



The IGFTO Observer

A newsletter for International Game Fish Tournament Observers

Volume 5

Edition 2



IGFTO Observers are busy witnessing record numbers of billfish releases in 2016

Observing Today ... Conserving for Tomorrow



IGFTO Observer Witnesses Surprising Release

Story by IGFTO Observer Ron Teke
Los Suenos, Costa Rica - I was one of 15 IGFTO Observers at the third leg of the Los Suenos Triple Crown Tournament in Costa Rica.

Day three started out slow but by afternoon many boats had moved and found the hot-spot. My boat for that day was the Sea Fix. They were short handed with only 3 of the 5 anglers onboard. By 11 am, they had only three sailfish released. They made the move and released 20 more sailfish before the call of "lines out". Even with only three anglers they caught two quadruples.

On their first quad hook-up anglers were dancing back and forth, up and down trying to stay straight on their fish. Low-and-behold a rod is pulled out of an angler's hand. Without a missed beat the angler throws off his hat and jumps over the transom for the rod/line.

I say to myself "no way will he come back with anything." Well...the angler pops back up with the yellow line over his shoulder. He climbs in unassisted with no one else touching the line or rod and fights this fish successfully to a legal release. I say to myself "Did I really just witness this?"

One could not have asked for a more exciting finish of the third leg of the Los Sueños Signature Triple Crown tournament. With this amount of fish anything was possible until the very end of the competition.

All said and done Agitator dominated winning First Place of the Third Leg and was crowned Series Champion. Pelese having an incredible come back after Day One took second place and Sea Angel took Third Place. A total of 1,855 billfish were release during the Third Leg of the Series. Overall during the 9 days of competition 6, 570 billfish were released – 832 more than 2015.

During the first three months of 2016, International Game Fish Tournament Observers participated in five tournaments in Florida, the Dominican Republic and Costa Rica, where record numbers of 6,747 billfish were caught and released according to IGFA and tournament rules.

Without a doubt, the three tournaments in Costa Rica were the busiest as 6,547 sailfish and 23 marlin were released in the nine fishing days of the Los Suenos Signature Triple Crown Tournaments in January, February and March.

"The numbers of billfish releases IGFTO Observers are witnessing in Costa Rica are insane. Records are being broken each year," said IGFTO Director Steve Hargett. "IGFTO Observer participation in all tournaments regardless of release numbers, number of boats or venue is equally important to conserving this valuable resource and ensuring compliance with IGFA and tournament rules."

Already this year, IGFTO observers are on target to surpass last year's releases of 7,127 billfish in 15 tournaments throughout Central America, US Virgin Islands, the Caribbean and Florida.

IGFTO Observers Discuss Rules before the start of Every Billfish Tournament



Photo by Richard Gibson

IGFTO Observer Coordinator Nick Noonan and Tournament Director Rick Alvarez discuss rules with observers during the International Blue Marlin Classic at Casa de Campo, DR. (Story Page 2)

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Observers Meetings: “Vital to the integrity” of billfish tournaments

Before IGFTO observers step onboard boats in international billfish tournaments, they meet to review IGFA and specific tournament rules to assure each competing boat, angler and mate follows the same protocol.

“In the case of our tournaments, observers meetings are vital to the integrity of the events,” said Rick Alvarez, director of several tournaments in the Dominican Republic and a staunch advocate for using observers.

“The importance of the observers eyes and ears of the tournament judges is indispensable and that is why, in our case, rules are reviewed separately with the observers before every tournament.”

All tournaments use basic International Game Fish Association (IGFA) rules, but most tournaments incorporate some rules specific to their tournament, such as numbers of anglers, rotations of anglers, leader strengths and lengths, etc.

“Understanding these nuances are critical to observer performance,” said IGFTO President Steve Hargett. “As IGFTO grows and many observers may be attending a tournament for the first time, brief meetings are necessary to ensure everyone is on the same page.”

Observers are reminded at these meetings that they are not there to disqualify fish, but to report any irregularities to the tournament rules committee in writing.

“The *primary* responsibility of observers, in our tournaments, is to prevent rule infractions,” said Alvarez, who is a lifetime member of IGFTO and serves as an observer in tournaments other than those he directs each year. “It is also important that they be knowledgeable in species identification and serve as time keepers according to GPS time, which is universal.”

Observers are encouraged to discuss rules with the anglers and mates and measure leaders after they board boats to assure all competitors are abiding by the same rules. The familiarity of specific tournament rules by observers, anglers, mates and captains helps level the competitive field for all involved.



Photo by Richard Gibson

Tournament Director Rick Alvarez and IGFTO Observer Coordinator Nick Noonan discuss rules during an observer meeting before the Casa de Campo International Billfish Classic in the Dominican Republic.



Photos by Richard Gibson

IGFTO Observer Nick Noonan checks leader lengths on the boat he is assigned before competition begins at the Casa de Campo International Billfish Classic.

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Observer Spotlight



By Rodney Hinton
IGFTO Observer

Los what, who, where, why? Those were some of the questions my wife, Penny, and I asked prior to our first visit to Los Suenos, Costa Rica. We now know why everyone calls Los Suenos, Pura Vida (Paradise). It is truly a paradise that we would have never experienced if not for IGFTO.

After our last child graduated from high school the dynamics around our house changed. Penny and I now had time for each other and opportunities to travel and make memories together. I have been fishing offshore of South Carolina for 25 years and first took my son, Asheton, when he was five years old. However, after your fishing partner of fifteen years goes off to college it becomes impossible to fish alone. I begin to think how can I still enjoy fishing and get to travel to other parts of the world on a limited budget. I began searching the web and discovered IGFTO and thought this may be a great opportunity. After receiving training by IGFA, I became an observer with IGFTO.

Now *What?* After training, I became a member of the IGFTO family. I then had to get my feet wet, literally more than I cared to during the Stuart Sailfish Club's Light Tackle Tournament in December. I told Penny let's find a warmer place for our next tournament. We had a great time in Stuart and met many very nice people; we will be going back this year.

Who? Penny doesn't care to fish however she enjoys traveling. So while many observers and their spouse are observers, this is not Penny's idea of a fun day. She would much rather enjoy a work out, massage and a good book while enjoying a tropical drink by the pool. I am too much of a multitasker (ADHD) for that kind of a day. I need action.

Where do we find relaxation and action? We decided to visit Los Suenos for the February leg of the 2016 Triple Crown. Many of the best sports fishing teams from around the world come here to compete because of the action this fishing paradise provides. By the end of the first day I had been a part of witnessing a total of 1,103 sailfish being caught and released. I was hooked.

After three days I had observed fishing techniques from three of the best teams in the world. Day one: I observed team "Tarheel", the 2015 Triple Crown Champions; Day two: I was on "Numero Uno" with the developer of Los Suenos enjoying hearing about the vision to develop the sport fishing capitol of the world; Day Three: I was blessed to observe team "Trophy Box" with an angler that has been recognized as 2015 Top Release Angler Atlantic Blue Marlin, Top Release Angler Pacific Sailfish and Top Tagging Angler Atlantic Blue Marlin. Keeping up with this action will keep the best multitasker busy.

But what about Penny, how was her day? Pura Vida! She enjoyed exercise, massage, relaxing by the pool. Yes, she was there to greet me with a big smile every afternoon and to hear about what a great and exciting day I had. We agreed this is paradise that we would return to "next year".

After arriving home and getting back to work; when I arrived at home that night I was greeted with; "I looked on the internet and the next leg of Los Suenos is next month, let's go back".

So, we did. The competition was fierce with team "Agitator" finishing at the top of the leaderboard with 8,700 points (87 sails), followed by "Pelese", "Spanish Fly", and "Sea Angel" all having 8,600 points with 86 Sailfish released. These three boats were all tied, with the tie being broken by the time of released as recorded by an OBSERVER.

Meanwhile, Penny and Asheton had been enjoying mother/son time at the pool and riding four wheelers into the mountains of the rainforest while visiting waterfalls along the way. We shared stories during the evening hours while eating supper in the great restaurants within the resort. We made many family memories and relationships.

Thanks to everyone that made this and future trips of epic proportions possible and affordable, we can't wait to see where the next IGFTO tournament takes us. Pura Vida!



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Thank you IGFTO Sponsors



Upcoming Tournaments:

International Cap Cana Billfish Shootout
Dominican Republic June 21 - 26

IX Flor de Cana International Fishing Tournament
Nicaragua Aug. 24-27

International Billfish Tournament, San Juan
Puerto Rico Sept. 12 -18

Presidential Challenge of Aruba Oct. 20-23

El Salvador International Billfish Tournament
Nov. 16-20

Stuart Light Tackle Tournament, Stuart, FL
Dec. 9 - 11

Welcome Aboard - IGFTO Members

Martin Bracamonte-Dominguez - Cancun, Mexico
Melinda Buckley - Port St. Lucie, FL
Anna Bush - Brookhaven, GA
Andrew Butler - Mattapoisett, MA
Morace Chaney - Plantation, FL
Barbara Evans - Marco Island, FL
Alexander Fritz Jr. - Vero Beach, FL
Gregg Geltz- Stuart, FL
Jeffrey Kittredge - Port St. Lucie, FL
Skip Lascell - Palm City, FL
Shari Lascell - Palm City, FL
Greg Marsolais - Del Ray Oaks, CA
Jeff Marsolais - Pollock Pines, CA
Kevin McCarthy - Chester, NJ
Andrew McLeod - Temegula, CA
Rodney Nichol - Floral City, FL
Ronald Pullman - Tavernier, FL
Steve Roshon - Stuart, FL
Mike Sampsel - Stuart, FL
Markwrich Sorel - Oranjestad, Aruba

IGFTO Membership
Applications are Available Online at www.igfto.org

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Photo by Pepper Ailor

IGFTO Observers meet after a busy day of competition during Leg III of the Los Suenos Signature Triple Crown Tournament in March 2016.

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