

OUTDOORS

Briggs reels in Jocassee winner

Angler boats trout after 8-minute fight

By Scott Keeper

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Jeff Briggs already had two Lake Jocassee trophies on the wall — 9-pound and 8.5-pound trout caught on back-to-back weekends years ago.

Now he'll have to make room for a third — a plaque commemorating his first-ever Lake Jocassee Trout Tournament victory.

Briggs reeled in a 5.57-pound brown trout last Saturday, besting longtime fishing partner Leon Baker by nearly a pound for the top spot.

"He's won tournaments there before," Briggs said of Baker. "But I never had. I'd been second or third a few times, but never first, so I guess it was about time. He (Baker) was always kidding me."

Briggs, 48, lives in Indian Trail, N.C., just east of Charlotte, where he owns his own masonry contracting business. It's 165 miles from his driveway to Devils Fork State Park at Jocassee, but Briggs says he doesn't mind making the regular trek.

"It's the closest lake around that's really got a good-quality trout fishery where you've got the potential to catch a trophy fish," Briggs said. "It has good numbers of big fish, and that's what appeals to me."

Briggs has been fishing at Jocassee for 20 years, and he and Baker have been teaming up to compete in tournaments for the past seven or eight years, he said.

Last Saturday Briggs hooked his big trout at 9:15 a.m. while trolling a live shiner. The fish came to the boat three times before Baker could net it — "he saw Leon and took off each time," Briggs said with a laugh.

When the fish was finally boat-



Jeff Briggs, left, and fishing partner Leon Baker display their first- and second-place catches, respectively, in last week's tournament at Lake Jocassee. READER SUBMITTED PHOTO

ed after an eight-minute fight, Briggs was confident he'd place in the tournament.

"I wasn't sure if it'd win," Briggs said. "A 6-pound fish won in December, and it usually takes about a 6-pounder to win the next

few tournaments, so you never know."

And this year's mild winter has altered some trout-fishing strategies and made the fishing even more unpredictable.

"The water temperature is

probably six degrees warmer than it was this time last year," Briggs said. "So I'm not doing what I typically do this time of year. I'm fishing more like I'd fish in March and April."

Baker took second place with his 4.61-pound brown trout, edging third-place Mike Brunhuber of Salem by .01 pounds. The next tournament — the fourth of six this season — is set for Feb. 18.

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OUTDOORS CALENDAR

BASS

ABA Couples Series, South Carolina Division, Feb. 18, Lake Keowee (Mile Creek). Contact: Don or Martha (864) 630-3183.

Bass Fishing League, Savannah River Division Tournaments, Feb. 11, Lake Keowee (South Cove Park), 7:15 a.m.-3:30 p.m. Contact: (270) 252-1000 or flwoutdoor.com

BOATING

42nd Annual Upstate S.C. Boat Show, Jan. 26-29, Greenville (TD Convention Center), open noon-6 p.m. on Jan. 29; \$7 adults, \$6 seniors and students, under 6 free; parking \$5. Contact: (864) 233-2562 or www.upstatesboatshow.com

U.S. Power Squadron Safe Boating Course, begins Feb. 13, Mauldin (Messiah Lutheran Church); eight-hour course covers boat handling, anchoring, finding directions, adverse conditions and using marine radio. For information, go to www.lake-hartwell.org

TROUT

Jocassee Outdoor Center Trout Tournament Trail, Feb. 18, 8 a.m.-4 p.m., Lake Jocassee; entry \$35/person, optional \$10 big fish; anglers under 16 fish free. Contact: (864) 944-9016.

Chattooga River Chapter of Trout Unlimited, monthly meeting, Feb. 7, 7:30 p.m., Clemson, SCDNR office. Contact: Brian (864) 346-4310.