

Champs were Crowned at the 61st Annual Texas State Bass Tournament

Sam Scroggins
Tournament Director

The 61st Annual Texas State Bass Tournament was held on Toledo Bend Reservoir on April 23-24, 2016. The State Tournament dates back to 1955 when Earl Golding, then a sports writer for the Waco Tribune-Herald, organized what is believed to be the first major invitational bass fishing contest. In 1956, the competition was repeated but opened up to all Texas anglers and dubbed "The State Bass Tournament". Though never offering prize money to the winners, it has remained a staple of Texas competitive fishing ever since by maintaining its highly competitive Individual, Teams, and Couples Divisions while reaching out over time to seniors and families with children. It extended its reach again in 2014 by adding a competitive Division for High School Student Teams with a scholarship component.

Fin & Feather Resort near Hemphill hosted the State Tournament for the fifth time in the last six years. Near constant rainfall during the week preceding the event was followed by bluebird skies on Saturday and moderate overcast on Sunday. These changing conditions made fishing very difficult for most of the competitors and five-fish daily limits on either day were rare. Nevertheless a few very good stringers made it to the scales from among the 200+ competitors and six new teams and one individual became 2016 Texas State Bass Tournament Champions.

The High School Team Division concluded its competition on Saturday with Devon Anderson and Brandon Lavender (Jacksonville HS) atop the pack with 17.19 pounds. With their win, Devon and Brandon are each eligible for a \$1000 Higher Education Award upon their high school graduation and entry into secondary education at a college or trade school. The Higher Education Awards are made possible by Fun-n-Sun Marine and the Jeff England Motor Co. of Cleburne. Hunter Muncrief and Brett Primrose (West Sabine HS) finished second with 8.38 pounds.

Wendell Bond (Burlson) topped the Individual Division with nine fish totaling 18.91 pounds. Wendell, who has previously won several other State Championships in the Team and Adult/Girl Divisions, was followed in second place by Ricky Blake (Lufkin) with only 4 fish weighing 11.88 pounds.

Phil Marks and John Barns (both of Dallas) were sitting well back in sixth place with 12.47 pounds on Saturday, but surged with a 22.97 pound Sunday stringer to top the Team Division with 35.44 pounds. They were followed in second place by the Jacksonville High School duo that won the Student Team competition, Devon Harrison and Brandon Lavender. The pair rolled their Saturday weight over into the Team Division on Sunday and ended with 33.56 pounds.

The championship of the Couples Division was claimed for the second year in a row by Chris and Kristina Baggett (Dayton) with a two-day total of 33.15 pounds. Mike and Jackie Murski (Meridian) also matched their prior year's second place finish with 21.97 pounds. The Baggett's and Murski's were the only Couples Division teams that managed 5-fish stringers on both days.

The Senior Team Division was won by Curtis Smith (Hemphill) and James Edgerly (Six Mile) with a two-day catch of 23.16 pounds anchored by a 7.81 pounder landed by Edgerly. Norman Terry (Jacksonville) and Don Jones (Sandersville, GA) took second in the Senior Team Division with 17.09 pounds that included the Tournament's second largest bass of 8.32 pounds caught by Terry.

The Adult/Boy Division Championship was won by Terry Stevens and Lane Stevens (Hutto) with 26.68 pounds. Terry and Lane also won the event in 2015. Kenny and Weldon Sherrell (Rhome) placed second with 19.53 pounds, including the Tournament's largest bass (8.41 pounds) caught by the youngster, Weldon, on Sunday.

Top honors in the Adult/Girl Division were claimed by past Champions Mark and Natalie Wych (Huntington) with only .3 pounds after a 1 pound penalty.

Fort Worth's Westside Bass Club fielded two teams for the Bass Club Top 6 Competition. Their Team#2 took top honors with a combined weight of 55.48 pounds. Westside's Team#1 came in second with 46.86 pounds, barely edging out the 46.50 pounds accumulated by the No Frills Grill Bass Club (Tarrant County).

In other activities, three new members were inducted into the Texas State Bass Tournament Hall-of-Fame. The Hall-of-Fame was formed in 1998 by Tournament Founder Earl Golding to honor those recognized as "Legends of the State Tournament". The new inductees were Dan Davis of Winnsboro, Ruby and Allen Hendrickson of Houston, and Bobby Smith of Lufkin. A plaque in their honor will be displayed along with other State Tournament Legends at the Texas Parks & Wildlife Freshwater Fishing Center in Athens, Texas.

The Tournament's 2016 Sponsors were Strike King Lure Company, Fun-n-Sun Marine & Tackle, Skeeter Boats, No Frills Bar & Grill, and Toledo Bend Area Tourism.

The complete list of top finishers and more information about past and future Tournaments can be found at www.texasstatebass.com and on the Texas State Bass Tournament Facebook page. The Tournament Director, Sam Scroggins, can be contacted at 903-497-6887.