# Angler reels in first Jocassee victory

## Tournament trail off to fast start

**By Scott Keepfer**
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Shaun Roper lives in Bradley in rural Greenwood County, but his heart resides in the mountains.

"I've been fishing up there close to 30 years now," Roper said of Lake Jocassee. "It's my favorite lake of all. The pristine beauty of the landscape around it is what makes it special."

It became even more special in Roper's eyes last Saturday as the 40-year-old reeled in his first-ever victory in the Lake Jocassee Trout Tournament series. His 4.33-pound brown trout bested a field of 34 anglers that weighed in 16 fish.

Although Roper has plied Jocassee's clear cool depths for years, he only began competing in trout tournaments a few years ago. Last Saturday's competition was his seventh, and he'd never placed higher than fifth in a tournament.

Roper, who works at the Oconee Nuclear Station, caught the biggest trout of his life – a 7-pound, 4-ounce brown – in November of 2008. But that catch came the day before a tournament.

"That figures," Roper said. "And in this November's tournament, I didn't even catch a keeper to weigh in."

This year's tournament trail is off to a rousing start, with increased participation accompanying the increased number of catches. A total of 70 anglers have weighed in 30 fish through the first two events.

Roper's winning catch came around noon while he was trolling a Mepps spinner – a lure that's considered primarily for creek fishing for trout and bass.

"It's kind of funny – I always use spoons, but it was such a hard day I told myself that I was going to try something different on the lake that I'd never tried before," Roper said.. "So I was free-lining a rod out the back, about 100 feet behind the boat, when he hit."

The trout struck near the surface and Roper initially was convinced he'd hooked a largemouth bass.

"It just acted like one at first," Roper said. "Then when it got within sight of the boat I knew I had a good trout."

Roper's son, 19-year-old Benjamin, netted the big catch, and Roper immediately began to believe that maybe his tournament fortune was about to change.

"I put him on the scale right away and knew it was around 4½ pounds," Roper said. "At that point I knew I had at least a place (top five) in the tournament."

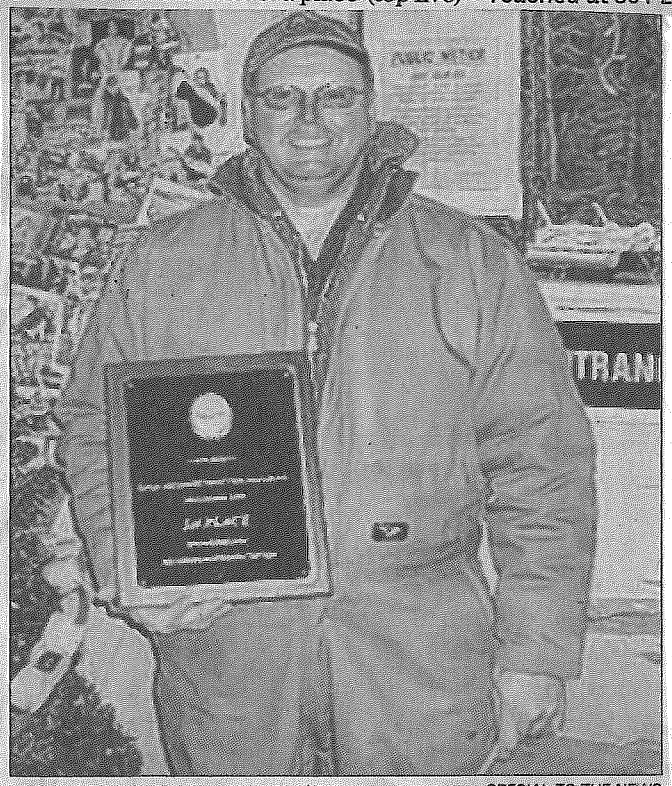
He did – his first No. 1 finish. His catch was nearly a half-pound better than runner-up Joe Owens of Easley, who landed a 3.82-pound brown. Third place went to Bryan Lee of Mauldin with a catch weighing 3.20 pounds.

Roper also moved into third place in the season-long Jimmie Orr Championship with a cumulative total of 9.33 pounds. Bubba Brunson of Spartanburg, who won the November tournament, leads the Orr competition with 10.53 while Owens is second at 9.55.

And Roper admits that he may incorporate the Mepps spinner into his Jocassee repertoire, which typically consists of spoons.

"It has changed my thinking," Roper said. "I've got a feeling I may do a bit more of that."

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SPECIAL TO THE NEWS

Shaun Roper claimed his first tournament title.

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