

Improving Survival of Tournament Bass

No one likes to think that the bass that looked ok when we released it, died a day or two later from the shock of the tournament experience. Studies show that in Oregon and Idaho between 10% to 20% die from this delayed mortality. As water temperatures increase the survival rates of bass caught in tournaments decreases. Here are some tips that will reduce the numbers of bass lost.

While Fishing:

- Land fish quickly, using a net if allowed. Avoid tiring fish to exhaustion.
- Handle fish quickly, properly, avoid dropping them on hot fiberglass or carpet.
- Use pliers to remove hooks.
- Use a recirculating livewell with backup aeration and a minimum 10-gallon volume.
- Fill your livewell early at the first fishing spot. It is the coolest water of the day.
- Set you system to continuous aeration, or recirculation if good quality water is available.
- Use catch and release chemicals when recirculating water in livewell.
- Keep livewell 5-10° below lake temperature, 1/2 block of ice cools 15 gallons 3 hours.
- Add 1/3-cup salt per 5 gallons of water when water temperature exceeds 85°.
- Studies have shown removing dead fish immediately to be critical for other fish.
- Wet down the carpet on the livewell lid to cool the temperature inside.
- Deflate any deep-caught fish as soon as they start to float in the livewell.

At the Weigh-in (and while waiting):

- Fill fish bag one third to half full of water to carry fish to weigh-in.
- No more than 10 pounds of fish per bag.
- No more than 6 anglers (3 boats) waiting to weigh at a time.
- Minimize the time the fish are in a bag without aeration, the oxygen is exhausted quickly.
- Handle fish quickly, properly, avoid tiring the fish out; use a good livewell net if allowed.
- Cool water barrels with a block of ice when water temperatures reach 80 degrees or more.

Releasing your fish:

- Fish & Game tournament rules require releasing fish at least 1 mile from the ramp.
- Pick a location where good quality water is available: cool, clean, and out of traffic areas.
- Don't release fish in any area with high bank fishing pressure.
- A good rule of thumb for selecting a location is release fish only where you caught fish. If an area won't support fish, they won't be there in the first place.
- Handle fish quickly and properly. Avoid tiring the fish out; use a good quality livewell release net if allowed.
- Watch to make sure no released fish float and still need deflating.