



Observing Today...Conserving for Tomorrow

The IGFTO Observer

A newsletter for International Game Fish Tournament Observers

Volume 8

Edition 2

Mystery Marlin - Roundscale Spearfish

Story by Art McDonald

So, you're out there – plenty of deep dark blue water – Atlantic Ocean/Caribbean Sea/Gulf of Mexico Billfish Tournament. A fish appears on the left teaser – looks like a White Marlin all lit up and angry... the teaser comes in – the angler pitches – the fish is hooked and immediately comes out of the water – straight up, like most White Marlin. You quickly note the rounded pectoral fins, the skinny body, and you call out “White Marlin!” The fish is fought, leader knot hits the rod tip, and you yell “Release – White Marlin!”

----- ARE YOU SURE???????

You've heard about the mysterious “Hatchet Marlin” – could it be a White Marlin – or could it be a Spearfish? It's an interesting, and tough question – and one tough call. Very little is known about these fish. It wasn't until 2006 that the scientific community confirmed (through genetic research) that a Roundscale Spearfish is a different species than

again, tough to call under “battle conditions” and both species are about the same size (uncommon over 80 lbs.) Here are some hints.... The Roundscale Spearfish has the abbreviated Dorsal Fin and not tapered at the end like a Blue Marlin. The Pectoral fins are sharp (much like a Blue Marlin), while the anal fin is rounded, much like a White Marlin. Roundscale Spearfish do not have “spots” on their dorsal fins like White Marlin. Also, after speaking with Jason Schratwieser, of the IGFA, the Roundscale Spearfish has “long branchiostegals (that boney frill beneath the gills)” – much longer than a White Marlin. In a White Marlin, they only go about halfway to the edge of the gill plate, but in the Roundscale, they extend much further to the edge.” As their name suggests, the Roundscale Spearfish has rounded scales (not easily seen). The operative “acid test” is the fact that the anal vent is approximately 5” forward of the anal fin.

White Marlin. One study showed that 27% of the reported White Marlin caught were Roundscale Spearfish – and samples recently taken at the White Marlin Open Tournament found that 31% of White Marlin landed were actually Roundscale Spearfish. So.... This begs the question: How do you tell the difference – and Do they count?

There are 4 identifiable species of Spearfish

- **Shortbill Spearfish**
(*Tetrapturus angustirostris*)
- **Longbill Spearfish** (*Tetrapturus pfluegeri*)
- **Mediterranean Spearfish**
(*Tetrapturus belone*)
- **Roundscale Spearfish**
(*Tetrapturus georgi*).

We'll talk about the Shortbill, Longbill, & Mediterranean Spearfishes in a subsequent article. The term "Hatchet Marlin" came in existence when crews couldn't figure out what kind of billfish it was – they thought it was some kind of mutation or hybrid of a White Marlin, but we now know a "Hatchet Marlin" is really a Roundscale Spearfish. For purposes of this narrative, we'll concentrate on the Roundscale Spearfish, as it appears most common in the Atlantic and is often confused with a White Marlin. Ok – how do you know if it's a White Marlin or a Roundscale Spearfish –



Compare the upper fish in both of these photos

The White Marlin is top, Roundscale Spearfish is bottom



White Marlin above Roundscale Spearfish – note White Marlin Dorsal fin (rounded) and pectoral fin (rounded). Roundscale Spearfish has sharper pectoral and dorsal fins. The anal opening is 4-5 inches (depending on the size of the fish) forward of the anal fin.

What does this mean to you, as an Observer? Well, we know that we cannot take them out of the water (illegal) to get a good look at their anal opening vs anal fin, nor inspect their scales. Your best bet is to try and compare their exterior characteristics and make a "judgment call." Look for the dissimilarity between the pectoral and anal fins and, if at all possible, see if there are spots on the dorsal fins. If your subject lacks spots – it's a Spearfish. A number of Tournaments are now allowing for a correctly identified Spearfish to be counted as the same points for a White Marlin. A specific inquiry should be made of Tournament Directors prior to the first fishing day of the Tournament – to avoid any confusion.

In the next issue, we'll deal with the Longbill, Shortbill, and Mediterranean Spearfishes!

IGFTO to Provide Observers for Two New Billfish Tournaments

Peninsula Papagayo Tournament

The Peninsula Papagayo Tournament was held on July 6th, 2019 out of the Marina Papagayo. This inaugural one-day tournament used eight Costa Rica based IGFTO Observers. The tournament



L to R: Neil Harris, Gustavo Jimenez, Michael Moldenhauer, Miguel Guzman, Alcides Alfaro, Daniel OBryan, David Jimenez, Ollie Bass, David Esquivel

is open to members of the Peninsula Papagayo Resort Community Master Association and invited guests. Approximately 26 billfish were released. Plans are underway to increase the number of fishing days and participating boats for this tournament.

Peninsula Papagayo is an exotic resort located in Guanacaste, a province located in the northwestern region of Costa Rica, along the coast of the Pacific Ocean. The province consists is approximately 4,000 square miles and is the most sparsely populated of all of Costa Rica's provinces.

Pescadora Billfish Championship

During a recent visit to Costa Rica, IGFTO president Steve Hargett met with the directors of the Quepos Pescadora Billfish Championship to discuss providing IGFTO observers to the second annual tournament scheduled for February 20-22, 2020.

A total of 512 billfish were released at the 2019 Pescadora Billfish Championship in Quepos,

The Pescadora Billfish Championship is truly a unique tournament. It's a billfishing event specifically for women that brings experienced and non-experienced female anglers together to compete for the title of the World's Top Lady Anglers! This tournament is a mix of hook and hand, and hook your own. Two top lady angler awards are presented, one to the female who reels in the most fish (hook & hand), and the other to the female that hooks and reels in her own fish (per IGFA rules) along with overall team awards. There is no other billfishing tournament in the world with this format that allows every skill level the ability to be compete.



The winning team Uno Mas at the Quepos First Annual Pescadora Billfish Tournament

This two fishing day tournament is held in Quepos, Costa Rica at the prestigious Marina Pez Vela. A total of 512 billfish were released in the 2019 first annual tournament, setting a record for the most fish released in a ladies tournament. More than eighty female anglers from eighteen countries, aboard twenty-two boats, fished two days to average twenty-three fish per boat.

Details regarding IGFTO observer

participation in the 2nd annual tournament will be released soon.

Bill Slaughter – A Southerner – and Damn Proud of it!

Story by Art McDonald

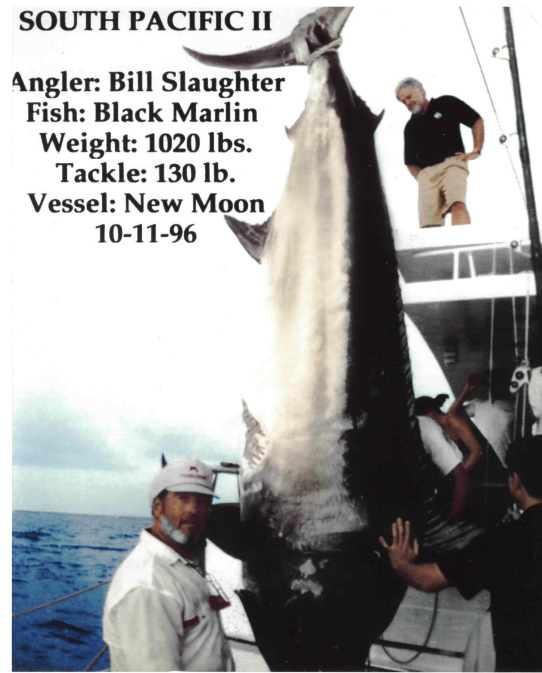


Bill Loves Aruba

Way down yonder on the Chattahoochee, it gets hotter than a hoochie coochie (Alan Jackson, circa 1993) – Chattahoochee River, La Grange, Georgia.... Hometown of Bill Slaughter, and Georgia Bulldog fan extraordinaire, where he first started fishing the farm ponds with his Mom & Dad as a tyke. Periodically, the family would travel to Florida, which young William loved because “you were always catching something,” and Bill “didn’t care what!” He started salt-water fishing in Gulfport, Mississippi – mostly Speckled Trout, Flounder, Redfish, and Cobia (they call em Ling down there)! In around 1980-81 Bill started diving and got his instructors rating about then. Also, around that time he took his first blue water trip – caught his first Dolphin (52 ½ pounds) and Wahoo (68 lbs.) – great way to break into offshore fishing - he was “definitely hooked” after that trip! He caught several Sailfish, White Marlin, but it was 11 years before he got his first Blue Marlin – a special fish because it was during a Biloxi, Mississippi Tournament! He traveled to Australia in 1996 on a diving trip to the Great Barrier Reef, but decided to go fishing one day, as it was in the Fall during Black Marlin season. He gave specific instructions to both the captain and mate that any fish he was involved with was to be released – and THEN, it HAPPENED. As fate would have it, Mrs. Jumbo jumped on one of Bill’s rigs but, as sometimes happens, died during the fight before a healthy release could be effectuated. Instead, the fish measured right and was boated – turned out it weighed

He’s been fortunate to catch/release billfish in a number of countries and seen countless more during his Observing adventures. In 2000 he was invited to fish the 50th anniversary of the Hemmingway Tournament in Cuba – and won! He’s held a Captain’s License and 5- ton Master’s License since 2001. His observing adventures began in the late 1990’s with an observing assignment in Puerto Rico, and is a charter member of IGFTO. Since that time he’s been observing in cockpits and bridges near and far (including Guatemala, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Aruba, St. Thomas, Mexico, the Dominican Republic, Turks & Caicos, and Palm Beach/Stuart). Bill is one of the most respected and requested IGFTO Observers – we’re proud to have him in our Organization. These days, Bill resides in Islamorada, FL where he’s the Governor/President of the Islamorada Moose Chapter, and, when not observing in some exotic locale, spends much of his idle time catching Mangrove Snapper, Yellowtails, and Tarpon. He’s also an excellent lobster diver!. Look for Bill on the RIP – you’ll know him by his smile, Southern accent, and be sure and have him coach you on why to bring along a tumbler in your backpack!

1,020 lbs. on a certified scale, giving Bill membership in the exclusive “Grander Club!”



Editors note: IGFTO does not support the killing or mutilation of gamefish.

YOU MAKE THE CALL

By Art McDonald



You are Observing in one of the many South Florida Sailfish Tournaments – it’s February, there’s a cold front moving in, winds are brisk, and the fishing has been good. The boat you are assigned to the first day has a lady angler – a friend of the owner, who has been invited to participate in the Tournament. You find out early that she is a, virtual, rookie with very little offshore experience, and, after leaving the dock she tells you how excited she is to catch her first Sailfish. It doesn’t take you long to realize she’s a tad wobbly in the current conditions. She has that “what did I get myself into” look on her face when the mates are

where the knot connecting the double line touches the rod-tip. She, quickly, gets a “high five” from her teammates, and, to celebrate her success, the mate bills the fish, brings it over the gunnel for a quick picture with our intrepid angler, and the fish is released after being revived. It swims away gracefully.

Question: Did any violations occur?

Answer: Yes, a violation occurred.

Inadvertent touching of the rod or line is not considered, by the IGFA, as a violation as long as the angler received no direct assistance. What is a violation,

giving her a quick lesson on kite fishing in 6' seas. Of course, as the morning progresses, she succumbs to the effects of 6' seas, diesel fumes, and a little white water over the transom. It's only a matter of time and the inevitable happens as she prays to Father Neptune to please get her on solid ground. Being the good Observer you are, you console her that "everybody gets sick eventually" – and hope she believes it! You have learned, over the years, to disregard seasick folk wishing they were dead! Eventually (even though it is not a good idea) she goes inside the cabin "to die!" Fishing was good and the remaining team members have released several sailfish – all without incident. It is later in the day, and you have not seen much of the lovely lady who looked a little green earlier in the morning, but around 3:30, with 30 minutes left until lines out, she emerges from the cabin – still looks a little wobbly. As she passes the left long outfit, it comes screaming out of the release clip and a healthy Sailfish is headed for Bimini with line peeling off the reel. The Owner yells for her to pick up the rod – which she does. "Now what do I do" she begs, and is told to just steady herself and "let him run!" The mate steadies her by holding onto her hips in order for a team member to get a fighting belt on as she struggles to stay upright. As the boat backs into the waves, she is drenched and having a hard time holding her balance. Several times she appears to fall but is caught by the mate and, more than once, the rod touches the mate briefly. The fish tires and is brought to the point

in this instance, is the fact the Sailfish was removed from the water. It is a Federal* violation to remove any billfish from the water that is not of proper size (for a Sailfish 63 inches from jaw to fork in the tail) or is not intended to be "harvested. IGFA Rules state: "The catch must not be at variance with any laws or regulations governing the species or the waters in which it was caught." This is listed under the "General Information" header in the "IGFA World Record Requirements" section of the rules. When a billfish is removed from the water, the loss of buoyancy causes immense stress on the internal organs. Scientific experimentation with White Marlin shows one in six fish with one-minute air exposure die, two of five fish exposed for three-minutes die, and four of seven fish exposed to air for 5-minutes expire. Everyone wants the "hero shot" but let's leave them in the water – for the good of the fish and to comply with Federal Law!

*National Marine Fisheries Service Recreational-fishing Atlantic Guide to "highly migratory species" including billfish: "a marlin or sailfish not harvested must be released immediately to improve its chances of survival without removing it from the water." Applies to the Atlantic Ocean.



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Welcome New Members

Three Observer Training Courses were held in April, June, and July. One in Pensacola, FL, one in Virginia Beach, VA, and one in Los Suenos, CR. Congratulations and welcome to these new IGFTO members:

Minor Navarro..... Rojas, Jaco, CR
 Michael Mata..... Las Vegas, NV
 Sergio Montealegre.. Herradura, CR
 John Wells..... Herradura, CR
 Dave Perkins..... Panama City, FL
 Chris Starling..... Lafayette, LA
 Tom Milliren..... Destin, FL
 Dave Cambron..... Pensacola, FL
 William Bank..... Carrollton, VA
 Scott Nagem..... Manassas, VA

Chris Schneider..... Virginia Bch, FL
 Linda Nolasco..... Virginia Bch, VA
 Lennie Coyner..... Charlottesville, VA
 David Walden..... Yorktown, VA
 Rick Smith..... Louisburg, NC
 Wynn Smith..... Louisburg, NC
 Mark Wallace..... Virginia Bch, VA
 James Eisenhower... Norfolk, VA
 Jorge Rivera..... Virginia Bch, VA
 Larry Regula..... Windsor, VA
 Jim Sadler..... Virginia Bch, VA

Observer Training Courses Schedule



Saturday, November 9, 2019
Delray Beach, FL

Saturday, January 25, 2020
Delray Beach, FL

Tuesday, February 18, 2020
Marina Pez Vela,
Quepos, Costa Rica

Help Fill Our Upcoming Observer Training Classes

When attendees at an Observer Training Course are asked where they heard about the IGFTO, the number one response is from current members like you. Three new courses are coming up and we're looking to you to help spread the word. Two courses will be held in the Bel Aire

We're here for you.
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New Member Benefits have been added. Log in and check them out.

Community Clubhouse at 5121 Casa Real Drive in Delray Beach, Florida. The first is scheduled for Saturday, November 9, 2019, and the second for Saturday, January 25, 2020. The course runs from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. In addition to the above a course will be held for the first time in Quepos, Costa Rica.

We need to maintain our membership numbers to meet the growing demand for IGFTO Observers.

Thank you!

IGFTO Address Change

We have a new mailing address:

**IGFTO
PO Box 7333
Gainesville, GA, 30504**



**Prevent IGFTO Communications from Accidentally being Moved to Your Spam Folder
Click Here To**

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International Game Fish Tournament Observers Inc. is a 501(c)3 tax-exempt charitable organization dedicated to the preservation and conservation of game fish worldwide. We provide trained and insured observers to authenticate the "catch and release" of billfish and game fish during international big game fish tournaments.

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