



Beginners Guide to Kayak Fishing Tournaments

By Bill Durboraw

The sport of kayak fishing has been exploding in popularity across the country. No longer are anglers left with the only options of fishing from the bank or the hassle and expense of boat ownership. With this increasing growth of the sport, the concept of kayak fishing tournaments has continued the same explosion in growth and popularity. The low cost and other added benefits of fishing from a kayak has attracted anglers of all skill levels to the sport. More importantly, there has been a big influx of people that are not only new to kayak fishing but are also new to the sport of fishing in general. I could talk for hours about how much I love this sport and about all the benefits that that piece of floating plastic provides but instead I want to share with you why I think all kayak anglers should give tournaments a try and I'm also going to help you with everything you need to know to get started. To do this I'm going to break this guide into 4 parts so it is simple and easy to follow. In Part 1 I'm going to discuss the benefits of fishing kayak tournaments and what you can expect from them. Part 2 I will share some tips about fishing gear. Part 3 will cover tournament prep. Part 4 will cover safety and CPR (Catch, Photo, Release).

PART 1- Why you should try tournaments

When it comes to kayak tournament fishing there are two statements that I hear most often from people that have never tried it: "I just want to fish for the fun of it" and "I'm not good enough to fish tournaments, I just enjoy fishing". Little do these people know, these statements are exactly why they should try tournaments, especially with a grass roots type organization like Kayak Anglers. Kayak Anglers is a multi-regional club with chapters located in Western PA, Laurel Highlands PA, Central PA, Eastern PA, and Central NY. Each chapter has tournaments throughout their respected region but no matter what chapter you would consider your "home" region you are welcome to fish events in any region you want.

The best reason I can give you to fish KA tournaments is the people. Everyone is very friendly and welcoming. It's almost like one big family that shares together in their passion of fishing. The events are geared more toward being fun with a little friendly competition thrown in. The best way to describe it would be a bunch of friends getting together to fish with some prizes awarded at the end. Through these events you'll find people that are always looking for someone to fish with. I don't know about you but I don't think there's such a thing as having too many fishing buddies. Making new friends is great way to get out on some other bodies of water that you might not have thought of exploring before.

You'll find anglers of all different skill levels at these tournaments. However, what you won't find is any kind of intimidation. You'll be surprised just how much people are willing to share info and help others out. Many times I've even seen guys give other guys baits during a tournament to help them out. That's the kind of thing that is unheard of in

your typical tournament setting but is the norm with a group like KA. Beginners will have the opportunity to learn a lot from some of the more experienced anglers. Most guys will willingly share with you some tips and info to help you grow as an angler. No matter if you're someone that only wants to fish for fun or not, I think everyone wants to improve as an angler and KA tournaments are a great tool to do just that.

KA is all about camaraderie and that will become evident immediately upon arriving at one of the events. I hope you'll give it a try and join in on the brotherhood. I promise you won't be disappointed. Remember, even if you're not catching, there's always the opportunity for learning.





Part 2- Tournament Fishing Gear

When it comes to starting out in tournaments the key with your gear is to keep it simple and stick with what you're confident in. The biggest mistake I see people making in tournaments is trying new baits, techniques, or gear. Save anything "new" for your non-tournament fishing days. Instead only use tackle and gear that you are comfortable and have experience with. I can't stress enough how important confidence is whether it's in a bait, technique, or gear. It's a x-factor that I think too many people overlook but I think is more responsible for catching fish than anything else.

I've seen guys fishing tournaments with anywhere from one rod/reel combo all the way up to eleven or more. A tournament isn't won by who has the most or best gear, it's your ability to use them. So only take what you have confidence in using. Ideally, I think three combos are the way to go when you are new to tournament fishing. With three combos you can cover the three different water columns without having to re-tie. The first combo will be dedicated to a top water bait. Combo two will be dedicated to something that works through the middle depth range. Your last combo will be a bait for working on the bottom. These 3 combos will work for any body of water you're fishing and almost every part of the season. As far as spinning and bait casting setups, again it's about what you are comfortable using. You don't want to spend your tournament day picking out back lashes, so be proficient with a bait caster before using it during a tournament.

Tackle can be overwhelming if you think about it too much. There's just so much out there that it can literally make your head spin. To keep it simple during a tournament, again just focus on the three different water columns. Here's some examples:

Top Column- buzzbait, Pop-R, Torpedo, Zara Spook, etc

Middle Column- spinnerbait, crankbait, swimbait, jerkbait, etc

Bottom Column- jig, worms, tubes, etc

My three favorite baits to use are a buzzbait, spinnerbait, and a tube. I have the most confidence in these and I know I can go to any body of water and catch fish with them. Find a bait that you have that same confidence in for each water

column and stick with that on tournament day. Spend your non-tournament fishing days trying out new baits and techniques until you develop confidence in them and then add them to your tournament arsenal.

Now that you have your bait choices narrowed down lets discuss colors. Again, keep it simple. For topwaters and middle of the column baits you're mimicking baitfish, so stick with a natural color that looks like an available forage. In muddy water use dark or bright colors that will stand out more. For your bottom baits you can't go wrong with green pumpkin or black for muddy water.

When it comes to how much tackle you should bring with you on tournament day, again keep it simple. One bait binder/bag for soft plastics, one box of hardbaits, and one box of terminal tackle. With these you'll have everything you need for a day out on the water and be well organized as well.

Simplifying your gear and tackle with these tips will make for an easier and more pleasant tournament experience. By keeping it simple you'll get the most out of your tournament time and catch some fish in the process. Remember it's all about having fun and learning.



Part 3- Tournament Prep/Day

If you have the time to pre-fish a tournament location that's great. It will allow you the opportunity to develop a pattern and give yourself a little knowledge going into tournament day. However, if you don't have the time, don't stress it. There are things you can do from home to help you prepare. A few days before the tournament start doing a little research. Like everything, keep it simple and don't over think things.

Start by looking at weather reports so you know what clothing articles you'll need. Check wind speeds and directions as they can play a factor in some of the areas you plan to fish. Wind can be a difficult element when fishing from a kayak and is often not taken into consideration beforehand. Pay attention to cold and warm fronts to help you narrow down your pattern choices as well.

Look at maps of the body of water you'll be on. Google maps and Google Earth are some great tools at your disposal, especially when a lot of bodies of water don't have topo fishing maps. Use those maps to check the available launch locations as many times more than one launch is a loud to be used. Also use these maps to figure out possible fishing locations. You can zoom in and identify cover/structure, and just the overall layout of the body of water.

Check online for local fishing reports if there are any available. Sometimes you can find some info on fishing forums too. I will caution you about online forums though. They are not always a reliable source because some people like to give dis-information. Fellow kayak anglers are usually a very good source for info. We tend to be a brotherhood and look out for each other. Don't hesitate to ask a fellow angler that will be competing in the tournament as well. Most will be willing to point you in the right direction at least.

Read through the tournament rules and make sure you understand all of them. If you have any questions contact the tournament director. Their name and phone number is always listed on the tournament page on the Kayak Fishing Series website for each event.

The day before the tournament make sure all of your gear and tackle is packed and ready. You don't want to be rushing around the morning of getting stuff ready. You're liable to leave something behind and start stressing. The key here is to be stress free the day of, remember this is supposed to be stress free fun. Try to get a good night sleep. I can tell you from experience that some of my worst fishing days were caused by lack of sleep. Lack of sleep leads to poor decisions on the water and a lack of focus. Eat a good breakfast and bring some snacks and plenty of water with you on the yak. Make sure to keep yourself hydrated throughout the day. I even go so far as setting an alarm on my phone for every hour as a reminder to chug a bottle of water during the hotter days of the year. Take a few minutes throughout the day to have some food. If things are going tough and you're starting to get frustrated, that's a great time to take a break and eat something. This will allow you to decompress and regain your focus. Make sure to always carry sunblock with you. It doesn't take very long to burn when you're out in the open on the water.

The biggest thing is to go out there and just have fun. Enjoy the camaraderie with the fellow anglers. Don't be afraid to ask for help or some tips. You'll be surprised just how willing most people are to lend a helping hand. We all want to see everyone catch fish and enjoy their self. Make some connections with people. Plan some fishing outings with a group. This is a good way to learn and grow as an angler.

Part 4- Safety and CPR

The goal of fishing is always to catch fish. However, there's an overlooked goal that should always take priority and that's returning home safe. No fish and I mean NO FISH is worth jeopardizing your safety and wellbeing. Always wear your PFD while out on the water. I highly recommend a PFD made specifically for kayak fishing. They are well vented for those hot summer days, have plenty pockets for gear storage, are lightweight, they give you plenty of range of motion for paddling, and they don't require any kind of inflation cartridges or manual pull cord operation. All KA tournaments require you to wear a PFD but it's also a good practice to follow anytime you're out on the water. Make sure you follow all state and tournament laws/rules when it comes to kayak safety measures. Have a whistle attached to your PFD and some form of light if out on the water before or after day light hours. Other than these things mentioned, just use sound judgement when out on the water. Water can be an unforgiving force and turn on you in a second. Always respect it and never put yourself in harm's way.

There is a great video tutorial located on the KA website discussing what CPR is. Watch it several times so you have complete understanding of it. The best advice I can give you is to practice it before hand on your non-tournament fishing days. The goal is to be as efficient at it as you can be. You want the time between catch and release to be as minimal as possible while accomplishing the task of getting the photo right. Practice makes perfect when it comes to this task. Always leave the fish in a net or attached to fish grips in the water when it's not actually being photographed on the hawk trough. The great thing about CPR is that it puts a very minimal amount of stress on the fish and allows them to be safely released in a very short period of time.

I hope this guide has been useful and helps lead to a positive tournament experience. I'm sure once you experience a KA event you'll be instantly hooked and will be counting down the days till the next tournament. I hope you enjoy your time with KA and we all look forward to seeing you out on the water.

