



Observing Today...Conserving for Tomorrow

The IGFTO Observer

A newsletter for International Game Fish Tournament Observers

Volume 10

Edition 2

Los Sueños 2021 Leg III Well Worth Over Doing!

By Rodney Hinton

I have often thought that anything worth doing is worth over doing. Mr. Bill Royster, the visionary founder of the Los Sueños resort, had that same thought when he created a place where men and women from around the world could catch and release numerous billfish in a single day. The third leg of the Los Sueños Triple Crown was an example of go big or go home. After COVID-19 attacked the world, the third leg of the 2020 Triple Crown was postponed. Consequently, the winning of the Triple Crown 2020

You Make The Call

By Art McDonald

You are observing in a blue marlin tournament where both natural baits and lures are allowed in the spread. The boat you have drawn is fishing lures with J hooks. The weather was a bit dicey in the morning hampering the lure action, but it has calmed down in the early afternoon. The boat is trolling 4 lures – two on outriggers and two on flat lines. During the course of the afternoon, one of the mates changes out the rig on one of the flat lines to include a bird teaser into a lure rig, attached at the top of the leader. When deployed, the teaser flops back and forth creating what appears to be a frightened fish fleeing from another (which in this case is the

also had to be postponed.

Leg III Would Decide the Winner of Two Triple Crown Tournaments

It was decided to make the Leg III of the 2021 tournament a double header. If a boat participated in the 2020 tournament, the points earned in Leg III of 2021 would also count toward the Leg III of the 2020 tournament. In addition, the point accumulated in Leg III 2021 would decide the Triple Crown winner for both 2020 and 2021. This created a strong incentive for those boats that participated in the 2020 tournament to fish Leg III of 2021.

Cheating with a “Sweet Release”

In the afternoon of March 27, tournament director Ashley Bretecher hosted an online meeting for the Captains and observers. After reviewing the rules, she discussed something that had been brought to her attention known as a “Sweet Release”. At this point, you could almost hear chairs shuffle as those online moved closer to their computers. Was this a new legal release technique not allowed for

actual lure). Assuming the leader and hook measure no more than 30’ from the swivel attaching the bird to the leader, is this legal?



Answer: Yes, this is a legal set up as long as the bird does not unfairly hamper the fighting ability of the fish. IGFA rules state: “Daisy chains, birds, floats and similar devices may only be used if they do not unfairly hamper or inhibit the normal swimming or fighting ability of the fish, thereby giving the angler or crew an unfair advantage in fighting, landing or boating the fish.” Care must be taken in leader length as the leader would commence at the point at the head of the Bird when attached to the main line (most likely by a ball-bearing swivel).

this tournament?
She said firmly that a “sweet release” was illegal, and that observers should confirm that a released fish swims off freely. A “sweet release” consists of leadering a fish alongside the boat, then wrapping the line from another rod around the bill and foul hooking the fish before cutting off the original leader. Dropping the line back into the spread there is no pressure on the rod until the angler adjusts the drag and the second rod comes tight. If the observer is not watching the release, it would appear as though another fish has been hooked.

Day 1, Uno Mas

The boats I was assigned to for each of the three fishing days of Leg III were Uno Mas, Pura Vida and Max Bet. Thanks to every one of these teams for allowing me to observe some of the best fishing in the world. On board Uno Mas, I watched as the eventual overall top angler of the 2021 Series, Maria Magalhaes, released a Blue Marlin and a sailfish. Overall, she released 5 marlin and 18 sails during the tournament earning her team 4,300 release points.

Day 2, Pura Vida

Featured Member:

Ellen Peel - A Lady on a Mission



Ellen tags a sailfish prior to release. Photo by Abbie Raymond.

Story by Art McDonald

IGFTO Honorary Member, Ellen Peel, has been president of The Billfish

Day two, on board Pura Vida I was the guest of owner Juan Carlos (JC) Gonzalez and Captain Rudy Arguedas. I enjoyed listening to their story about how a group of high school friends from Florida fished Los Sueños, dreaming of one day of buying a boat and fishing in the tournament. Captain Rudy told me that JC would say, "One day I'm going to buy a boat and you're going to be my captain". That dream came true when Mr. Gonzalez purchased the Pura Vida, a 55-foot Viking on the east coast of Florida. He called his high school friends, motored the vessel around the southern end of the Florida Keys and fished in the waters off Cuba. The interesting part of the story for me was that his dad came to the United States from Cuba with just "a nickel in his pocket". He wanted to raise a family where he was free to dream and set his own goals. What a feeling that must have been for JC to cruise past Cuba in his new 55 Viking Sportfish with his friends. He had the boat shipped to Costa Rica where he and his friends continued to make memories that will last beyond a lifetime.

This team did not like a crowd and Capt. Rudy was a master at

Foundation for 25 years. She grew up in coastal Mississippi, just blocks from the Gulf of Mexico. After college she moved to Gulf Breeze, just a stone's throw from Pensacola, Florida. She married Dr. Russell Nelson, a fish scientist and billfish advocate. She, her husband, and neighbors fished for fun, in the Pensacola Big Game Fishing Club's (PBGFC) International Tournament, and in the Gulf Breeze Optimist Club's tournament. She was bitten by the "billfish bug".

"Our Ham Sandwiches Are Riding Just Fine"

During Ellen's first PBGFC Tournament, in 1985, she fished on a 25 foot Chaparral and gained an up-close appreciation for just how fast conditions can change in the Gulf of Mexico. On the 3rd day of the International, the tournament was called off when a front came through after most boats were at least 65 miles offshore. Each boat turned and headed to the barn in 14' waves (not a misprint)! Waves crashed over boats from the New Orleans Big Game Fishing Club and Ellen recalled one captain complaining that his crew had trouble keeping their plates on the table. Ellen's captain, having no empathy for the big boats, radioed

operating the Furuno Sonar giving his team a shot at 15 fish for the day.

Day 3, Max Bet and Team Galati

Day three I was blessed to be on board the Max Bet, a 66-foot Spencer. This was a family fishing team and they were in the hunt to win. They also did not want to stay with the pack and just compete they wanted to find the fish that would win the tournament. It was a great day but luck did not come our way. Instead, Team Galati seemed to always be in the right place at the right time. Team Galati put pressure on the entire fleet winning the daily on day one. They led the 2020 and 2021 series after day two. Then, they throttled up, releasing two Blue Marlin to start the day. Team Galati won day 3, Leg III and the 2020 and 2021 Triple Crown Series. Many of us will remember this as the tournament that allowed the world to travel again and enjoy the wonders that God created for us. Thanks to the tournament staff, the boat owners, captains, and crews, and especially to the welcoming people of Costa Rica.

PURA-VIDA!

back, “Our ham sandwiches are riding just fine on the dash!”

In those early tournaments, Ellen noticed a scientist from the National Marine Fisheries Service Panama City’s lab. He spoke of the importance of tagging and releasing billfish. She listened to the scientist explain how tagging billfish and sending in tag reports could help conserve the fish, and this message resonated with her. At the time, tournament docks were stacked with dead billfish after photographs were taken of the angler, captain, mate, and the dead fish. Some tournaments begun donating the fish to food banks – some just discarded the fish!

A Master of Marine Resources Law

A few years passed, and Ellen was working for the National Park Service at Gulf Islands National Seashore in Ocean Springs, Mississippi. The experience enhanced her appreciation for marine conservation. Her son was finishing his undergraduate studies and heading into a masters’ program in environmental engineering at the University of Florida. It inspired Ellen to pursue advanced studies herself and she decided on law school at Ole Miss (University of Mississippi). Upon



Photo Caption: The fleet heads out from Los Sueños for Leg III 2021. Photo by Pepper Ailor.

Here are the IGFA rules that will disqualify a catch for your review. Numbers 10 and 11 apply to the “Sweet Release”. All the rules can be found at igfa.org.

1. Failure to comply with equipment or angling regulations.
2. The act of persons other than the angler in touching any part of the rod, reel, or line (including the double line) either bodily or with any device, from the time a fish strikes or takes the bait or lure, until the fish is either landed or released, or in giving any aid other than that allowed in the rules and regulations. If an obstacle to the passage of the line through the rod guides has to be removed from the line, then the obstacle (whether chum, rubber

graduation, she earned her master’s degree in marine resources law from the University of Washington in Seattle.

Executive Director of The Billfish Foundation

Ellen took a position with a non-profit organization in Washington, D.C. to focus on highly migratory species. She remained in that first job after law school for approximately 2 1/2 years, working in the St. Petersburg office. Because of her passion for billfish, she regularly communicated with The Billfish Foundation’s (TBF) Executive Director in Ft. Lauderdale, often advising on national regulatory issues affecting billfish. The top position at TBF became vacant and a TBF board member asked her to travel to Palm Beach to interview for the opening. The day after the interview, she received a call from Winthrop P. Rockefeller, TBF’s founder, who offered her the position of Executive Director. She said she would think about the offer. She had concerns about the TBF’s willingness to take the steps necessary to help preserve billfish. After thinking it over, she agreed to accept the position. That was 25 years ago. Thank goodness for that decision!

band, or other material) shall be held and cut free. Under no circumstances should the line be held or by anyone other than the angler during this process.

3. Resting the rod in a rod holder, on the gunwale of the boat, or any other object while playing the fish.

4. Hand lining or using a hand line or rope attached in any manner to the angler's line or leader for the purpose of holding or lifting the fish.

5. Shooting, harpooning, or lancing any fish (including sharks and halibuts) at any stage of the catch.

6. Chumming with or using as bait the flesh, blood, skin, or any part of mammals other than hair or pork rind used in lures designed for trolling or casting.

7. Using a boat or device to beach or drive a fish into shallow water in order to deprive the fish of its normal ability to swim.

8. Changing the rod or reel while the fish is being played.

9. Splicing, removing, or adding to the line while the fish is being

A Passion for Advancing Billfish Research, Responsible Management, and Conservation

During her years at TBF, Ellen advanced the organization's advocacy campaigns and expanded billfish research. She served for decades on national fishery advisory committees and received a presidential appointment as the U.S. Commissioner (negotiator) for Recreational Fishing before the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tuna (ICCAT), a regional treaty organization charged with managing highly migratory fish. Her inclusion in the international management of billfish and other highly migratory species enabled her to bring more attention to the conservation needs of billfish and their importance to the sport fishing industry. Her work has taken her around the world, from Australia to Morocco and many points in between. As Executive Director of The Billfish Foundation, she remains passionate about advancing billfish research, responsible management, and conservation.

Ellen Peel is one of the most accomplished and respected voices in the world of billfish

played.

10. Intentionally foul hooking a fish.

11. Catching a fish in a manner that the double line never leaves the rod tip.

12. Using a size or kind of bait that is illegal to possess.

13. Attaching the angler's line or leader to part of a boat or other object for the purpose of holding or lifting the fish.

14. If a fish escapes before gaffing or netting and is recaptured by any method other than as outlined in the angling rules.

15. Holding or touching an angler in a manner that assists them in fighting the fish or takes pressure off the angler. Touching or briefly holding the angler to prevent them from falling does not constitute a disqualification.

Tax Savings for Donors

conservation. There are many more marlin swimming the oceans because of her skill and dedication. IGFTO is proud to be a parallel partner with Ellen and TBF in these conservation efforts.

Industry News

It's Time to Renew Your Membership

You may recall that IGFTO member dues were waived last year under the banner "No tournaments, no dues!" Tournaments are back and so are your IGFTO dues.

All memberships run from January 1 to December 31, but our member renewal campaign starts on October 1st. We need to fund our operational expenses including seeking new tournaments, managing existing tournaments, advertising and conducting Observer Training Courses, and publishing our quarterly newsletter. Board members contribute their efforts without compensation, and pay dues just like everyone else.

Annual dues are just \$100. That amounts to just over 25 cents each

Donate a portion of your IRA required distribution tax-free

By Terry O'Neill

Many of us have reached the age of 70½. Some of us were fortunate to have put away some money in a 401(k) or other IRA tax savings plan. Now we find ourselves faced with a new task, withdrawing and deciding what to do with the required minimum distribution or RMD.

It seems that all that tax money our Uncle Sam has been saving for us was only temporary. Now he wants it back, and he wants you to take money out of your account and pay the taxes. Fortunately, there is a new additional way to save from paying a portion of those taxes.

I am sure you have heard that giving money to charity can reduce the amount of tax owed, but with the Covid relief bill, officially the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, you can save even more. It is said 'tis an ill wind that blows no one any good. Covid-19 certainly was and remains an ill wind, but keeping some tax money is good.

A Qualified Charitable

day. Your membership makes a statement about your position regarding the preservation of gamefish. Even if you choose not to participate in a tournament, you are helping to save a precious resource. You can renew online at www.igfto.org. Click on Member Login, then Renew Membership, then member \$100 and follow the remaining prompts. Or, if you prefer, mail a check to:

IGFTO
PO Box 7333
Gainesville, GA 30504-0017

Thank you for your support!

Upcoming Observer Training Courses

July 31, 2021 - OTC in Virginia Beach

The International Game Fish Tournament Observers Organization Announces a New Observer Training Course in Virginia Beach, VA. This course will be conducted in Virginia Beach just once this year. Virginia Beach, VA - The IGFTO announced a new Observer Training Course to be held on July 31, 2021, at

Distribution

Introducing the QCD or Qualified Charitable Distribution. Like the RMD, it comes directly from your IRA and counts as part of your RMD. However, it differs in that it must be made directly to a qualified tax-exempt organization; and it is not counted as part of your tax liability.

Here is an example: Your IRA sends you a notice that your RMD for the year 2021 is \$10,000. You direct your IRA to send \$6,000 directly to a qualifying organization. You must still withdraw \$4,000 by December 31, 2021, but, in 2022 when your 2021 taxes are due, you will only be taxed on the \$4,000 and not \$6,000 you gave to a qualifying organization.

IGFTO is a Qualifying Organization

You might ask what the difference is between claiming a charitable exemption and the QCD. The big difference is that the capital gains you earned on the portion you gave to the QCD are not taxable. Here is the best part of all; the IGFTO is a qualifying organization. Any

The Shack located at 712 Atlantic Avenue. The course runs from 9 a.m. until 1 p.m. Content includes IGFA international angling rules, billfish identification, observer best practices, and numerous billfish identification slides and videos.

Steve Hargett, president of the IGFTO, and a veteran of numerous billfish tournaments will conduct the course. A complimentary breakfast for attendees will be provided.

Upon completion of the course, attendees become immediately eligible to observe in world class billfish tournaments in locations such as Aruba, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Florida, and Puerto Rico. For more information and to register go to www.igfto.org.

November 13, 2021 - OTC in Fort Lauderdale

A new Observer Training Course will be held at the Holiday Inn Express near Ft. Lauderdale Airport on November 13, 2021. Registration for that course is open now as well. The hotel, located at 1500 SE 17th Causeway in Ft. Lauderdale, is just 3 miles from the airport. It offers free transportation to and from the airport and is within walking distance of numerous shops and restaurants. A

donation you make from your RMD to the IGFTO is tax-free. You should always consult your financial advisor or tax accountant to see if a QCD is right for you.

special room rate is available as long as reservations are made by October 12, 2021.

Both courses will include a thorough presentation of IGFA angling rules, billfish identification, and best practices for observers. At the conclusion of the course, attendees will be eligible to observe in billfish tournaments. Each course runs from 9 a.m. until 1:30 p.m. Register at www.igfto.org

Welcome New Members

IGFTO is pleased to welcome these new members. They attended the Observer Training Course held at Ft. Lauderdale airport on April 24, 2021. Congratulations and welcome to all.

Dianne Bukowski, Punta Gorda, FL
Joseph Bukowski, Punta Gorda, FL
Nick Felix, Coram, NY
Jake Johnson, Boca Raton, FL
Mike Menor, Loxahatchee, FL
Tommy Word, Wildwood, FL

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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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