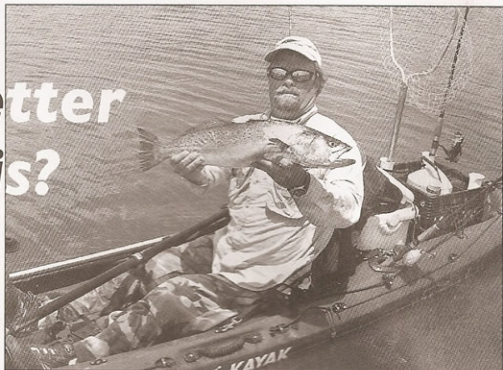


Does It Get Any Better Than This?

A Recap of the 2008 Jacksonville Kayak Fishing Classic

By Mike Kogan



Ever since the first Jacksonville Kayak Fishing Classic we have been surprised and thrilled with the growth and participation of our favorite recreational activity. Each year as the Classic has grown we keep telling ourselves it just can't get any bigger or better, yet every year more and more people and sponsors participate. This year was no different. When we had over 200 registered four months in advance we knew it was going to be huge, and ultimately 340 anglers enjoyed another world-class event.

What was really impressive was not only did the Classic net \$28,000 for our target charities, but the \$28,000 was directly from the pockets of the participants from their entry fees and raffle ticket purchases. Trust me, that's a lot without corporate cash donations and it speaks volumes about the kind of quality folks that enjoy kayak fishing. I am proud to say that not one person affiliated with the Classic received a solitary cent for their time and contributions — all these great folks that made it happen were volunteers in the truest sense of the word.

So enough bragging, what happened at this year's Classic? People came from all over the country — from California to Michigan, Ohio, Wisconsin, Texas, all throughout the Southeast, and up through Virginia. We had kayak anglers from many of the manufacturers' fishing teams such as the Hobie Team, the Emotion Team, Team Confluence, and Team FreedomHawk.

LET ME GIVE YOU a tournament timeline from a participant's perspective. Friday around 5 p.m. you get to the Morocco Shrine Auditorium, a huge venue setup to seat 400, and you are immediately greeted by the registration folks who are more than ready and organized to handle over 300 anglers. You give them your name and get a monster captain's bag with over \$70 in goodies including t-shirts, caps, artificial lures, tackle products, cozies, travel mugs, stickers, and product info. Then you move towards the main event hall and HoosierPaddler (Brad Hatton) is set up to sell raffle tickets with the Ker's Winghouse Calendar Girls — oh boy I'll take some more please!

Then as you go into the main hall there are vendors and sponsors

showing off their products, displays of the tournament and raffle prizes, and a catered meal of awesome chicken wings from Ker's Winghouse. Did I mention there was a drink bar? So you grab some cold adult beverages to wash down your wings, and spend the next hour commiserating with tons of kayak anglers from just about everywhere.

Around 6:30 p.m. the festivities officially began and there's discussion from the hosts, the benefit charities, conservation organizations like St. Johns Riverkeeper, and some great local charter captains. After an invocation and the singing of God Bless America by the incomparable NFL Hall-of-Famer (and Hobie kayaker) Jackie Smith we had a quick review of the rules. With all the official stuff out of the way the raffles begin, and oh what raffles. Somewhere around \$15,000 worth of goodies were raffled Friday, and this was quality kayak fishing merchandise donated by the generous sponsors. Needless to say the raffles proceeded for over an hour until around 8:30 p.m., when the launch time was announced and everyone was dismissed to get ready to fish.

Saturday you go out at sunrise and fish — and like any other day sometimes you catch and sometimes you just fish. But after fishing you go back to the tournament venue to check in your fish scoring pictures, enjoy a great banquet meal of barbeque from Sticky Fingers, another raffle of \$15,000 worth of donated products, and finally the award ceremonies.

THIS YEAR'S CLASSIC had some great stories associated with the lucky anglers that won or placed. Captain Roger Bump of Jacksonville claimed the top prize in the redfish-trout-flounder slam division — a fully-rigged Hobie Revolution fishing kayak with an Accent Diamond paddle. Bump said he launched and fished his Hobie in three different locations in pursuit of his winning 65.5-inch slam.

"I've been fishing this tournament for 4 years," an overcome Bump related, "and finally got it right. I only caught three fish all day but they were the right ones, and thankfully my fish pictures were good."

Bump was closely followed by Jacksonville's Dan Arvin with 61.7 inches, Jon Ward of Riverview, Fla. with 60.8 inches, and 12-year-old Daniel

Ganoe of Jacksonville with 59.2 inches.

Eric Doughty of Atlantic Beach won the trout division with an outstanding 27-inch gator trout and took home a new Emotion Grand Slam kayak. Top redfish honors went to Joshua Burley of Jacksonville with a 34.5-inch red and he scored a Malibu X-13 kayak. Leading the way in the flounder category was John Gill of Jacksonville with a 20.65-inch flatie that was good for a Wilderness Systems Tarpon 140 kayak. Everyone who placed received custom paddles courtesy of Accent Paddles.

Ganoe not only placed fourth in the slam competition but also won Jr. Angler. And when Ganoe walked down the center aisle to accept his awards, there was no measuring the joy that his smile brought to the crowd. That's what kayak fishing is all about.

Patty Greene won Lady Angler in addition to fourth place in the trout class. Donald Lohman, 66, won Sr. Angler with a nice red and a trout, and Rich Santos took Fly Angler honors with a 23-inch red and a 23-inch trout.

WHY IS THE CLASSIC so much fun? Consider this: our charity focus and the generosity of our sponsors enable us to put together a fun format where everyone is a winner just by entering, having fun in the raffles, and enjoying great kayak fishing camaraderie.

For your \$60 entry fee you get rights to fish in the Classic, some raffle tickets, a captain's bag worth anywhere from \$60 to \$80, a catered meal of killer wings at the captain's meeting, a catered meal of BBQ at the check-in, and the best dang time you can have enjoying kayak fishing with folks that love it as much as you. Some people call it a charity fishing tournament, others might call it a party with some kayak fishing on the side. But after you've been there, you just call it The Classic. 🦋



Trout winner Eric Doughty (opposite page) with a 27-inch gator trout. Five-year-old Christian Derringer (above) holding up a redfish. Mark Gross of Team Emotion (left) demonstrating why observing tidal conditions at the launch site is important. Daniel Ganoe, 12, (bottom left) Jr. Angler winner and 4th place winner in the Slam category. Lady Angler winner Patty Greene (bottom center) also took 4th place in the Trout category. Erick Bell (below) of Team Confluence poses with a redfish.

