

The IGFTO Observer Newsletter



Observing Today...Conserving for Tomorrow

The IGFTO Observer

A Newsletter for International Game Fish Tournament Observers

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Edition 3

69th San Juan International Billfish Tournament ("IBT")

August 16-21, 2022 By: Art McDonald



El Morro - Home of the IBT

The San Juan International Billfish Tournament (IBT), the longest continually running offshore saltwater tournament in the world kicked off its 69th year on August 16, 2022.

Attending a great registration party at Club Nautico de San Juan were 25 IGFTO members. In alphabetical order, they were Rick Alvarez, Dewey Blaylock, Alan Buchfuher, Mike Cisneros, Julio Colomba, Marcy Costa, Roger Dart, Barbara Evans, Mike Gordon, Ed Hails, Bob Hicks, Joe Ingram, Kelie Limehouse, Mike McCorkle, Art McDonald, Cindy Pruett, Derwood Roberts, Mike Sampsel, Markwrich Sorel, Robert Smith, Scott Smith, Lyn Taloe, Gina Teixeira, Adriana Vale, and John Wells. All attended the IGFTO Observers meeting on the 17th, followed by a kick-off party, which included the historic Flag Ceremony where international teams were introduced.

The Last Leg of the Sport Fishing Championship

This year, the IBT joined the prestigious Sport Fishing Championship – a multi-tournament format that included 11 different locations in the US, Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico. The IBT was the final leg of the tournament where the winner was announced at the awards banquet receiving a \$1,000,000 payout. CBS Sports covered the event.

On the first day of fishing, Thursday, August 18th, 249 Anglers on 58 boats representing 45 teams lined up at the entrance to El Morro, the historic Spanish fort at the entrance to San Juan Harbor. At the allotted time, in a classic Bimini Start (they call it a “Shootout”) those 58 boats churned up white-water as they raced to the fishing grounds. The first blue marlin release was called in by Cervecita, a 52 foot Viking at 8:33 AM.

Nineteen Blue Marlin Released on Day 1

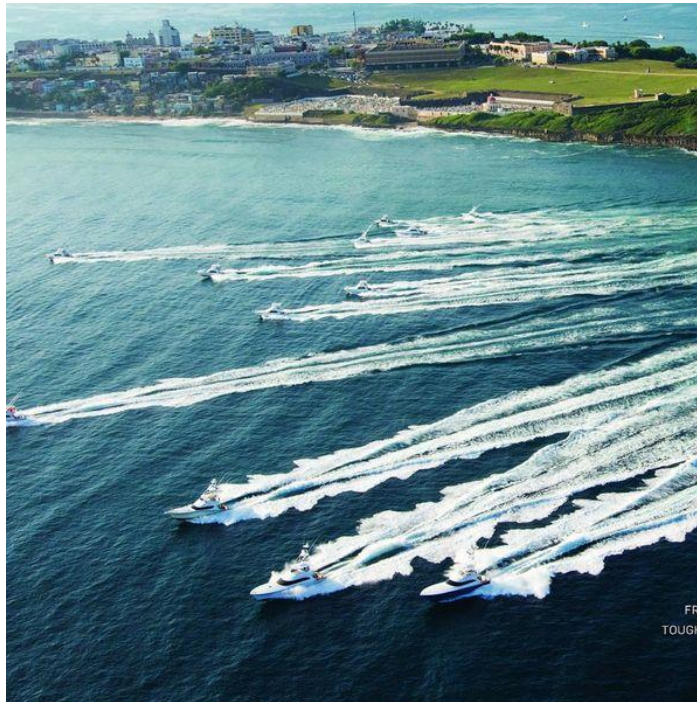
A total of 19 Blue Marlin and one White were released on day 1. Day 2, August 19, mirrored day the first day with 20 blues released. After fishing hours, there was a gala dinner, highlighted by 185 computerized drones creating an incredible show in the night sky – it was spectacular! The next day the internet lit up with videos and pictures of the tournament. Later in the evening, a weak low pressure area arrived, slowing down the bite on day 3 with only 11 billfish released (9 Blues and 2 Sailfish). Interestingly, there was not even a single hook up after 1:32 PM.

By the end of the tournament, 50 billfish were released consisting of 47 Blue Marlin, 1 White Marlin, and 2 Sailfish. The 72 foot Viking *Sarl Victoria* took first place overall with 4 Blue Marlin releases, followed by the 47 Jersey Cape *Drill Hound* with 2 Blue Marlin releases. Third place went to the 64 foot

Viking *Picara* also with 2 Blue Marlin releases. In fact, there were 14 boats with 2 marlin releases.

***Quantified* Wins the \$1,000,000 Sport Fishing Championship**

A special note to mention that the Texas based fishing team from the 64 foot Spencer *Quantified* also released 2 Blue Marlin, and, as participants in the Sport Fishing Championship, won the \$1,000,000 first prize (coming all the way from Texas to win it!). The dates for the 70th anniversary IBT in 2023 have yet to be announced, but you can bet the bank, I'll be there!



Participants race to the fishing grounds

From Rookie to Pro: A Look at IGFTO's Terry O'Neill, Director Emeritus. Story By: Art McDonald



Terry O'Neill with a monster Mahi.

Chances are, if you are one of the newer IGFTO Observers and took your course in South Florida, Terry O'Neill, was your instructor. He is a key figure in the formation and success of the IGFTO. It was Terry, along with Bob Malerba, John Treat, and Larry l'Anson, who founded the IGFTO. Here are Terry's own words on how he became an observer:

“In February of 1989, I ordered a new 20 ft Dusky center console and would visit it on the weekends as it was being built. In May, my first weekend after delivery, my wife and I were cruising off Palm Beach in near glass-like conditions when, suddenly, I noticed one of my reels was peeling line like there was no tomorrow. I quickly cranked my new Penn Senator and brought the three-foot billfish to the boat until the swivel made a ‘clack’ sound as I tipped it. I excitedly yelled to my wife to grab the leader, to which she replied, “what’s the leader?” With that, the fish jumped from the water heading for the inside of my boat. In my mind’s eye, I could see significant damage about to be inflicted on my brand new boat and maybe my wife too. Fortunately for all parties involved, the fish hit the strap of the Bimini top, spit the hook, and fell back into the water. Thus, I had my first billfish release. I later found out it was most likely a juvenile white marlin. Fast forward about ten years and a few sailfish later.

In the meantime, my son, Sean, had become one of the youngest sportfish captains in the Palm Beaches and asked if I would be an observer in the

Buccaneer Cup Tournament, one of the oldest catch and release tournaments. In those days, observers were provided by each boat into a pool of observers. The only real requirement to be an observer was to show up at the Buccaneer Yacht Club on time; otherwise, your sponsor would be disqualified from the day's fishing.

Honestly, I had little knowledge of tournament fishing and had not thought about getting involved. I had no idea what observing fishing tournaments was all about. All I knew was they had to follow the IGFA rules. No one seemed to have a copy of those rules – my guess is they had never read them. One morning I was assigned to a charter boat and witnessed a mate hook a sailfish and hand the rod to the angler. I approached the captain and suggested handing off the fishing pole may be against the rules, to which he agreed.

Sportfishing captains rely upon winning tournaments as a large part of their income. Recognizing this, I realized I had to “know” the rules and hold people accountable for following the rules. The following year, someone handed out a pamphlet inviting fishermen to become a “Certified Observer” through a course sponsored by the IGFA. I quickly signed up for the first course in Ft. Lauderdale. The course was taught by tournament directors Bill Gooch, Jimmy Loveland, and Rick Alvarez.

Now, to get some experience observing. A friend of Sean's offered the use of his 47' Merritt sportfish for the price of fuel (10 cents a gallon) – all we had to do was to get to La Guaira in Venezuela. On the second day, I released a respectable 350 lb. blue marlin, my first. That summer, I volunteered to observe in the July Open in St. Thomas, where I met several newly minted observers who became lifelong friends, including Bob Malerba and Larry l'Anson. Both men were instrumental in forming the IGFTO. I escalated my involvement to the point where I observed 6-8 tournaments a year. At first, it seemed I was being assigned to almost every 28' Bertram in the Caribbean while others rode in comfort on the larger boats. I just assumed I needed to pay my dues.”

Terry has observed in Venezuela, Guatemala, the US Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Mexico, El Salvador, Florida, and Virginia. He was a founding member of the IGFTO Organization and an immediate member of the Board of Directors. An expert in technical skills (he worked for FPL (Florida Power & Light), rising to Sr. Engineer for over 19 years. He is credited with building the IGFTO website from the beginning. Terry is always available to “computer rookies” helping to solve some of the difficulties we get ourselves into. He retired from FPL in 1992 and joined his wife, Dr. Mary Fondren as practice manager in her successful veterinary hospital. They have been married for 38 years and live in Palm Beach Gardens, Fl.

Simply stated in Terry's own words: "I am so grateful to my son Sean who asked me to get involved, and to my wife, who lets me. I have enjoyed the training and participating in the tournaments as an observer and look forward to doing so for years to come."

So are WE!

YOU MAKE THE CALL

By: Art McDonald



"The fish greyhounds across the horizon, then settles down and a give-and-take battle ensues."

So there you are, observing in Sunny San Juan, Puerto Rico at the San Juan IBT (International Billfish Tournament) – a 3 day event comprised of some of the best known boats and crews in the Caribbean. The boat you are assigned to that day has 4 anglers – one of whom is a diminutive lady who couldn't weigh more than 110 lbs. soaking wet. The weather has been "sporty" with 6' – 8' seas. This is a rotating tournament where anglers must rotate rod positions every hour. They are fishing multiple teasers along with rigged lures on each outrigger and pitch baits in both the left and right corners. Drags are set on the outrigger lures at 18 lbs.

A healthy blue marlin has crashed the right long rigger and is headed toward the open ocean.

It is around 2:15 p.m. and a healthy blue marlin has crashed the right long rigger and is headed toward the open ocean. With line peeling off the reel, our lady angler struggles to get the rod out of the holder but does accomplish this and stumbles into the fighting chair. She attempts to put the rod butt in the floating gimbal but is having difficulty doing so. In an effort to assist, one of the mates holds the gimbal steady but she is still having trouble with placing the butt in the gimbal. To aid her, the mate touches the rod butt gently to glide the butt into the gimbal completing the transfer – and the fight continues.

The fish surfaces and the boat backs down at breakneck speed...

The fish greyhounds across the horizon, then settles down and a give-and-take battle ensues. Finally, the fish surfaces and the boat backs down at breakneck speed – white water pouring over the transom into the cockpit – it's a wild time! The leader comes into view. The mate reaches to grasp the leader but loses his balance, grabbing the rod tip to steady himself. Then, he finally grasps the leader. The fish is subdued, the hook removed, and the fish slowly swims away. Has there been a violation of IGFA rules?

Answer: Technically (in “strict” IGFA compliance) there are two possible infractions. The first entails the assistance the mate gave in guiding the rod butt into the gimbal – The mate can, certainly, hold the gimbal in place (much like assisting the angler into a harness), but should not touch the rod in any circumstances, unless by accident. However, in the second instance, the fact the mate grabbed ahold of the rod (even though he may have been off balance) would be a clear violation of IGFA Rules. In charter operations many times aggressive mates will grab the end of the rod to gain leverage before grabbing the leader which is a clear violation of IGFA rules.

REMEMBER – YOU ARE NOT A JUDGE. Any possible infraction should be noted and reported to the Tournament Director for a decision to be made. Many Tournaments have a “judgment committee” of impartial judges that will make a final decision!

DO NOT EVER tell an angler or captain “I’m going to DQ that fish!” Leave it up to a panel to decide!

Theresa "Tess" Sheil



Tess and friend.

The fishing community was saddened to learn of the passing of IGFTO (International Game Fish Tournament Observers), senior observer Theresa "Tess" Sheil. Tess was an original, founding, member of the organization, attending numerous tournaments in Costa Rica, The Dominican Republic, Aruba, San Juan, and St. Thomas. Along the way, she made numerous friends among the tournament directors, anglers and crews. We will greatly miss her infectious smile.

Tess was much more than an experienced observer. She was educated as an RN (Registered Nurse) and worked nearly 30 years as an educator and administrator for the NYC Department of Education. At the end of that career, she served as City-wide Supervisor of Nursing for the office of Adult and Continuing Education. Not content with early retirement, she became a driving force in the American Red Cross as a volunteer representative to numerous man-made disasters, including being a first responder to the NYC Terror attacks of 9/11, and Hurricane Katrina. Along the way, she was recognized with several prestigious awards including the Lifetime Presidential Service Award, and the coveted Clara Barton Award for Meritorious Volunteer Leadership.

We will certainly miss Tess!

Industry News

Last Observer Training Course at 2022 Prices!

The last Observer Training Course in 2022 is scheduled for Saturday, November 12 in Hollywood, FL (near Fort Lauderdale Airport). This is also the last course that will be offered at the low price of just \$250. The price includes dues for 2023, which are \$200 so the additional cost to take the course and receive 2 IGFTO Observer shirts, log book, lapel pin, and buff is just \$50.

Registration is available on our website igfto.org.

Welcome New Members

IGFTO is pleased to welcome as new members the following graduates from the Observer Training Course held in Old Saybrook CT on October 1, 2022.

Keith Breiner, Watertown, CT
Robert Martin, Navarre, FL
Marty Pouliot, Hampton, NH

We're here for you.
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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.

