January 8, 2017

The 2017 Perch Assault Tournament series got off to a big start Saturday with sixty teams signed up to fish the first event of the twelfth year of the series. Advertised as “The HOTTEST tournament on ice”, the slogan certainly refers to the excitement and passion that surrounds the event, because at a negative sixteen degrees at the shotgun start, it clearly does NOT describe the weather!

Lower Stillwater Lake in Olney, MT is known as one of the first lakes in NW Montana to freeze every year, so we like to host the opening event here every few years. The area does tend to get quite a bit of snow as well, so sometimes the tradeoff is good ice, but with heavy, slushy snow on top, as was the case again this year, in the week or so leading up to the event. Thankfully, a deep cold snap settled in the valley the week before the event, with nigh time temperatures dipping well into the negative teens for the 3 nights before the Saturday event and most of the trouble spots on the lake firmed right up, although you could still find some heavy slush if you veered too far off the travelled paths.

While parking got a little tricky for the final 20 teams or so, all the contestants did a great job of staying calm and collected, and the inspections, briefing and shotgun start all went off like clockwork, with only one machine not getting off the line for the eight o’clock start. As the machines and the walkers slowly made their way out towards the fishing grounds, it was obvious that it was going to be a clear, sunny, high barometric pressure day of fishing.

Many teams picked out a spot, set up their shacks, turned on the heaters and stayed put all day. Others were on the move every half hour or so, trying to chase the hottest bite for the first two hours. Once the sun was up and shining on the ice and with no wind at all, it was actually a very nice day on the lake and fish started coming through the holes and getting put in the buckets. Tournament rules specify ALL Perch have to be alive at the weigh in, and temperatures like on Saturday can make that a little difficult, but all the anglers did what they had to do to keep them alive for the six hour event.

As usual, the competition in this event was very tight, with #1.16 pounds separating the top ten teams, and only 3/100ths of a pound separating first and second place! The big fish of the day, at #1.20, was caught very early, and was one of only two entered by that team, but was actually worth more money than the winning bag of ten fish! No complaints there!

As usual, our sponsors came through with some amazing prizes, all of which are awarded via random drawing. Tony Corbett walked away with a Clam Vista ice house, and Dylon Hoff won the Clam Edge ice suit. In fact, at the final event of 2016, Tony also won the Vexilar Fish Scout camera system, so Tony continues to build his ice fishing arsenal thanks to the Perch Assault! Dozens and dozens of other prizes included rod and reel combos, jig boxes, gloves, hats, lures, baits and towels provided by HT Enterprises, Clam, Rose Creek, Akara, Polar Fire, Vexilar, Flathead Bait, Pete’s Tackle and Big Jons Big Rods. It’s not too early to sign up for our next event, February 4th at Lake Mary Ronan. Entries can be done online at [www.perchasault.com](http://www.perchasault.com) or at Snappy Sport Senter in Kalispell. Thanks to ALL the Perch Assault anglers and friends who have kept these events fresh and exciting for TWELVE years and counting, you ARE the Perch Assault!