

My Crappie U.S.A. Classic Experience

By Steve Welch

Although I have qualified for other Crappie U.S.A. classics this is only the second one I have attended. I had a ball all week long. Kentucky Lake is a phenomenal fishery. My wife and I went down Sunday night right after I pulled a guide trip on Shelbyville. Monday we stayed up in Murray and fished the Blood River. I have fished it a couple of times with limited success. I just know my way around better at Paris Landing.

We caught about thirty legal sized fish and had just two over thirteen-inches. That was enough for me and I was ready to go on down to Tennessee and fish the Big Sandy. Tuesday we got on the water at first light and tried to beat the wind. It always blows down there and anything over ten miles per hour can get the boat rockin.

I couldn't believe the wife let me stay out there in the wind all day. The boat was taking water over the front and I was on eighty percent on the trolling motor all day long. You couldn't use the spider rig rod holders I brought as they were just bouncing up and down too much.

We had a what I call winter weight day. We had four fish over fourteen inches and the wife had a fifteen and a half-inch fish. We had about a dozen over thirteen and tons of eleven and twelve- inch fish. Our weight for seven fish would have been about eleven pounds not too bad now I am putting together a good pattern.

Wednesday you can only fish half a day as you have to register and the sponsors give you tons of free goodies and there is a banquet for all qualifiers. Mostly on Wednesday I left my good fish alone as the boats were all starting to show up and fisherman of this caliber can find your spots even though they are some two hundred feet away.

I found out the hard way just how good those Hummingbird side-imaging units are. I have been going down to Paris Landing now for about five years always putting GPS spots on my Lowrance and have about a hundred spots to run and gun too.

In one week the fisherman at my motel who had the Hummingbirds found just about all my brush. You see they can use the side imaging as they drive by you and they will get an actual picture of the brush that you are hovering over. Then they can move the curser over to that brush pile and mark the GPS coordinates without ever going over and running over it. The fish will show up as a white image and if they are close enough to the bottom they will cast a shadow under them and by the dark image under the fish you can see how big the fish are.

Well anyway I am still undaunted by those Hummingbirds and the wind is still blowing and I am all alone out in the middle of the Big Sandy. I call the wife and tell her I have went to just two of my best spots for just a few moments and have three over fourteen-inches. My fish are still going good and Thursday I had another ten-pound day. We skipped the banquet on Thursday and got to bed early as I had a big day on Friday could I repeat what I had done twice this week.

Friday arrived and wouldn't you know it the wind died and I am no longer alone out in the Big Sandy. One hundred and ninety-five teams entered into this tourney and I bet a hundred of them were out there with me. I am still undaunted because I know a ton of brush piles and I have a pattern that has worked all week. The drop-shot rig and a large shiner. Fished about a foot off bottom in the thickest brush you can find.

We had mid eighty-degree weather much different than the cold snap that had hit us early in the week. The water temps had fallen from 79 early in the week down to 71. That ended up being my demise.

With no wind it is hard to hover over fish in this very clear water and not spook them. You need to saturate the brush with sixteen hooks and give it fifteen minutes then pull up and run to the next spot. I fished alone and am used to being a single pole jig fisherman. This hurt me, as did the cold front. I thought the fish would just bury themselves in the brush deeper with the cold front. I did not think they would move to

shallower brush.

I always go down and fish during the winter months and then you need brush in that twenty-foot range. I had to hustle and find brush shallower in the eight to ten-foot range. This I didn't catch on to right away because I was just catching tons of fish.

The first day of the classic I caught nearly sixty keepers by myself and just couldn't pull off those spots to look for bigger fish. That hurt, so on Saturday I opted to head straight for my best big fish spot. I had two over thirteen-inches in less than fifteen minutes and things were looking good. I should have stayed in the area but no I am off to the races. I fished about ten spots with no luck and returned to my starting spot and promptly got another thirteen-inch fish. Well I managed just one more big fish all day and if I had a day on Friday like I had on Saturday I would have been seventh overall. As it was I ended up in seventeenth. Not to bad for someone fishing alone against the toughest crappie fisherman in the nation. Several of them fishing on their home lake.

In closing Kentucky Lake has got to be my favorite lake. It is an incredible crappie lake. If I were to count the legal sized fish that I caught in six days of fishing I bet I had over five hundred. I like it so much I am going back in three weeks.