Duckett primed for 'home' lake

Next weekend's Bassmaster Classic to feature two anglers from state

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For Boyd Duckett, next weekend's Bassmaster Classic is like a home game.

Not exactly a bona fide home game, mind you, but at least one on familiar turf, er, water.

And that gives Duckett at least some sense of ease as he prepares to join 50 of the world's top professional bass fishermen at Lay Lake, Ala., for the Super Bowl of Bass Fishing.

"I'll tell you where it gives you confidence – when things go south on you and you have to scramble," Duckett said last week. "Here, I know where to scramble. That's the home field advantage."

Duckett lives about two hours from Lay Lake, which is about a half-hour south of Birmingham, but says he's spent a couple hundred days fishing the lake over the past 20 years or so.

Three of his best days came during the 2007 Classic, when he edged Skeet Reese by six ounces and became the first angler ever to win the event in his home state.

A Classic fixture since, Duckett finished 33rd at Lake Hartwell in 2007 despite weighing in the second-biggest catch of the tournament on the second day. It was his first-day catch – one bass weighing 1 pound, 12 ounces – that doomed him.

"(Kevin) VanDam told me once that you can't win the Classic the first day, but you can definitely lose it the first day, and that's so true," Duckett said.

Despite that disappointment at Hartwell, Duckett loves the Upstate's most popular reservoir and would like to get the opportunity to test its waters again.

"I hope the Classic comes back to Hartwell," Duckett said. "I'd like another shot at it. It's a good venue, and you can catch them there whether it's cold or not. If nothing else, I'd like to see another regular tour event there."

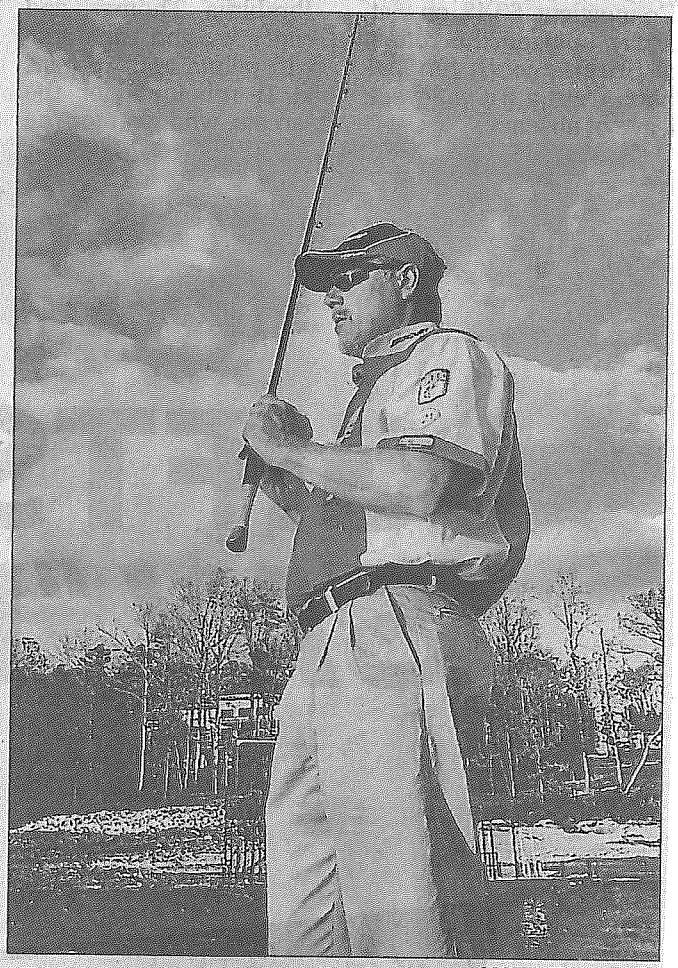
Last year at Louisiana's Red River, Duckett flirted with victory again. He led after the first day before falling off while chasing big bites on the final day. He wound up 12th but satisfied with his strategy.

"I could've finished sixth, but to me there's no difference between sixth and 46th," Duckett said.

Going for broke is a Classic strategy that is befitting the event. Much like the Super Bowl, few folks remember the runner-up.

"It's really the only tournament of the year that we fish like that," Duckett said. "A lot of the new guys come in and they want to be competitive, but that only lasts for a year or two, then they realize they're just another sap in the crowd."

Now Duckett has focused his attention back on his "home" water, a river-run reservoir rife with current and some backwater creeks and sloughs. Lay Lake has plenty of largemouth bass, to be sure, but large spotted bass are a big part of the catch. When Duckett won in 2007, he weighed in at least "two or three spots" each day.



SCOTT KEEPFER / Staff

Boyd Duckett prepares for the 2008 Bassmaster Classic that was held at Lake Hartwell.

Although the extended forecast indicates temperatures may rise to the mid- to upper-50s come tournament time, anglers were greeted by a steady snowfall on the first day of practice last Friday, and water temperatures were in the low 40s.

That suits Duckett just fine.

"The tougher the better," he said. "If it's cold and nasty and the guys struggle in practice, it's hard for them to build a pattern. I would rather it be just as tough as it can be on them."

The 51-angler field includes two South Carolinians – Donalds' Casey Ashley, who's competing in his third consecutive Classic, and Lake Wylie's Jason Quinn, who's competing in his fifth.

Either is capable of winning, Duckett said, but he's more concerned about the local guys such as Russ Lane and Matt Herren, who fish Lay Lake on a regular basis.

Duckett also expects a

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strong challenge from Reese and Gary Klein and Tommy Biffle and other competitors who are "good flipping, cold-weather fishermen."

"And you can never take VanDam out of it," Duckett said.

For most anglers, the Classic is much like a big football game – on the road.

"Regardless of how strong you are, the Classic is such a big event that you get butterflies in the stomach before that whistle blows," Duckett said. "You don't doubt yourself, but it's like an away game in that there's not that confidence level you'd like to have. But I'm confident. Heck, I beat everybody there before, and I know that and they know that."

2010 Bassmaster Classic Field

Jody Adkins, North Canton, Ohio; Casey Ashley, Donalds; Scott Ashmore, Broken Arrow, Okla.; Tommy Biffle, Wagoner, Okla.; Denny Brauer, Camdenton, Mo.; Stephen Browning, Hot Springs, Ark.; Terry Butcher, Talala, Okla.; Brent Chapman, Lake Quivira, Kan.; Cliff Crochet, Pierre Part, La.; Boyd Duckett, Demopolis, Ala.; Todd Faircloth, Jasper, Texas; Jami Fralick, Martin, S.D.; Jeff Freeman, Max Meadows, Va.; Shaw Grigsby, Gainesville, Fla.; Greg Hackney, Gonzales, La.; Matt Herren, Trussville, Ala.; Don Hogue, Pasco, Wash.; Randy Howell, Springville, Ala.; Michael Iaconelli, Runnemede, N.J.; Alton Jones, Waco, Texas; Kelly Jordon, Mineola, Texas; Steve Kennedy, Auburn, Ala.; Kotaro Kiriyama, Moody, Ala.

Gary Klein, Weatherford, Texas; Jeff Kriet, Ardmore, Okla.; Bobby Lane, Lakeland, Fla.; Russ Lane, Prattville, Ala.; Brent Long, Cornelius, N.C.; Aaron Martens, Leeds, Ala.; Pam Martin-Wells, Bainbridge, Ga.; Billy McCaghren, Mayflower, Ark.; Mike McClelland, Bella Vista, Ark.; Mark Menendez, Paducah, Ky.; John Murray, Phoenix; James Niggemeyer, Van, Texas; Takahiro Omori, Emory, Texas; Cliff Pace, Petal, Miss.; Randy Phillips, Oxford, Mass.; Jason Quinn, Lake Wylie; Skeet Reese, Auburn, Calif.; Dean Rojas, Lake Havasu, Ariz.; Frank Scalish, Cleveland Heights, Ohio; Bryan Schmidt, Olney, Texas; Terry Scroggins, San Mateo, Fla.; Kevin Short, Mayflower, Ark.; Gerald Swindle, Warrior, Ala.; Mark Tucker, St. Louis; Kevin VanDam, Kalamazoo, Mich.; Byron Velvick, Del Rio, Texas; Darrell West, Drasco, Ark.; Kevin Wirth, Crestwood, Ky.

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