Extreme cold to delay Bassmaster start

BY PHILLIP GENTRY
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During the day Thursday, Bassmaster Classic anglers and officials were putting on brave faces and keeping stiff upper lips when faced with the prospect of the record-low temperatures forecasted for the pre-dawn hours this morning.

The anglers and promoters got a bit of reprieve from the weather when the announcement was made that, upon recommendation by public safety officials in Anderson County, the start of the first day of the event will be delayed until after sunrise.

All activities at Green Pond Event Facility, including boat launching, will be delayed until after daylight — approximately 7 a.m. — which will delay the takeoff until approximately 8:30 a.m. Delaying the start will cut into the amount of time the anglers will have to fish during the first round of competition, but it will still allow approximately six and a half hours of fishing time before heading to the official weigh-in being conducted at Bon Secours Wellness Arena in Greenville.

"So far, my gameplan was to fish some shallow structure I found and then run-and-gun as I needed," said Chris Lane from Guntersville, Ala. "I wasn't really planning on getting a whole lot accomplished until the sun got

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Cold temperatures will delay the start of the first day of the Bassmaster Classic, as anglers will launch at approximately 8:30 a.m. instead of the scheduled 7 a.m. start.

BASSMASTER: Classic kicks off this morning

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up anyway."

Temperature-wise, the delayed start means anglers will not have to brave 13-degree temperatures with a wind-chill factor of 6 degrees to a balmy 15 degrees and wind chill of 7. Officials cited the precautions were necessary in the event of an emergency that there would be enough light to respond efficiently.

The unseasonably cold weather for South Carolina has come as a surprise to even some veteran anglers who have been on the professional tournament trail. 2014 Angler of The Year Greg Hackney from Gonzales, La., admitted Lake Hartwell's conditions will be the challenging, but not overwhelming.

"I've been fishing as a pro for 15 years, and this will be the coldest tournament I've ever fished in, ever," Hackney said. "You would think that mentally, it would take guys out of the game, but not this bunch. It is the Bassmaster Classic. It could hail stones out there, and this bunch of guys will still be on fire out there."

Local favorite Casey Ashley from Hodges had been wishing for inclement weather in the days leading up to the event, but when faced with the extreme cold, admitted he might get a little more than he'd asked for.

"This is what I wanted and how I wanted it, but it still going to be tough," he said. "This is going to make it a mental game for everyone, and that will be very interesting to see how various anglers deal with the cold."

"The fish are still going to bite," added Jacob Powriznik from Prince George, Va. "We're not that far off from the springtime conditions, and despite the cold air, those fish are feeling the spring coming up, and I think you'll see some really good bags of fish.

"I think they will be deep, but even this amount of cold won't do all that much to a fish that's down 20 to 30 feet underwater."

Though today will be sunny, the high temperature will reach only 34 degrees before the anglers have to return to the launch site. Saturday's conditions look to improve by nearly 10 degrees with light winds, while the forecast for Sunday includes mid-day highs in the 50s with an 80 percent chance of rain.

PHILLIP GENTRY is the host of "Upstate Outdoors," a broadcast from noon to 2 p.m. Saturdays on WORD 106.3 FM. This week, "Upstate Outdoors" will be broadcasting live from the Bassmaster Classic Expo at the TD Convention Center on Saturday. Contact Gentry at pgentry6@bellsouth.net.