

The IGFTO Observer Newsletter ~ January 1, 2026 - to - March 31, 2026

~Volume 15



Edition 1~



Observing Today...Conserving for Tomorrow

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Sunrise over Los Sueños. Photo credit: Evan.

Get to know IGFTO Observer Jorge Delgado Vigier

Story by: Art McDonald

Jorge (“George”) has been an IGFTO observer for three years after being approached by dear friend, Dr. Ricardo Jaen, of Puerto Rico. The good doctor had posted a message on Facebook about IGFTO and the upcoming International Billfish Tournament (IBT) in San Juan. Intrigued, Jorge flew to Ft. Lauderdale and took the Observer Training Course in April of 2023.

A Passion for Fishing Since the Age of 6

Jorge’s family are from Cuba. They immigrated to Puerto Rico after the Cuban revolution in or around 1960, and Jorge was born there. Ever since he could recall, fishing has been his passion. When he was only 6, his father took him to a canal one block from their house. He remembers his first fishing trip well. He thought he was stuck on the bottom when, much to his surprise, he realized he had actually hooked a snook. He was so excited that he emptied his tackle box and filled it with water hoping to preserve the snook so that he could show it to his friends and family – he was hooked for life!

An Epic Day of Yellowfin Tuna

Four years after that first snook, in November 1983, at the age of 10, his uncle Kiko invited him to fish offshore on his 33' sportfisherman. That became an unforgettable day as they encountered hundreds of birds circling what turned out to be a school of yellowfin tuna – right in front of all the hotels in San Juan. They caught twenty-two yellowfins – each weighing in the neighborhood of 50 lbs. He was so excited that even though he felt a little queasy, he told his uncle he was feeling ok so that they wouldn't stop fishing.

Since that epic day, he's had endless fishing days offshore including the privilege to participate in multiple tournaments. He has fished in Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, St. Thomas, Venezuela, Panama, El Salvador, Guatemala, Costa Rica, and the USA.

A College Grad and Self-Made Businessman

He graduated from the University of Florida with a Bachelor of Science in the school of Business Administration, (yes, he's a Gator). After graduation he took position as a retail sales person with ConAgra. After a few years he returned to Puerto Rico to care for his ill mother. Later, he joined Bunzi Distribution, an international supplier serving the U.S., Canada, and the Caribbean and eventually, became the Territory Manager for Puerto Rico. After a few years in that position, he opened his own company dedicated to the manufacture and sale of chemicals in Puerto Rico.

He stills operates the chemical sales portion of his business part time, and he owns and manages a few short-term rental properties. That has given him the freedom to travel as an IGFTO observer, and plan future adventures which he hopes will include fishing in places like the Azores, Cabo San Lucas, and other venues. He is excited by what his future may hold.

Running Charters in soon-to be New Center Console

Jorge feels blessed and fortunate to be part of IGFTO and is grateful to his parents and uncle for helping to fuel his passion for fishing from such a young age. Having secured has 50 Ton Marine Merchant License in 2007, he's looking forward to running charters with the soon-to-be purchase of a center console (32-39 feet). Eventually he hopes to own a larger sport fishing boat in the 39-to-46-foot range. He even has picked out names, looking to call the center console Reel Blessed and, later, the larger boat Beyond Blessed. Plans call for fishing and island adventures in Puerto Rico – so, mark that down and if you visit the Island. Be sure to hook up with Jorge – he'll hook you up for sure!



Jorge and two nice-size Pacific Groupers. Photo credit: crew.

You Make the Call

Article by: Art McDonald

Ah, Costa Rica – a Pura Vida feeling - translating to "pure life." Those who have experienced Costa Rica will know what I'm talking about – those who haven't visited, will soon find out. One of those Pura Vida feelings is the incredible fishing that the country offers – and whether it's Quepos, Los Sueños, Flamingo, Crocodile Bay, etc. it doesn't get much better than this!

So, there you are, observing in a billfish tournament in sunny Costa Rica. The boat you've drawn is well known and has been racking up good numbers in the days before. It's around 8:15 a.m. – the sun is rising toward the west and you are on the bridge watching the spread eagerly looking for that "first bite."

Sure enough, the tower spotter reports a sailfish on the left teaser – which is immediately brought toward the boat with the sailfish in hot pursuit. The left corner angler has brought his line in close to the boat to try and intercept the chasing sailfish and the left long has brought his bait closer as well – maybe too close as the sailfish attacks the flat line first – then the second, left long bait.

In the blink of an eye both anglers are hooked up with an airborne sailfish screeching toward the horizon. The captain takes a good look and says it appears the fish has picked up both baits and both anglers are hooked to the same fish. He (captain) yells to the mate to cut the line on the left long and allow the left flat angler to fight the fish – which is concluded with a successful release.

Did an IGFA infraction occur?

Answer: Yes. IGFA rules clearly state under the section entitled **“The Following Situations Will Disqualify a Catch: (3) When a fish is hooked or entangled on more than one line.** Regardless of the second angler’s line being cut (or if the second angler put his reel in free-spool), the fact that two anglers were attached to the fish at any time would disqualify the catch. If the captain was adamant about the release being legal, the observer should note the infraction and bring it to the attention of the Tournament Director for a final decision.



Two anglers attached to one fish. Picture credit: Crew.

My First Observer Trip in Los Sueños, Costa Rica

Story by: Hayden Mulder

Three days, thousands of sailfish, and a front-row seat to tournament fishing at its best.

There are trips you plan for. There are trips you dream about. And then there are trips that hit you all at once—early alarms, salt spray, radios crackling nonstop, and sailfish lighting up the wake like fireworks.

My first observer trip in Los Sueños, Costa Rica, was all of that and more. Before I even get into the fishing, I have to say this: if it wasn't for Art McDonald (Arturo), this trip wouldn't have happened. He helped make it possible, and I'm grateful for it.

From Classroom to Fly Bridge

My path to this moment started years ago. When I was about 14, I took the observer course down in Stuart, Florida. I was eager and ready—but too young to actually observe a tournament. So, I waited. As time passed, I realized something important: tournament fishing isn't something you just “remember.” The rules and regulations matter, and the details matter even more. So, about four years later, I took the course again to sharpen my knowledge—leader requirements, double line rules, hook sizes, lure regulations, and the long list of small things that separate a clean release from a disqualification. I kept the info guide like a cheat sheet, something I could always reference. When the time finally came to observe my first tournament, I'll be honest: I was nervous.

The Night Before

The first night, the captain's dinner set the tone. I met experienced observers who offered advice and small tips that only come from time on the water—where to position yourself, what to watch, what mistakes to avoid, and how to keep calm when the cockpit turns chaotic. The food was great, the drinks were flowing, and the energy was electric. Still, I made sure not to indulge too much. Because I knew what was coming.

Day 1 – G-Rod and the First “Release!”

At 0400, the alarm went off, and the tournament reality hit me immediately. We made our way to the marina and checked in with Ashley, who is—without exaggeration—the backbone of this tournament. Without her, the operation doesn't run. Coffee was ready. Lunch bags were packed. Boat assignments were handed out. My first boat was *G-Rod*. We left the dock around 0515, heading southeast into the dark.

The ride out

It felt like it lasted forever, and then finally—0800. Lines in. I was locked in. Every teaser, every rod tip, every line angle—I watched it all. At 0802, the first boat radioed in a fish. Then another. Then another. Within minutes, it felt like the entire ocean woke up at once. The radio was nonstop: *release after release after release*. Around 0915, *G-Rod* got tight. One of the anglers hooked up and my nerves spiked instantly. As an observer, you're not just watching the fight—you're watching the rules. I tracked the line carefully, eyes shifting from the water to the rod tip and back again. The fish jumped in the distance and there was no doubt:

Sailfish.

Identify fish—checked.

The leader

Now it was about the leader. The captain kept circling, looking for a second bite, and sure enough—another angler hooked up. Now I had two fish in play. I was nervous, but focused. I had to call the releases cleanly and make sure nobody touched the line early. The leader came up, closing in on the rod tip. The angler cranked. One... two... three... four... five.

The leader slid through the first rod eye.

Watch leader pass through first eye- checked

“RELEASE!” I yelled as loud as I could.

Yell release- checked

That fish was cut off immediately. Now all eyes were on fish number two. Same process. Track the line. Watch the leader. Wait for the first eye. The leader popped out of the water and slid through. “RELEASE!” Loud enough that nobody could pretend they didn't hear it.

By the end of the day, *G-Rod* released 7 sailfish and 0 marlin. They also hooked up to what looked like a 40-50lb. Bull dolphin but didn't bother wasting their time with it. When I saw them cut that line not even one minute into the fight my heart shattered. I understood though that these tournaments are about billfish and money why waste time catching a fish that doesn't count. My first day observing was officially in the books!

Day 2 – *Juben* and a Team That Fished Like a Machine

Day 2 started the same way: 0400, up and moving. Same marina routine. Same coffee. Same anticipation. This time I drew the *Juben*, and from the moment I stepped aboard I knew it was going to be a good day. Beautiful boat, professional crew, and they treated me like family. We ran southeast again and when lines went in, the radio lit up within the first ten minutes. When *Juben* finally hooked up, I got a front-row seat to a crew that operated like a machine. The second the bite happened, they moved the angler to the correct side, pulled dredges, adjusted outriggers, and started circling. No wasted movement. No confusion. Just clean teamwork. At one point they had a triple hookup, and it was honestly impressive to watch. The anglers weaved around each other with precision, almost like they knew what the fish would do before the fish knew. Then came the heartbreak moment. In the last five minutes of fishing, *Juben* hooked up again. They circled the fish 3–4 times hoping for a double. They got it. But the second hookup happened at 1600 and 5 seconds—five seconds past lines out. To make it worse, about three seconds later, a third fish piled on too. Those last two didn't count, but the initial hookup did. They released all three and headed back to the dock. Second day complete.

Juben released 13 sails 0 marlin

Day 3 – Trophy Fly and Tournament Madness

By Day 3, that 0400 alarm felt personal. We dragged ourselves to the dock, yawning and begging for coffee, grabbed breakfast, got our assignments, and headed out for the final day. My last boat was *Trophy Fly*, and I'll say it straight: that captain earned the name. At 0800, lines in. It didn't take long before the cockpit erupted: "LEFT TEASER! LEFT TEASER!"

A sailfish came in hot, slapping at the teaser like it owed him lunch money. The left short bait was dropped back perfectly. Boom—hooked up. The angler was everything a fisherman wants to be. Calm. Sharp. Efficient. He didn't miss. Every fish he saw, he caught. After 3–4 hours in the same area, the captain made a move, pushed in a bit, and started hunting birds. He found an area with life—and no boats around. That decision changed everything. For the rest of the day, it was chaos—in the best possible way. We couldn't go five minutes without another bite. Release one, hook another. Reset, troll, bite again. It was madness.

By the end of Day 3, Trophy Fly finished with 27 fish.

And that angler I mentioned? He caught 18 of them! It was a performance I won't forget.

Awards Night and the Numbers

Back at the hotel, it was time to clean up and head to the awards ceremony. The drinks were flowing, the food was endless, and the stories started rolling in. Observers compared notes and laughed about moments from the water. Most of the anglers showed up even if they didn't win, and I respected that. It showed something important: They view each other as opponents, not enemies. After the awards and an incredible video recap of the tournament, it was officially over.

The final numbers

And the final numbers were nothing short of unbelievable:

2,258 sailfish released

36 marlin released

in just three 8-hour days
Hooked for Life

That was my first observer trip!

Three days. Three boats. Three completely different experiences—each one unforgettable. I learned a lot, gained a ton of respect for the teams competing at that level, and I’m already looking forward to the next one.

Tight lines,
Hayden Mulder



Los Sueños Leg 1 Observers January 2026. Photo credit: Los Sueños.

An Observer's Perspective - The Pescadora

Story by: Pete Van Dingstee

I had such a great time at the all-women's Pescadora tournament in Quepos, Costa Rica. This was my second year at this event and it's only gotten better, and definitely more fun as I've gotten to know more anglers, crew, and staff at both the marina and the tournament.

This year we had 67 boats and over 300 female anglers. This tournament is special and helps less-experienced anglers have an opportunity in their own division called "Hook and Hand."

For those of you not familiar with this technique, it's where a mate or a designated hooker can set the hook after the bite and pass the rod to the angler or place the rod in the rod holder without cranking on the reel until an angler picks it up and reels the release point.

Although it's not an IGFA scenario, it is, however a confidence-builder for the angler to eventually hook their own. It really made a great opportunity for the experienced anglers to build up new team members and allow their teams to be competitive. Points were structured 100 for hook and hand, and 120 for a sailfish etc. (IGFA release).

Now I'll tell you about my personal experience. On day one, it was slow aboard *Lights Out*. However, there was a meat division and the ladies were able to pick up two Mahi for the combined total for a two-day win in that division.

I was assigned *Tar Heel*, the lead boat on day two, and the final day. An absolutely gorgeous custom built *Bayliss* yacht that was operated by the Owner and Builder, Captain John Bayliss.

John Bayliss and I shared the amazing day together on the bridge searching for fish. We had very light conversation, mostly when moving between locations. Not only was he running the helm, but also commanding the controls of the sonar.

I observed the team battle it out for the win with 30 sailfish on day 1 to top the leader board, followed-up by 21 sailfish on day two. I had the opportunity to observe five of the best anglers in the world, man or woman, and this has shown me new techniques that will continue to help me be a better angler. Out of every trip I've ever been on, I always ask for advice to a new angler thereby showing them my interest.

At the end of the day not only did I get a huge high five but also an energetic "man hug" from John after hooking and releasing our last sailfish in 15 seconds at 3:28 with lines out at 3:30.

Celebrating the win was a bonus for me coupled with every day on the water where I've met fellow like-minded folks who have made the sport of bill fishing their passion!

I can't really explain what that day meant to me. But it's a day I will remember and think about for years to come! Go with your team with enthusiasm, yell your releases loud like a macaw in the tropical sky. Let them feel your excitement - they like it loud!

Now I'm off to the Los Sueños Triple Crown for 3 more exciting days on the water.

Take time to share your experience when you return home, recruit some fishing friends and ask them to join IGFTO by taking an Observer course. Tell them to get up off the couch and leave their snow shovels at home and join us in having fun.

Happy to say that I personally enjoyed every tournament I've been at; to date I have 26 observing days completed in 14 months.

And yes, my team Pete's Hen House (Guatemala December 2025) won the first annual observers fishing tournament. Who knows what's next but I hope to see all of you there.

Tight lines for now my friends!
Pete.



Pescadora Observers and Staff February 2026. Photo credit: Staff.

First Timer as an IGFTO Observer

Story by: Mike McCarthy

A new Chapter

My love for fishing began as a kid in Cincinnati, Ohio, stringing worms on a cane pole, catching catfish in the lakes and ponds. My love of fishing continues today.

My journey to the IGFTO was years in the making. From mate to captain to leaving the profession in 1989 when my daughter was born. I then got the call from my long-time friend and colleague, Captain Keith, on the *Black Gold*, a beautiful 65' American Custom Yacht. He asked me to be their observer for the sailfish tournaments in the Palm Beaches and Stuart.

There was no IGFTO in those days, so each boat had to provide an observer to fish the tournament. It was not long after I became an angler, catching 325 blue marlins on the *Black Gold*.

Black Gold fished a lot of tournaments in the Bahamas, Puerto Rico, St. Thomas, and the Dominican Republic, which became its home for 15 years. During these tournaments, many of them used observers which is where I met Art McDonald.

Art was an observer for us on several occasions. After our observers came on board and made introductions, I never really paid too much attention, but recall they were friendly and professional. My focus was on hooking fish and listening for the release call.

In August 2025, we lost my friend and owner of the *Black Gold* Harry "SARGE" Sargeant. Sarge was a great man, friend, angler, and mentor. I was, and am, extremely heartbroken. Not only did I lose my friend, but by all indications, I lost my favorite pastime, tournament fishing!

I loved the competition, friendships, and camaraderie I enjoyed for 26 years as a member of the *Black Gold* fishing team. What was I going to do now? I kept in touch with Art over the years and he said, on more than one occasion, to become an observer for the IGFTO.

Art talked about all the great things the organization does, and I would love it. Art said there was a class in November, 2025 in Ft. Lauderdale which I attended. The class was taught by Terry O'Neill and Bob Stimilo.

Small world because Terry had recognized me from tournaments he was at. I signed up for Pescadora and Leg 2 of the triple crown out of Los Sueños. I was nervous and wondered how I was going to keep up with logging in all the fish?

I had heard over the years the reputation Costa Rica had for numbers, plus not knowing what to expect was a bit concerning. Art helped me with hotels, transportation, and coached me through everything.

Off we go to Costa Rica! Leaving Ft. Lauderdale was the easy part of the day. Upon arrival in San Jose, I was welcomed to an hour-and-a-half line at Immigration. I found Art in the same line and once we got through, we met up with my brother from a different mother Kevin McCarthy lol. (I actually do have a brother named Kevin.)

We met Art's driver, Jeffery, and he announced there was an accident just past the crocodile bridge. Well, it took us six hours to arrive in Quepos, not a good start to say the least. We missed the meeting and photo, so we just checked into the Best Western and then started off to the marina for dinner.

We ran into Lynette Catha and she told us of a tuna Keith had caught and many observers were going to the restaurant to enjoy a family style dinner. I met many of my new IGFTO family and enjoyed great conversation and meal, so something good after a long day.

Day 1 Pescadora A long day turned into a short night with the alarm going off at 4 AM. Art and I got ready, went downstairs, and met many other observers that were staying there as well for coffee. We started walking to the marina spilling hot coffee on my hands until I had enough and it went into the next trash can. I then said to myself "just what the hell did I get myself into" - Lol We arrived at the marina and I was immediately impressed with how organized Lynette was in handing out boat assignments and info.

My boat was *Grand Slam*. As I walked to the to the boat my nervousness came back. My mind went back to my own experiences I had with observers over my early years and my training on the importance of my job. I knew the importance of making myself invisible, staying out of the way of the captain and crew, and witnessing the obedience of the rules and calling the release loud for all to hear.

On to the introductions. I am bad with names and often forget someone's name when I first meet them. True to form, five minutes after meeting the anglers I forgot their names, sure I had the roster but who is who? Ah, write down descriptions next to the angler's name, that is what the line is for in the log book. Short hair, blue hat, camo shirt....

Big SURPRISE! This was the Pescadora LADIES tournament and everyone had pink wigs, pink shirts so we went fishing with me trying to put names to faces. LINES IN! It took the *Grand Slam* team a while to get a bite, at 9:21 "RELEASE" loud and proud. Ice was broken; I logged the time and Captain Dave called in IGFA release for Sarah. I then realized, *I got this*, with Daves help on the names lol. We ended day 1 with 12 IGFA releases.

Day 2

Back up at 4 AM heading to the dock for boat assignments with more confidence and a lid on my coffee. I was assigned to *Pastime* a 92 ft. Viking. I wrote down the anglers and off I went to the boat, still with my name remembrance issues. I met everyone, and yes, all dressed the same. I asked the group if they had rod positions to help identify them and they said no, they were all new anglers who had not even caught fish before, so all hook and hand. Head mate Jacob was awesome and helped me with names again and he was just a riot all day. Captain Cam was great and they each went in order, and I ended up remembering everyone! The ladies caught nine sailfish, what a fun bunch!

It never rains in Costa Rica this time of year WRONG!

Turning in scorecards in heavy rain, even the dock bar was closed lol. I had heard about the white party from Art before the trip so I was looking forward to it but would it be dry? Nope! Here everyone was dressed in white, huddled together under any cover they could find. I felt bad for the tournament team that put in all this effort and the rain was relentless, but everyone still seemed to have a great time.

On to Los Sueños

I was lucky enough to be selected for the ladies only tournament, up at 3:30 because Art was kind enough to come pick me up at Paradise Bay hotel, even though he was not observing the ladies tournament.

Upon arrival at the marina I met Ashley, Estaban and team for my boat assignments. Ashley's team worked like a well-oiled machine, an Indy pit crew, any superlatives would apply. They had coffee, bag lunches and boat assignments ready. I drew the *Southern Pride*.

Feeling more confident with all the tricks and techniques on remembering angler names, I headed to the boat. Introductions were made, and the ladies were like Southern hospitality, and I could understand why the boat was named *Southern Pride*. Captain Chris and crew were so nice and accommodating, they all made me feel so comfortable.

With only three sailfish before noon then all hell broke loose in the final 1 ½ hours. Single, single, and double. At 3:25. a Blue Marlin for Jonie followed by a double at 3:35 to seal the victory for Southern pride. Throw in a 58 ½ lb. Wahoo for dinner. *Southern Pride* won the day.

On to leg 2 for more serious competition! Day 1

I was assigned *Uno Mas*, Captain and Owner Brooks Smith. I have met Brooks several times over the years, so I was kind of familiar with him. The day was long, making several moves but at the end of the day only five sailfish with a blue marlin loss by his wife made for an un-happy Brooks.

Day 2 - *Wall Hanger* with Captain Brian Allen. The day was the Paul Spencer show, with Paul catching seven of the 11 fish on the day.

Day 3 - *Perlamar* and new Captain Johnny Fagua. Johnny was just the mate a week earlier and promoted to Captain before leg 2. This team fished six lines, keeping me on my toes during bait testing and deployment changes. It was important they only kept six lines in the water. The team had a lot of bites, and missed opportunities and at days end only seven sailfish.

Being a part of a professional team for so many years, it was great to see other teams in action. All of the boats were competitive and professional. All were courteous to this rookie observer. it was great to have a front row seat to see other professional teams in action!

Six days of fishing, three tournaments, 4 A.M. alarms.

I witnessed 54 sailfish releases and a blue marlin. While I did not meet all my observer colleagues, I made new friendships and I hope to meet more of my IGFTO team in the future,

I thank you all for your help navigating the process. A special shout out to Art my mentor. Paul - hope I made you proud for approving me, Bob, Evan, Lynette and Jorge for your help, and that early morning transportation.

Being a part of the IGFTO family is an honor! I now have the friendships and camaraderie back!

See you on the tournament trail!

Party! Awards, great meal, Fireworks, BOOM! A great time - see you all soon!

Thank you!!



Los Sueños Leg 2 Observers February 2026. Photo credit: Los Sueños.

Los Sueños

Story by David Faulk

Hailing from Baton Rouge, LA, I became an observer in 2021 after taking a trip to Los Sueños and catching numerous billfish aboard the fabulous charter fleet there. It was during that trip that I read a fantastic article in the Los Sueños resort publication about the IGFTO and their roles as observers.

Intrigued.

I have to admit that I was intrigued. As soon as I returned to the states, I looked up the organization and flew to Ft. Lauderdale for training and certification. I started observing at the 2022 Los Sueños Triple Crown tournament and I was immediately hooked.

Over the course of the past four years, I have described my experience as an observer with tremendous excitement and enthusiasm to just about anyone who would listen. The thrill of being aboard the most beautiful sportfishing boats in the world in one of the most beautiful settings in the world and watching world class anglers fish these tournaments is unlike anything that you can imagine.

At the end of each day, you look back on a fishing experience that many would be envious of and throughout the experience you truly feel part of the team. The thrill of tournament observing combined with the beauty of Costa Rica has, for the past two years, driven me to now participating in the Pescadora Billfish Championships in Queops the weekend before and the Los Suenos Triple Crown Leg 2. It's like a two for one special.

Bring a friend

This year, after years of listening to me describe my observing trips, one of my best friends, Brad Bokun, also from Baton Rouge, decided to join me for my trip. Brad flew into Quepos to experience the excitement of the Pescadora Billfish Championships. Unfortunately, the awards dinner and White Party experienced some rain but that did not cool the excitement of the night and seeing the distribution of the many awards that night.

The next morning, Brad I and fished aboard a charter boat out of Marina Pez Vela and I was able to witness Brad catching his first billfish, a beautiful sailfish that put on a fantastic display for us.

That Sunday evening, we drove to and checked into Los Sueños and repeated a charter trip from the Los Sueños Marina where we continued to catch sailfish throughout the day. On Tuesday we discovered the beauty of Costa Rica by exploring the area surrounding Los Sueños and doing some hiking. The fishing continued on Wednesday and were able to continue our string of sailfish releases and were able to also catch a large yellowfin that would have easily tipped the scales at 150 pounds giving us some great source of meals for the remainder of the week.

Finally, Wednesday evening Brad and I were able to experience the Triple Crown Captain's meeting together with the other observers. This is here where Brad really started to experience the energy and excitement of the Triple Crown Tournament.

Brad was anxious to see how the tournament played out with my boat selections and daily catches.

Triple Crown Leg 2 certainly did not disappoint with action.

On Thursday I was lucky enough to draw *JUBEN*, the boat owned by Billy Freeman the man behind Freeman Boats. You can only imagine the excitement that I had in knowing that I would get to spend the day aboard the boat with an absolute legend in the boating world.

JUBEN managed to catch and release nine sailfish for the day starting at 9:00 and wrapping up at 2:13. Certainly not the day that anyone was expecting, but certainly a great day on the water and much better, as always, than a day at the office.

Day 2

Friday morning had me aboard the *SWEET SPOT* and what a day that it was. Starting the day at 8:28 with our first sailfish and wrapping up the day with 27 sailfish and one blue Marlin that came at 9:51. The result won the *SWEET SPOT* the daily and catapulted the boat into first place on day two. It was an amazing day to witness and one that I will never forget.

Saturday Day 3

The excitement was building on Day 3 when I drew *VINTAGE*, this is a boat that I had previously observed on and remembered that day well so I knew that I was in for a great day with an experienced Captain and Crew. We started the day at 8:46 and the action continued until 3:48 with a total of 19 sailfish, with a total of six double sailfish releases for the day.

Each day was tremendous and describing the day's events to Brad was a great highlight to the end of each day. Brad, throughout his experience, was able to meet a fantastic array of observers and enjoy the fabulous awards dinner celebration. He is still talking about the tournament experience with our friends back home and is seriously considering obtaining his IGFTO certification so that he can fully participate next year!

Los Sueños Triple Crown Leg 3

Story by Pete Van Dingstee

WOW what a weekend I had!

Leaving Florida for the tournament I was fired up to come and watch other people fish again, how many people in the world can say this and actually mean it?

Coming to an awesome place like this with so many fish and seeing some of the best men and women anglers in the world do their thing. The great part of this tournament after being involved both fishing it for three years and now my second year Observing it is the friendships I have made. As one of you we all have our stories of singles, doubles, yes even quad hookups and more fish for some being caught at the same time. Not to mention Marlins!

Ecstatic about my time here on the water. Thursday, Day 1

I too was in line with forty-two other observers for our boat assignments at 4:45 a.m.; I was assigned to *Max Bet* - at that time, they were in the lead. I looked at the angler list and two of the anglers were on the *Tar Heel*, who a week before, won the Pescadora while I was on board. They told everyone on board that "*Pete* was our lucky observer." The whole crew was great and we were fortunate to get lots of sails that day and hold up their lead.

Friday Day 2

When I went up to the table to get my boat details I was assigned to *Vintage* with Captain Hans, family, and crew. I have a brother named Hans and mentioned that to Hans Jr. as he welcomed me to the family. I stayed on deck the whole day watching them battle sailfish and they made me really feel at home. I was excited for them at every release and they took the Daily for day two, with their angler Cole taking the award for angler of the year at the awards night.

Saturday Day 3

Things were close in the top standings Max Bet up 900 points over the competition. Ashley's team was there ready to greet us all again. Other observers were filling in their score cards and familiarizing the names of their anglers. I was in line chatting with some of you about the previous day. When I got to my turn, they said Pete hope you have a great day! To my surprise I have my 3rd top three boat of the tournament *Team Galati*.

I could feel the intensity in the air.

Pat Healy owner of Viking gave an awesome motivating talk to the team and we were off. After saying hi to all the guys on board I stayed on deck with the mates as they completed rigging and setting everything up like a well-oiled machine. We took time to watch the sunrise together and I felt blessed to get out on the water again. Moving a couple of times Tony had them on the fish all day, they caught 41 total to win the title of Champions for the 2026 Triple Crown.

Congrats to all the teams, and thank you for making my stay in Los Sueños so memorable!

This one for me was amazing.



Los Sueños Leg 3 Observers March 2026. Photo credit: Los Sueños.

Want More Information? Navigate to: [IGFTO](#), [upcoming OTCs](#), and [FAQs](#).

Welcome Aboard!

Congratulations and Welcome Aboard to our fifteen newest observers who completed our Observer Training Classes (OTC) in Quepos, Costa Rica in February and Los Sueños in March 2026.

As a reminder, Observers are always welcome and encouraged to attend one of our courses as a refresher at **no charge**. The Board will be discussing upcoming OTC dates and locations for the remainder of 2026 soon.

Amy	Lezon	Playa Herradura	Costa Rica
Ana	Herrera	Quepos	Costa Rica
Carlos	Arguedas	Herradura	Costa Rica
Courtney	Lasyone	Monroe	LA
Hannah	Harp	Rockwall	TX
Jessica	Soupart	Deerfield Beach	FL
John	Wisenstine	Parrita	Costa Rica
Katherine	Sanchez	Jaco	Costa Rica
Marijke	VanLaarhoven	Quepos	Costa Rica
Marisol	Sanchez Morales	Quepos	Costa Rica
Rachel	Roufs	Meerssen	Netherlands
Sadai	Gonzalez.Abarca	Quepos	Costa Rica
Steven	Olson	Sutton	MA
Suri	Gonzalez.Abarca	Quepos	Costa Rica
Wesley	Garland	Granadilla	Costa Rica



Quepos Costa Rica Observer Training Course attendees and IGFTO staff. Photo Credit: Best Western Staff.



Los Sueños Costa Rica Observer Training Course attendees and IGFTO staff. Photo credit: Staff.

Have feedback or want to submit an article? Get in touch with our [webmaster](#).

Around the circuit and yearly statistics - IGFTO achieves another new benchmark!

Statistics by: Evan A. Hipsley, Jr.

International Game Fish Tournament Observers, Inc. are both professional and amateur sport fishermen originally trained by the International Game Fish Association, now taught by IGFTO, in both billfish identification and tournament rules.

Over IGFTO's history, Observers have witnessed releases of **86,104** billfish and have incurred millions of dollars in personal expenses in order to observe and conserve the species for future generations.

C O N G R A T U L A T I O N S on this milestone!!

During the months of January through March of 2026, 187 Observers attended seven tournaments comprised of the Los Sueños Ladies one-day tournament prior to Legs 1, 2, & 3, the Signature Triple Crown Legs 1, 2, & 3, and the Pescadora (Quepos) and witnessed the release of 8,270 billfish (8,200 Sailfish and 70 Marlin) in the Pacific.

Thanks for taking a few minutes to catch up. As always, Tight lines, and all the Best,



Evan A. Hipsley, Jr.

Member Since 2014

IGFTO President | Director | Webmaster

