

On-the-Water with BASS Elite Pro: Jeff Connella

June 11,2008: Kentucky Lake - Bluegrass Brawl

By: Doug Vahrenberg



Today, I got to spend with one of my friends from fishing the BASS Central Opens back in 2005. Jeff and I have grown our friendship over the years and he has worked his way up the and now competes on the BASSmaster Elite Series Trail. Join me as Jeff allow me to get in the baot with him prior to the BASS Elite Series Bluegrass Brawl and practice with him.

I met Jeff at the Days Inn near Calvert City around 5 AM and we headed south to the Aurora, KY area. Jeff has had a tough practice peroid but has been able to catch a few keepers each day and was tuned into what he needed to do to solidify a Top 50 finish. In the BASS Elite series the Top 50 get a \$10,000 paycheck and rest go home empty handed. \$10,000 sounds like alot of money to you and me but to an Elite Series angler is barely covers the expenses - when you figure a \$5,000 entry fee for each event plus, meals, lodging, gas, and travel expenses plus trying to raise a family too. This tournament was even more of a necessity for anglers to succeed since the next Tuesday the last \$10,000 installment was due for the \$55,000 worth of entry fees they had contractual committment to. One of the things that really shocked me was Jeff stated a bare minimum for fishing the 11 events was \$100,000 in expenses.

Jeff was fishing off-shore structure on Kentucky Lake and was very in-tune to what he was needing to look for. He had scouted the area prior to the 30 day off-limits peroid and had some area he wanted to review and to build upon what he had found the prior two days of practice. In official practice the anglers cannot receive any assistance from anyone but other professional anglers - so it was just a day of riding around and fishing with Jeff. The only thing the co-angler can do to help is fish another lure or try another technique which is what I was able to do over the next few hours. Jeff Connella is a great jig fisherman - so I let Jeff what he needed to find the fish he needed to succeed. When Jeff would work the Jig I would pick up a worm or deep diving crankbait just to

see if they would bite anything else. Not many did over the next few hours but old Jeff out smarted many bass on the numerous ledges of Kentucky Lake.



But the best part of the day for me was to questions and answers we shared amongst us. I got to quiz one of the top 100 anglers and help me build my skills. My biggest weakness is off shore fishing - I feel like I'm in the middle of the ocean. But Jeff was gracious enough to allow me to join him and see how he found the structure and how he prepared for a large scale event. Jeff just doesn't fish for the enjoyment of the sport he fishes to put food on the table and diapers on his new son. It takes a stronger passion to put forth the money and time to chase a dream and a career. So many times we hear of the big dollar deals of the Kevin Van Dams, Denny Brauers, but there are a very limited number that make an acceptable living for the work and time involved. Jeff never complained about the money or time commitment, plus being away from his family. You'll hear very few complain but Professional Bass Fishing is uncomparable to any other sport from the committment these individuals must give.

What amazed me the most was the sharing between anglers, not only baits but they care about each other and the rights they have to fishing the same waters. Jeff and his roommate share information to help them both succeed and I heard and seen this over the course of the next several days as I fished as co-angler in the Bluegrass Brawl. At one time I shared the same waters with 3 other competitors all on the same piece of structure, yes 8 of us in a small group. The best part I never heard or seen any of the other pros complain. This is a trait not often seen in smaller more local events. These are the best and the best often think very much alike and they respect each other - even though they found the same fish.



Jeff Connella amassed 43 pounds and 7 ounces and finished in 48th place for the event and taking home one of those coveted checks. This marked the 25th time Jeff has made the top 50 cut. You can learn more about Jeff Connella the fisherman, father and my great friend by visiting his website www.jeffconnella.com

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