



Observing Today...Conserving for Tomorrow

# The IGFTO Observer

*A Newsletter for International Game Fish Tournament Observers*

Volume 11

Edition 1

## **2022 Pescadora Billfish Championship Crowns the World's Top Female Anglers**

QUEPOS, Costa Rica (February 23, 2022) – The fourth annual Pescadora Billfish Championship, presented by Costa Sunglasses, took place this past weekend out of Marina Pez Vela in Quepos, Costa Rica. Over 500 guests including 171 anglers on 40 teams representing 11 countries released 305 sailfish and 18 marlin in this two-day competition crowning the world's top female anglers.

This year drew a record number of new teams (16) to the tournament. Many rookie anglers caught their very first billfish, confirming that women represent the largest emerging market in the fishing industry. A new tournament category encouraged 40-foot-and-under boats to the competition, allowing all anglers to participate regardless of boat size or experience level.

### **Day 1 Started Fast and Strong**

## **YOU MAKE THE CALL Pitch Bait Rigs**

By Art McDonald



The ballyhoo or other baitfish is placed inside the skirt of the chugger

Chances are you have been on a sport-fishing boat that employs some form of pitch bait rig. The pitch bait remains in the cockpit while the billfish is brought closer to the boat by retrieving the teasers that are part of the trolling spread. The billfish is attracted to the teasers in the spread, then the teasers are pulled up close to the boat and out of the water and the pitch bait is cast overboard as close to the billfish as possible. More times than not, the billfish is so frustrated at not getting its intended meal that it will attack the pitch bait. It's one of the most thrilling aspects of game fishing. Often the billfish "lights up" in iridescent colors when attacking the bait.

A pitch bait involves a fresh natural bait such as a ballyhoo, small bonito, or mackerel. I've even seen small bonefish

Day 1 of the Pescadora Billfish Championship started fast and strong with last year's Hook and Hand Angler of the Year and *Billfishers* Kourtney Duffie catching the first fish of the tournament—a blue marlin. Anglers were unstoppable, catching seven fish in the first 15 minutes. By afternoon, the fish count slowed, but *Tarheel* took the daily lead with 1,920 points. The marlin count maxed out at 11, a record-breaking daily number in Pescadora tournament history.

### ***Tarheel* Claims First Place**

High scores achieved by teams on Day 1 would lay the groundwork for the podium placements by the end of Day 2. Although teams experienced a slow start, Erika Sandi on *Pura Vida* and Laura Jessen on *Fish Tank* each caught two marlin within a couple of hours. Top spots were highly contested, and early leads by *Tarheel*, *Billfisher*, and *Scandalous* allowed the teams to clinch the podium positions. After final scores were tallied, top teams were awarded trophies at the Pescadora's white attire party and awards ceremony. In the Billfish division, *Tarheel* claimed first place, *Billfisher* won second, and *Scandalous* finished third. *Fish Tank*, by a mere 20 points, finished fourth.

In the Meat Fish division, Liza Bianchi, Sue Cunningham, Marci Terrones, and Ana Herrera of Team Offensive caught the most dorado, with 135.64 points. Team Raven, including Cathy

used. A common pitch bait is a small Mold Craft chugger artificial lure with a ballyhoo or small bonito placed under the lure's skirt. The bait is wired, the wire is passed through the front of the chugger, and the hook is affixed to the wire. The use of the chugger serves two purposes – first, the bait will “smoke” creating a bubble trail that makes it easier for a predator to follow in the boat's wake. It also assures that the bait remains upright and does not spin. The question, is this an infraction of IGFA rules?

No, it is not. IGFA rules state: “When using an artificial lure with a skirt or trailing material, no more than two single hooks may be attached to the line, leader, or trace. The hooks need not be attached separately. The eyes of the hooks must be no less than an overall hook's length (the overall length of the largest hook used) apart and no more than (12 inches) apart. The only exception is that the point of one hook may be passed through the eye of the other hook. A hook may not precede bait, lure or bait/lure combo by more than one hook's length.”

As a practical matter, most tournaments that allow lures do not permit the use of more than one hook.

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## **We Lost A Legend – Capt. Jimmy Loveland**

**Story by Art McDonald  
With an assist from Stewart Loveland**



Captain Jimmy Loveland, courtesy of Richard Gibson

Gilmour, Stella Humphreys, Grethel Fernandez, Maria Jesus Bolanos, and Abigail Gonzalez, topped the Tuna division with 113.68 points.

Ocean conservation and sustainable fishing practices continue to be vital to the mission and values of the Pescadora Billfish Championship. Accordingly, the Pescadora continued its partnership with Gray FishTag Research, securing tags on 46 fish by eight teams during the tournament. Tagging a total of 12 billfish aboard the *Kelly Dawn*, Team KD Ladies earned the Top Tagging Team award while Jill Yates of Team Eight Eights clinched the Top Tagging Angler award.

“I am overwhelmingly impressed each year to see these incredible women bond and hone their angling skills,” says Tournament Director Samantha Mumford. “Each year these women surpass expectations and raise the bar. This year 41% of all fish released were by IGFA rules and regulations. I couldn’t be more proud and can’t wait to see everyone’s faces in 2023!”

The Pescadora Billfish Championship is an all-women’s offshore fishing tournament, crowning the World’s Top Lady Anglers. This tournament was created for women by women and caters to experienced and non-experienced female anglers from around the globe. The Pescadora awards the overall teams and the top females in two divisions: Hook and Hand and

The IGFTO was saddened to learn of the passing of legendary angler and tournament director, Jimmy Loveland of St. Thomas, United States Virgin Islands. Jimmy’s fishing exploits could fill a book. He got his start at Miami’s historical Pier 5, Chamber of Commerce Docks. Pier 5 stood at what is now Bayside Marketplace in downtown Miami. It was a popular tourist attraction, a bustling fish market and a thriving environment for sport fishing. As Jimmy once said to me, “you could fill a semi-tractor trailer with all the dead sailfish we laid on the docks in those days” – alluding to the times when fish on the dock was the best way to advertise your skills as a captain.

### **Sportfish Charters in the Virgin Islands**

Jimmy’s skills did not escape legendary captains Johnny Harms and Jerry Black, who lured Jimmy to the Virgin Islands to help develop sportfish charters out of Caneel Bay for Lawrence Rockefeller (yes, one of THOSE Rockefellers). The three captains pioneered sportfishing in the Virgin Islands by studying the NOAA charts and testing various likely areas. They discovered the famous “North Drop” in the British Virgin Islands. It was there, in 1966, that Jimmy caught a 761 lb. Blue Marlin, which was the fourth largest Blue ever recorded and put Red Hook St. Thomas on the map! He later caught a 124 lb. Wahoo that set the IGFA World Record in the 50 lb. class.

Jimmy purchased a 54-foot head boat he named the Fish-N- Fool and branched into the tour business. Jimmy was the first tour operator to feature weekly tours to Treasure Island and the Baths in Virgin Gorda. He began running snorkeling tours to Honeymoon Beach in St. John for the cruise ship tourists. He became a major tour operator for the visiting cruise ships. Along with creating Loveland Travel, in the mid 1970’s he purchased Sibs on the Mountain restaurant, and later

IGFA Release. There is no other fishing tournament in the world with this competitive groundbreaking format that gives every skill level the ability to be competitive.

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## **Los Sueños Signature Triple Crown Tournament Leg 1**

January 27-29, 2022  
Story by: Brian Titus



### **Day 1 – My First Day as an Observer**

The marina was active before 5 a.m. each day. Officials were milling around the check-in station, observers were checking in, and mates were stocking the boats and readying baits. Fishing was limited to a 50-mile radius around the GPS point N 09 38' and W 084 40'. The starting time for lines-in was 8 a.m.

The first day began in a blur and, before I knew it, I was standing on an immaculate 72' Viking sport fisher that had been built with 70 individual custom change orders. These included recessed lighting in the floor and ceiling of the salon, a large

opened Sibs by the Sea.

### **The Boy Scout Tournament**

In 1974, he won the Virgin Islands Governor's Cup Tournament as Winthrop Rockefeller's captain. He began to operate this tournament in 1980 and renamed it the United States Virgin Islands Open Atlantic Blue Marlin Tournament. Just about all the "players" circled the full moon in August to participate in "the best damn Blue Marlin fishing tournament in the world." He continued running the tournament donating the profits to the Boy Scouts of America until 2017. As a result, it became known as the "Boy Scout Tournament" and advertised as "The Super Bowl of Sportfishing Tournaments."

As the sport fishing world transitioned to a release ethic, Jimmy was the first tournament director to use observers. He declared that the "swivel must touch the rod tip" for a successful release. In 2002, he, along with his good friend, tournament director Rick Alvarez, (an Honorary IGFTO member), petitioned the IGFA to establish a program to educate and supply tournament observers – a program the IGFA had until around 2015. Many current and past members of IGFTO were trained in this program.

Jimmy was awarded the distinguished Boy Scout Beaver Award in 2011, and The Billfish Foundation recognized him with the Winthrop Rockefeller Lifetime Achievement Award. Those who observed in the USVI Open will remember "Jimmy's Rules" – a 12-page booklet of tournament rules considered by many to be the most complicated ever created.

### **An Industry Giant**

Jimmy was instrumental in creating the Big Game Room for the Miami Boat Show which showcased the USVI and drew anglers from far and wide just to "hang out

television monitor in the salon that was linked to the captain's screen on the bridge, and an additional screen monitor on the seatback of the captain's chair.

The waters were slightly choppy and relatively calm on the ride out. Cruising at nearly 35 knots, it seemed the further we got out the more the waters flattened out. One to two foot seas were the worst we saw the entire time. The anglers alternated catching sailfish and marlin, totaling six this day; 3 sails, 2 blue marlin and 1 striped marlin.

After the first few fish were released, I became more comfortable with the procedure - identifying the species, documenting the time of a marlin hook up, and watching the angler while staying out of the captain's line of sight. With each subsequent fish, I called the release and noted the time, finally recording the fish confirmation number radioed by the tournament officials. All of this took place within a very short time.

Day 1 saw marlin after marlin, paying homage to the billfish capital of the world. By the time the last fish was released, a marlin, by *Outage* at 4:12 pm, the day's total was 209 sails and 71 marlin - a total of 280 billfish. *Vaquero* finished the day in first, achieving 3000 points with 5 sails and 5 marlin, followed by *Ohana* in second with 2800 points, and *Miss AC* in third with 2700 points.

## **Day 2 – My First Triple**

there!" He was also instrumental in publishing "On the Edge", a magazine that promoted the Virgin Islands as one of the major Blue Marlin destinations in the world. This magazine was distributed throughout the United States. It highlighted the incredible fishing, the Marlin Festival for the Red Hook community, and the restaurants throughout the Island.

### **The Marine Vocational Program (MVP)**

Retiring from tournaments in 2017, Jimmy created the Marine Vocational Program ("MVP"). This charitable entity has nurtured kids from the Boys and Girls Club of St. Thomas and the community, preparing them for employment in the marine industry. The purpose of the MVP was to give young islanders with little economic hope the tools to become licensed captains, boat designers, SCUBA instructors and more.

Jimmy was proud to be a Virgin Islander. The next time you wander into the St. Thomas Airport and see the replica of Larry Martin's 1,142 lb. all tackle world record Blue Marlin mount – yep, Jimmy was responsible for that too! We'll miss him - that's for sure!

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## Release

By 10 am on day two, the fleet had released 278 sails and 82 marlin overall, with *Vaquero* still in the lead. By the end of the day, the fleet had released an additional 205 sails and 42 marlin, for a two-day total of 414 sails and 113 marlin for 527 total billfish. *Max Bet* took first place, followed by *Vaquero* and *Miss AC* in third.

On days two and three, I enjoyed watching how the captain and anglers handled their tasks. Each was very effective. One captain really stood out. He was alone on the bridge as he continuously multi-tasked, spotting birds and other surface activity miles out. He studied the sonar and the elliptical marks that appeared on the screen. He monitored the baits and teasers. I watched his eyes as they darted from left to right, short and long, continually, and realized he was spotting billfish even around the teasers and dredges 10 feet under the water! He used the electric reels above his head to retrieve the teasers before the predators struck them, and guided the anglers to move their baits into the optimum position for a strike.

On that day, I watched as fifteen sailfish were caught. I witnessed a triple hook-up and called the release for all three. Five minutes before lines out, we had a double hook up. In this hectic instant, before we knew what kind of fish was on, one of the lines became tangled around the rod tip. Someone other than the

## Pepper Ailor Awarded IGFTO Honorary Membership



Pepper Ailor

Pepper Ailor, photographer for the Los Sueños Signature Billfish Series and program manager for the Freedom Alliance Offshore Experience was awarded a lifetime honorary membership at Leg I of the 2022 tournament. If you have attended the Los Sueños Triple Crown Signature Billfish series of tournaments, you have seen Pepper with his camera taking pictures of just about everything.

He has been a generous friend of the IGFTO. He allows us free use of his photographs in our articles, our advertising, and our website. He gives us free access to his archive of photos, which include numerous action shots of marlin and sailfish hook-ups, and boats and crews in action. In addition, he takes a group photo of all the observers at each leg of the Los Sueños Triple Crown.

Pepper lives in Herradura, Costa Rica with his wife Jordanna. He has worked for Freedom Alliance since 2006, and currently runs the Freedom Alliance Offshore Experience, a charitable program that involves offshore fishing and a series of talks for groups of combat veterans who have experienced war trauma.

angler rushed down to free it before it broke off. When he realized the angler had received illegal assistance, the captain became very generous with his use of four-letter words. The angler immediately broke off the fish and both the captain and I were relieved to learn that the fish was a sail and not a marlin. The captain chased down the other sail, and I called that release.

### Day 3 - A Close Finish

We were almost 50 miles out, with 18 boats around us, all driving in anything but a straight line. Somehow, each boat maneuvered through a maze of unrehearsed lanes and hooked up with billfish despite the congested traffic! Being a scuba diver, I could visualize the countless billfish and other predators circling and piercing the bait balls that were constantly appearing on the sonar. As a first time observer, I was struck with adrenaline-laced awe while witnessing, firsthand, the 6 to 9 foot sailfish and marlin performing their signature dances across the sea surface. To say I was pumped, stoked, jacked, or merely excited would have been an understatement - and this was day 3 of Leg 1 of the Los Sueños Signature Series Billfish Tournament.

Over the course of the three days on the water, I was amazed to see many big sailfish were hooked and released in just two minutes! On one occasion, I peered back at the captain's dashboard and noted we were doing 11 knots - in reverse - while

If you would like to learn more about the Freedom Alliance or make a donation, email Pepper at [pepper.ailor@freedomalliance.org](mailto:pepper.ailor@freedomalliance.org) or call him at 571-388 2026.

Welcome aboard Pepper!

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## Industry News



### IGFTO Salutes the Stuart Sailfish Club

The Stuart Sailfish Club Foundation was established in 1941 to promote conservation in game fishing and support local charities. The club has over 350 members and is one of the oldest sport-fishing clubs in the United States. This coming December the foundation will sponsor the 69<sup>th</sup> Annual Light Tackle Sailfish Tournament.

Two of the foundations members are Pat and Greg Moore, who are long standing members of the IGFTO. Pat and Greg arranged for the IGFTO to mount a banner in the foundation's tiki hut where many of their meetings and functions are held. In fact, Pat and Greg also made it possible for us to conduct an Observer Training Course this past January in the same hut.

Thank you Pat and Greg for your support. The IGFTO is proud to hang our banner in the Stuart Sailfish Club Foundation tiki hut.

chasing down a sailfish 80 yards out and near the surface! In rougher seas, the cockpit would have been filled with water.

Day 3 escalated fast, with 280 billfish released by 10:00 am. As of noon, the leaderboard had *Miss AC* on top with 5100 points, *Max Bet* in second with 4700 points and *Billfisher* in third with 4700 points. The tournament couldn't have been more exciting on its final day, with the marlin making all the difference. At 3:45 pm, *Team Galati* released a marlin, moving them onto the leader board from sixth place to second.

At the end of day 3, the vessel *Miss AC* was in first place with 5,700 points. *Team Galati* and *Max Bet* were tied for second place with 5,400 points each.

A lot of remarkable moments made up my first experience as a tournament observer. As time progressed from the first to third day, I wasn't completely sure this kind of event on the water was for me. I mean, this was the absolute first time I'd been on the water or a boat without a fishing rod, or for that matter, a spear gun, bow, net or trap in my hands! I'm typically not a fan of watching others perform any sport that I could be doing myself. But after seeing so many big fish crashing the surface of the ocean, I became a fan. And, I look forward to doing it again.

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## Upcoming Observer Training Courses

Please encourage qualified friends and family to take the training course and join the IGFTO.

Saturday April 16th, 2022  
Hampton Inn and Suites  
2500 Stirling Rd, Hollywood, FL 33020

Wednesday June 1st, 2022  
Marina Pez Vela, Quepos, Costa Rica

Saturday July 30th, 2022  
712 Atlantic Ave  
Virginia Beach, VA 23451

Saturday November 12, 2022  
Hampton Inn and Suites  
2500 Stirling Rd, Hollywood, FL 33020

Questions?

Email: [member.services@igfto.org](mailto:member.services@igfto.org)

Phone: 404-386-3388 or 860-604-8822

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Los Sueños Signature Triple  
Crown 2022 Leg II  
Rum Runner Out in Front



Smooth Move Takes Leg II

**Day 1 Belongs to Pura Vida**

By day's end the fleet had released 93 billfish (56 sails, 37 marlin) and Pura Vida had taken top spot with 3 sailfish and 3 marlin releases for 1,800 points, followed by Billfisher (second), Fish Tank (third), D.A. Sea (fourth), and Miss AC (fifth) all with 1,400 points after releasing 4 sails and 2 marlin each. The tie between these four teams was broken by the time on the release of their last fish, with the top spot going to whomever achieved the points first. It doesn't get much closer than that, especially given that Pura Vida squeezed into first with a marlin release at exactly 4:00 pm!

**Day 2 Rum Runner Takes the Lead**

By 10:00 am the fleet had upped the two-day ticker to 67 sails and 43 marlin, with Pura Vida "comfortably" seated at the top of the board with 2,000 points, followed by D.A. Sea in second on time with 1,500 points over Pez Collector. No one can sit idle during a Triple Crown

**Welcome Fourteen New Members**

Our most recent Observer Training Course was held at Marina Pez Vela in Quepos, CR on February 15, 2022. The course was taught by IGFTO president Steve Hargett. Welcome new members:

Mari Borge, Quepos, Cr  
Steve Nelson, Lake Charles, LA  
Ryan Deitrick, Virginia Beach, VA  
Alex Porter, Lake Charles, LA  
Jeff Duchesneau, Quepos, CR  
John Robinson, Port Aransas, TX  
Danny Gonzalez, Garabito, CR  
Ronnie Schwenk, St. James, NY  
Damian Gonzales, Garabito, CR  
Brian Stoner, Quepos, CR  
Michael Gordon, Boca Chica, FL  
Allison Talbird, Hermosa, CR  
Mike Jacobi, Port Aransas, TX  
Tim Yannacone, Playa Jaco, CR  
Jeff Kudla, Lake Charles, LA

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event; Rum Runner came seemingly out of nowhere and into first by 10:49 am with three marlin releases early in the day and then solidified their lead with another three marlin releases by 1:03 pm, adding a sailfish to their scorecard at 2:47 pm. Pura Vida wasn't to be left far behind though, and with six sails and six marlin achieved 3,800 points over the first two days and 3,100 points on Day 2 alone, well ahead of Pura Vida in second for the day with 1,800 points! Uno Mas (1 sail, 5 marlin) finished third on time over Vaquero (6 sails, 4 marlin), scores tied at 2,600 points each. With 111 billfish (57 sails, 54 marlin) released on Day 2, the two-day tally was up to 204 billfish releases (113 sails, 91 marlin).

### **Day 3 Smooth Move Takes the Tourney**

The first call on DAY 3 was made for the second day in a row by Smooth Move, this time at 8:11 am with a sailfish release. Thankfully there was a steady progression in the number of billfish releases over the three-day event, with 72 releases called in by noon on Day 3 alone, bringing the three-day total to 275 billfish (159 sails, 117 marlin).

Billfisher, always a strong contender, scooted into second with a marlin release at 9:46 am and then to first with another marlin at 10:38 am, bringing them to 4,500 points as of noon. Just eleven minutes past noon, Rum Runner released a marlin for 4,800 points and

**We're here for you.**

### **Director contact information:**

Steve Hargett  
President & Director  
[Steve.Hargett@igfto.org](mailto:Steve.Hargett@igfto.org)

Art McDonald  
Vice President & Director  
[Art.McDonald@igfto.org](mailto:Art.McDonald@igfto.org)

Bob Stimolo  
Director & Marketing  
[Bob.Stimolo@igfto.org](mailto:Bob.Stimolo@igfto.org)

Evan A. Hipsley, Jr.  
Director & Webmaster  
[Evan.Hipsley@igfto.org](mailto:Evan.Hipsley@igfto.org)

Reese Bowles  
Director & Treasurer  
[Reese.Bowles@igfto.org](mailto:Reese.Bowles@igfto.org)

John Treat  
Director Emeritus  
[John.Treat@igfto.org](mailto:John.Treat@igfto.org)

Terry O'Neill  
Director Emeritus  
[Terry.Oneill@igfto.org](mailto:Terry.Oneill@igfto.org)

**IGFTO**

**P.O. BOX 7333**

**Gainesville, GA 30504-0017**

**1.404.386.3388**

**[www.igfto.org](http://www.igfto.org)**

boom! They were back in the lead.

The leaderboard didn't change over the course of the afternoon and by lines out on the third and final day it was Rum Runner in first with 5,800 points (3 sails, 11 marlin), followed by Billfisher in second on time with 4,600 points (6 sails, 8 marlin), and Vaquero in third also with 4,600 points (6 sails, 8 marlin) after releasing their last fish at 1:15 pm, 38 minutes after Billfisher's last fish.

While not on the leaderboard, Smooth Move had a fantastic showing on Day 3, releasing 3 sails and 4 marlin for 2,300 points. In yet another nail biter, Smooth Move called their hook up in to Tournament Control just minutes before lines out and fought to win the daily, releasing a marlin at 4:24 pm, the last fish of the day and of the tournament!

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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.*