OUTDOORS

Rice reels in a win out of Lake Keowee

By Scott Keepfer
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Bass fisherman Adam Rice says he always tries to underestimate the weight of his catch.

"I'd rather be surprised than disappointed," Rice said.

Rice was plenty surprised last Saturday in the Wal-Mart Bass Fishing League Savannah River Division Tournament at Lake Keowee, and the result was his first-ever BFL victory and a nice paycheck.

"I thought I had a strong 12 pounds when I headed in," Rice said.

When his five-bass limit tipped the scales, he had 15 pounds, 12 ounces – good enough to tie Darren Ashley of Calhoun Falls for the top spot in the 200-boater field.

Rice, a Belton native who lives near Anderson, has been competing on the BFL circuit for about five years, with a best finish of 14th place prior to last weekend. And the 26-year-old registered nurse didn't have high hopes for the 2013 season opener.

"Keowee is usually tough for me," said Rice, whose best previous finish was 14th place last year at Clarks Hill. "So it's a big deal to get off to a good start. In the past I've also struggled in February, so it's nice to start out like this."

Rice, who is bidding for a third consecutive berth in the BFL Regional Championship, used a shaky head worm and jig to land nine keeper bass and eventually weighed in three largemouths and two spotted bass.

Ashley, 46, continued his good fortune fishing an Alabama rig. Ashley won the BFL Wild-Card event last October, earning a berth in the 2013 All-American this June in Chattanooga, Tenn., by using an Alabama rig, and the same bait came through once again at Keowee.

He caught 20 bass – one spot and 19 largemouths. All of his "weigh-in fish" were largemouths.

"Three different times I had two bass on at one time," Ashley said. "And one time a third bass tried to hit the rig right at the boat."

Ashley, whose previous best finish in a BLF regular-season event was a second place at Lake Hartwell a few years ago, has nine Top 10 finishes on the circuit, but this was the first time he'd ever been fit to be tied.

"You don't see many ties – especially for first place," Ashley said.

Ashley also received a $2,000 Ranger Cup bonus and totaled $6,347 in winnings while Rice pocketed $4,347.

Liberty's Greg Glouse, who won the season-opening event at Keowee last year, finished fourth with 13-8 while Easley's Joe Anders took fifth with 13-2.

Dustin Shirley of Royston Ga., won the co-angler division with 12-11. Kevin Landreth of Seneca and David Smith of Anderson tied for fourth place with 9-6.