OUTDOORS REPORT

Rhinehart rides hot start to Bass League victory at Lake Keowee

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PELZER — Mick Rhinehart had a feeling it could be a special day when he caught two bass on his first four casts of the day, including an 8-pound, 9-ounce largemouth.

"It was pretty awesome," Rhinehart said. "It was a pretty good way to start."

And it led to a pretty good finish.

Rhinehart weighed in a limit of five bass that tipped the scales at 16 pounds, 7 ounces, pushing to him to a convincing victory in the first Walmart Bass Fishing League Savannah River Division tournament of the season last Saturday at Lake Keowee.

Rhinehart won by 3 pounds, 2 ounces over runner-up Randy Childers of Anderson and pocketed $4,315 for his efforts. It was his first victory in three seasons on the popular tournament trail.

"I started fishing as a little kid with my dad – we'd go for bream and catfish," said Rhinehart, a 30-year-old from Pelzer who works as a machinist for GE Aviation. "I didn't really get serious about (competitive) bass fishing until I was about 25. That's when I bought my boat."

Four years ago, Rhinehart dipped his rod in competitive waters as a co-angler on the BFL circuit. He finished in the Top 40 and qualified for the regional tournament, but has been unable to earn a regional berth since moving up to the boater division three years ago.

His best previous finish was a 10th-place showing at Lake Russell two years ago.

But last Saturday at Lake Keowee, everything fell into place – quickly.

Rhinehart had four keeper bass in the boat about half an hour into the day, with all of them falling for one of his homemade Qwik 8 baits – a five-arm umbrella rig with a swimbait attached to each arm.



Mick Rhinehart hoists two of his tournament-winning bass, including an 8-pound, 9-ounce largemouth, left, that ranks as the best of his career. /SUBMITTED PHOTO

"It's like a spinnerbait on steroids," Rhinehart said. "It was a pretty neat feeling to see it work for me like that."

Fishing in about four feet of water along a bank, Rhinehart caught a 2-pound largemouth on his second cast, then wrested the 8-pound, 9-ounce bass from the same spot on his fourth cast.

It was the biggest bass of his career, surpassing an 8-pounder he caught years ago at Lake Secession. That qualifies as a memorable catch at any lake, but particularly at Keowee.

"I like Keowee, but it's not typically my better lake," Rhinehart said. "My home lake is Hartwell."

Which bodes well for the remainder of the season.

"My best lakes are coming up," Rhinehart said. "Historically I've done better at Hartwell and Russell.

"I feel like I can compete with anywhere, but it's fishing, so anything can happen."

Savannah River Division anglers will converge on Lake Hartwell for tournaments on March 15 and May 3 while Lake Russell is on the schedule for an April 5 event.