

New Mexico Bass Federation Nation
State Team Qualifier #1
Elephant Butte Lake, NM April 24-25, 2010

Showed up Thursday night and met up with several of the guys in the club including some of our newest recruits from down south. After a nice meal with Fritz and Lee we called it a night and were set for official practice on Friday.

Started out surveying some of the areas below Rattlesnake that Seth and I fished at the PVA tourney earlier in the month, they were still productive. Having heard the "dock talk" of big fish being caught up the lake flipping, I was somewhat skeptical of the bite down lake, but also knew it would produce a limit. The weather was shaping up to be another windy, cold and wet spring front just in time for the tournament. Seth got to the lake a "little" after sunrise with his Dad having the boat ready to hit the water. We swapped out all Seth's stuff back to his boat and we split up the lake and went fishing. We compared notes at the end of the day and felt comfortable with our game plan...try to get a limit early and then head up lake for some toads.

The rules meeting was much longer than it should have been. We were there until 8PM and the club Directors ended up being there until past 9PM. Hopefully this won't happen again. The positive side is that we had 78 people turn out to fish the first State Team qualifier of 2010 which included 9 juniors from Kids of the Southwest. This is a substantial increase from recent history and the NMBFN continues to grow with new members from NM, CO and TX. Thanks to Steve Ragsdale, Barry Stanley and Chuck Rizuto for their efforts at the meeting. It was a little chaotic to say the least, but they kept it upright with the rubber side down.

Saturday I was fortunate enough to draw one of the new anglers from the ABQ Hawg Hunters, LB. We have a new guy in our club, LA, if the next person to join the NMBFN goes by LC, this will be a peculiar trend. LB was admittedly very new to the sport, especially the competition side. It was a blast fishing with him and he listened very well. He said from the beginning he was there to learn and as the boater, you are not obligated to teach, but it definitely makes the day a lot more enjoyable. We were able to catch fish doing three things LB had never done before, cranking, throwing a tube and flipping a hawg. This may sound like staples for most, but when you haven't fished for bass before, it is a quantum leap.

We came up on a cut Saturday that I had pulled a big smallie out of the day before, but was able to shake loose. After combing the area with the same crank, I started to throw different baits at it. After about 10 casts, I felt that "thunk" that you want to feel when a big fish picks up your bait and starts to ease off with it. Set the hook and hauled nothing but line. We were fishing some pretty sharp rock and I must have gotten a nick in the line that I didn't catch. Not

knowing what the fish was, I proceeded to retie while LB took the motor (which was something else he had never done). That morning the winds were howling in where we were fishing between 20-30 and it was a challenge to say the least. As I was retying he saw the fish come up trying to throw the bait. I didn't see it, but his response was "that is way bigger than any of the fish we have in the livewell". Now I was feeling frustrated and that is an understatement.

Having gone up the lake at 11 or so with a modest limit I was noticing the drastic change from Friday with the flow coming in from the river and the winds blowing all the dirt in the water from the west side of the lake. The water was more stained and I had very low confidence in the flipping bite. Have to apologize to Earl Conway and Dave Smith. We were heading for McRae mid day on Saturday and in hindsight I should have backed off and let those guys in. We were moving faster and passed them, but it was probably closer than it should have been and it won't happen again.

McRae, like Rock Canyon and the Dirt Dam had boats all over it. Every point and cut was loaded all the way back with boats. We went to the very back, ran out of water, and when the boat stopped, we started fishing. Managed to catch one largemouth that upgraded a smallie, but not by much, the fish was super skinny. I've never seen the Butte fish as small as it did this past weekend.

After spending some time on heavily used water in McRae, we went up past Monticello and looked for some water that was not being fished. LB managed one largemouth on a PowerHawg and that was it. The water was getting worse by the hour with a lot of flow coming in out of the river. We finished out the day down toward the dam looking for some new water and pre fishing for the second day. In the weigh in line, I conveyed to LB that he had a pretty good day with three fish to weigh at the scales. Not knowing how everyone else did, I had an average limit which put me in 10th after day 1. Seth had a slightly better day placing him in 8th after the first day.

Day 2 my nonboater was Dave Smith, a great guy out of the Hawg Hunters also. Dave has been around the Federation about as long as I, in fact I remember meeting him and his wife Yolanda at Navajo in 2007 at the Presidents Cup. He had just joined and was a blast to hang out with.

I told Dave the program and gave him one of the crankbaits that Seth and I were catching them on before launch. He tied it on and we proceeded to comb the bank looking for some fish that were moving up. We didn't do as well as Saturday on the crank bite, so we slowed down to get some fish in the boat and that was the ticket. We fished tubes and I managed a limit and Dave picked up three.

About mid day, we did the same thing, headed up the lake and looked for some water to flip. This time we went up past Kettle Top and the water was really

muddy. After about 30 minutes I told Dave I just didn't have the confidence to fish it. We headed back to the south end and hit a few more key areas. The flotilla of boats that had littered the dam area and Butte Rock were not to be seen on Sunday. I was really starting to wonder if we missed the bite altogether on Sunday with lower winds and high skies. We fished from the dam back toward the marina and covered as much water as we could. Culled out a couple fish working our way back, but it was for ounces.

Earlier in the day I caught a barely keeper largemouth and was able to get the fish to measure on one side sweeping the tail on a belly board. Checking the fish each time I culled, my lack of experience with "close" fish came back to haunt me at weigh in. I threw back two perfectly legal smallmouth for a 14" largemouth that gained me 4 ounces over my smallmouth that I was pitching over the side of the boat. At weigh in the bump master called the fish short. Frustrated, I took my lumps and kept my mouth shut like any disgraced angler should. It was a huge mistake on my part and one that I will likely not repeat anytime soon. Having had a lengthy conversation with LB on Saturday, he had a close largemouth which we checked more than once, having conveyed that you should only weigh a close fish if you have nothing to lose. On the other hand, I was in the running for third with the bad luck of some of the other competitors on Sunday. Kenny Hansel was in the lead on Day 1 with 12.5, Bob Lechel with over 10 and Rick Hipp in third with around 9. All three of those guys came in with one fish on Sunday opening up the door for the "limit getters" to step up.

Not having gone for the big bites up the lake was the right decision as Seth had a great day with around 9 pounds and David Herrera coming in with a second solid limit. Seth won the overall and the biggest check that has been paid out at a Federation tourney in years; it was a great moment for his first tourney as a boater. David was a respectable second with two days worth of limits and my penalized two days of limits took me out of the "only 4 people to weigh limits on both days" to a devastatingly embarrassing 16th place finish. Had I not thrown two fish back to keep that largemouth it might not be as painful, but trying to gain 4 ounces cost between 2.5 and 3 pounds in the overall. Shaun Gill was happy to pick up the third place check and plaque with a great start to the year. Would have been nice to book end the podium with my team tourney partner, but you are only as good as your last finish and there will always be more.

Thank you to [Mercury Marine](#), [St. Croix rods](#), [Navionics](#), [Loc R Bar](#), [Berkley](#), [Trilene](#) and [Abu Garcia](#).