

Bass, barbecue and sweet tea at Laurel Park

Fishing tournament also draws cooking competition to Lake Lanier



[Order This Image](#) - Rick Tilson of Smyrna won first place Saturday in the boater category for the American Bass Anglers tournament at Laurel Park. Tilson caught five bass, with a total weight of

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By Jennifer Messer

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Gainesville native Richard Shaw has a few secrets, and they can all be found in his cooking.

Shaw, who was busy preparing ribs Saturday morning, was a part of just one of 46 competition teams at the Early Times BBQ Cook-Off that was held at Laurel Park this weekend.

"We picked up our meat on Wednesday, prepped it on Thursday, and starting cooking last night," Shaw said. "We are cooking all four meat events, and we are also doing the sauce challenge, the sweet tea challenge and dessert."

Debra Talley, the National Marketing Director with the American Bass Anglers said the Bass Anglers started a five-city BBQ tour last year in which they visit five cities across the country. Lake Lanier is

the first stop on the tour this year.

Talley explained that the barbecue teams are judged in four categories: chicken, ribs, pork and brisket.

"Then we have two auxiliary categories, and they are sauce and dessert," Talley said.

Earlier that morning, nearly 200 anglers went out on Lake Lanier to see what they could catch in the tournament.

Other events at the Early Times BBQ included a motorcycle ride, live performances from two bands and the Sweet Tea Challenge sponsored by Y'all Magazine.

Associate Publisher Keith Sisson said that for the past four years, Y'all Magazine has traveled all across the Southeast conducting its sweet tea contests for both businesses and individuals.

Sisson said that a panel of local judges is chosen to judge the tea.

"We give awards and put their pictures in the magazine," Sisson said. "This is our fourth year back in Gainesville for the Sweet Tea Challenge."

Y'all Magazine hopes to eventually bring all of the winners together for a "World Series of Sweet Tea." Between making sweet tea, cooking yummy ribs and trying to catch fish, there was something else on the minds of people at Laurel Park over the weekend: The weather.

"You never know what will happen from one minute to the next," Talley said.

Friday night, those gathered weren't sure what was up in the gray sky until they got a call that some hail was moving through the area.

"We were about to start the anglers safety briefing, and I went over there and told them that they had five minutes before the hail would be coming and everyone ran to safety," Talley said. "The hail was unbelievable!"

Kevin Rake, an Early Times Pro, was present when the hail came in Friday night.

"It was hammering!" said Rake, who "dove" in his truck to protect himself from the hail.

Despite the fear of bad weather, both local residents and visitors made the most out of the Early Times BBQ event.