the tourney would be a grinder with a kicker in the 5-8lb range being the difference maker.

At the pairings meeting that night, my name was called after Kota's which meant we would fish together the first competition day. Felt good about my chances since I knew exactly what we'd be doing all day. It's not often in these events that you know and understand exactly what the pattern is and can prepare your tackle perfectly.

DAY ONE 4lbs-15oz

Just a short drive from the launch was our first stop and confidence hole as far as catching a limit. Kota caught two quick fish while I lost what would turn out to be my best fish of the day, not a giant but a 3-3.5lb fish none the less. On the co-angler side, that is equivalent to a 5-6lb fish on the pro side. Thinking the fish was played out, took my sweet time reaching down to grab the fish. MR. BASS had other plans for my 7lb Sunline and shredded it amongst some nearby lily pads. LESSON LEARNED! Upset with such a rookie mistake, had to refocus and get back to business; pitched a Senko most of the day

to seawalls and lily pads. Missed one other bite and ended up weighing four small fish for the day. Man...the one that got away really hurts sometimes.

DAY TWO 15lbs-11oz

Drew # 87 out the second day captained by Kurt Dove of VA. Kurt was very professional all day and a blast to fish with. He is an extremely skilled angler that is one big break from becoming a house hold name in the sport. He said we would be fishing a canal that he had success in the day before. We arrived in the canal and I was relieved to notice that Kota had practiced there so I was familiar with the area. Being in 41st coming into the second round made me concentrate on what was going on, knowing one screw up today and that could spell disaster.

My second pitch with the Texas rigged Senko was met with a soft "tick" and started swimming sideways slowly away from the target. That moment is what this sport is all about. Setting the hook with everything in me, suddenly I had more than expected. Asked Kurt for help as the monster went directly under the boat. Got control of what was sure to be a 10+ lb Florida behemoth, my partner, on his knees, was greeted by an unfriendly, 5' alligator that needed some serious dental care and a breath mint. Donating that hook, line and sinker to the now hip and new-age gator with a pierced lip, retied and refocused, I went on with my business.

Landed two fish for Kurt as he asked for help, he was wacky rigging a Senko and skipping it to seawalls and under piers. From practice I knew the section of the canal we were in had a broken, old, concrete seawall in one section that was out farther from the seawall. Feeling my way along in 3-6', the tungsten weight pegged to my bait made it possible to detect sections of harder bottom. That seemed to be key in finding the fish that were staged there to spawn. When a hard bottom or piece of broken concrete was felt, stopping and shaking the worm did the trick. Two fish over 3.5lbs on back to back casts told me something was going to get figured out finally. Broke one off shortly after that, got the line against some of that old concrete, that fish felt really big. Told myself it was one of those punk-rock gators and shook it off. Fishing slower and deeper than my partner seemed to pay off as he grabbed my third keeper of the day that eventually weighed 6lb-6oz.

Confidence was soaring at 9:30am and 12lb-13lb in the box. Visions of a twenty pound bag were clouding my thoughts as the next bite went undetected resulting in a poorly hooked fish of over 3lbs that jumped and spit my Senko back at me like it was a piece of Hubba Bubba. How quickly the fish have a way of spoiling a good ol' fashioned daydream. Kurt said it was time to go flippin' up in the river. To get there took over an hour and a half. Too many "idle only" zones and one lock into Lake Griffin made for a long ride. Didn't want to leave the fish we had in that canal, but Kurt only had two and he knew big bags came from the river the day before. Decisions like that are a prime example of what I'm fishing these tournaments for. He had to go for broke to make the top fifty cut and I respect that. The plan didn't turn out as he'd hoped but I finished my limit. On our way back to weigh-in we idled for a couple of miles and talked to Mark

Menendez who was coming back with what he thought was 25lbs. That reassured Kurt he'd made the right decision. The fish were there but we just didn't hit the lucky stretch.

DAY THREE 0lbs-0oz

Sitting in second place and weighing the biggest sack of all the co-anglers on day two had me flying pretty high. Couple that with a partner named KVD and there was gonna be some fish getting relocated after this final day! Kevin said fishing was challenging to begin with, add 25-40mph wind on Lake Harris, making almost the whole thing a giant mud hole.

In true KVD fashion, he was chunkin' and windin' that good ol' sexy shad colored Red-Eye shad along with a Pure Poison (Strike King version of a Chatterbait) and a signature KVD spinnerbait on the outside edges of the Kissimmee Grass. He was concerned with water clarity more than any thing on this wind blown day. His first fish came fairly quickly that morning on the chatter-plug. He wanted to check a few more areas quickly and check the quality of the water. Protected little pockets with clearer water were the goal and the hunt was on. Not finding much at all that wasn't destroyed by the heavy wind; KVD went back close to where he caught his first fish. A fifty yard stretch or so that he kept saying was the money spot was all ours until Chris Lane snuck in behind us and lowered both Power-Poles(anchor systems attached to the back of the boat that lower electronically to hold you in place). Apparently he was occupying the best part of the money spot as he weighed the heaviest bag of the day from a little 15yrd section of Kissimmee grass.

Trying to watch and learn from the best fisherman in the world while "speed flippin'" the Kissimmee grass is how I spent my day. Kevin told me that flippin' a straight tail worm would be my best option since we were tight to the grass. He was very helpful and a pleasure to be around, answering all my questions and giving me advice on various lakes on my schedule coming up the rest of the year. To make a long story short, Kevin caught three and I finally ended up with a goose's egg. Knowing it had to come sooner or later, I'm glad it happened when it did. Spending the day with someone with that much fishing knowledge in a situation like that where he wasn't under all the media pressure (he came in 44th place = no camera boat) was a unique opportunity that will always be remembered.

KVD broke down fishing Kissimmee grass for me, which until that day was very intimidating. Keying me into what to look for and how water clarity and wind current affect the already fickle Florida fish. Before that day, I would avoid that stuff like the plague. Now it's not "a needle in the haystack" feeling when confronted with having to fish it. Never got a single bite in eight hours of fishing. Can't remember when that happened last, but it's been a while. Not making any immediate plans for it to happen again either.

SUMMARY

Proud of myself for pulling it together after a bad start and staying positive. The mental aspect of this sport played a huge roll in the final numbers on my check at the end of this derby. Remembering instances when my focus was on something else other than what my bait was doing cost me at least twice. Not handling the first fish of the tourney properly also cost me, big time! That's three times I lost my concentration and to my estimation cost me \$3,500. To some that's not a lot of money, but to my wife that's a new couch, 12 pairs of summer sandals, two bikinis and toilet paper for the rest of '08. Just kidding! My wife loves and supports me in this wild adventure.

Through practice and the tournament much was learned and observed. Questions answered and the puzzle known as Kissimmee grass was narrowed down to something manageable. Still hate that stuff! Florida is overrated and not as much fun as all the big bass pictures you see in the magazines. If you would like a second opinion on the issue, ask Franco Vallejos or Bob "Lucky" Lechel about what they think. They are two of NM's finest anglers and I know they don't like it either. Would rather have made the Texas swing at Amistad and Falcon, but I needed the experience in Florida more. I'd really like to thank all my partners for putting up with my whining about what Florida fish do all day and letting me observe their decision making process. Those are the things that I learn from the most.

P.S. No more e-mails about the zero please, I won't forget that it happened. LOL