

The IGFTO Observer ~ April 1, 2025 - to - June 30, 2025



Observing Today...Conserving for Tomorrow

The IGFTO Observer
A Newsletter for International Game Fish Tournament Observers

~Volume 14



Edition 2~



Charleston Observers. Photo Credit: Crew.

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Aqua Inspiration After Action Report

Story and photographs by: Dr. Ginny Richter



This was the fourth year that IGFTO participated in the Costa Rica Aqua Inspiration Educational Program in Quepos, and our third year in Golfitio encompassing May 19 – 23, 2025. Events were held at both Marina Bahia Golfito in Golfitio and Marina Pez Vela in Quepos.

This year's events served 53 students from Colegio de Conte in Golfito and 60 students from Colegio Rural de Cerros in Quepos. The students at both high schools participated in team building and character-building activities led by Junior Achievement Costa Rica at their respective schools on the first day.

The second day, students were bussed to their respective marina to learn about the different job opportunities in the marine industry, which brings in about \$500 million annually to Costa Rica, accounting for roughly 13 percent of the country's total tourism dollars.

Here the students from Quepos are learning, hands on, how to regrow coral to keep the coral reefs alive and well because of their importance to marine life. This presentation was led by Nashira who graduated from their own high school several years ago!



Students at both marinas attended a session with FECOP ([Costa Rican Sport Fishing Federation](#)) which explained why it is important to pursue a career in the marine industry, as well as the importance of conservation efforts by all.

Aqua Inspiration is an important program which introduces students of Costa Rica to the occupations available to them after graduation and the importance of marine life conservation. Please consider donating to this worthwhile project! Your generous tax deductible donation can be specifically made toward this program via venmo: <https://www.venmo.com/u/igfto> or simply mailing a check to IGFTO, PO Box 30191 Pensacola, FL 32503 with Aqua Inspiration on the memo line. Thanks!!

2025 Charleston Billfish Cup draws 15 IGFTO observers

Story by: Derwood Roberts

Heavy weather forecast limits participating boats.

The Sport Fishing Championship (SFC) was held in Charleston, South Carolina, June 4–7, 2025, for the HUK Charleston Billfish Cup, one of the stops on its national tournament circuit. The action took place at Saltwater Cowboys on Shem Creek. Sport fishing teams from around the world competed for more than \$180,000 in prize money.

Fishing grounds lie 65–75 nautical miles offshore, where Gulf Stream filaments push in over the continental shelf. This unique marine environment makes Charleston one of the few places in the world where anglers can target king mackerel while simultaneously pursuing blue marlin.

Three-day tournament cut to two due to weather forecast.

Many of the boats that registered for the tournament decided not to enter due to the weather. The 3-day tournament was reduced to 2 days by vote of participating teams due to the weather forecast. Only 7 boats entered in the tournament. IGFTO had 15 observers attend this event, and each observer was able to observe for one day.

Lights Out New England Angling Club released a sailfish less than 20 minutes after lines-in. However, a blue marlin release at 10:40 am by *East Coast Remix* put them in the lead early into day one of the tournament over *Lights Out*.

Last minute finish keeps everyone on edge.

A slow bite made for tension among all the participating boats. Concern that another boat could take the win with a blue marlin or several sailfish releases kept the *Remix* crew on edge as they continued searching for fish to hold their lead. *Lights Out* remained a contender into day 2. In the last two minutes, a blue marlin charged a *Remix* teaser, then faded away. Finally, a sailfish came up, missed on the first pass, but was hooked on the long line at 3:59 p.m., just moments before lines out. The live ESPN+ broadcast caught the rod bend on camera and relayed the hook-up to the tournament director. *Remix* finished the day with a sailfish release garnering them a total of 975 points, enough to take the win*.

Spectators witnessed live weigh-ins, dockside meet-and-greets with professionals, and numerous exhibits. The event received over six hours of live nationally televised coverage. The event also marked a homecoming for the South Carolina Outcast Angling Club led by NASCAR driver and two-time Daytona 500 Champion *Austin Dillon*.

A partnership of science and sport.

The tournament was launched in partnership with leading scientists and sustainability advocates to promote responsible sport fishing practices, protect migratory billfish populations, and fund vital research for ocean health. SFC features 14 angling clubs split between the Atlantic and Gulf divisions. During the regular season, seven teams compete in each divisional tournament. At the conclusion of the regular season, the top two teams in each division advance to the Zane Grey Championship.

*IGFTO witnessed the release of 6 Blue Marlin and 5 Sailfish.

Member Profile - Juan Emmanuel Cardenas Chaves

Story by: Art McDonald

It's no surprise that, surrounded by the nature of Costa Rica, and the Pacific Ocean, that fellows like Juan Emmanuel Chaves learned at a very young age to take advantage of those natural wonders. He remembers being around 8-10 years of age heading offshore with his dad to go fishing – they start them off at a very young age down there! Over the years Juan was influenced, not only by his dad, but several other important people in his life that honed his skills into sportfishing and helped shape the fisherman he is today. His parents always emphasized the importance in swimming, boating, and learning English. When he turned 18, his dad taught him life's lesson of building his own name and reputation.

Over time, with his passion for sportfishing growing, he was lucky to meet Tina Muller, who was an integral part of the Los Suenos Signature Triple Crown Billfish Series, and who invited Juan to take the Los Suenos Observer Class and become a Certified Los Suenos observer in the 2011 Series. With dedication, he completed an introductory online course from the International Game Fish Association ("IGFA") and got more experience on private tours and professional fishing – eventually serving as an IGFTO Observer. His IGFTO role has taken him to several other tournaments which also include Marina Pez Vela, and, of course, Los Suenos. These tournaments have connected him to an incredible community of anglers, captains, mates, and amazing IGFTO members.

Juan has a 13-year old daughter, Romina, and a goodly number of immediate family members (4 sisters, nephews, nieces, brothers-in-law, etc.). All his life, Juan has had a passion for understanding how things work and fixing them, starting with electronics, motorcycles, ATV's, wave runners, and boats. He's a Honda technician graduate, and has taken courses at the University of Costa Rica in mechanical and electrical engineering.

This experience was put to great use during the Pescadora Ladies Tournament this past February. Working as an observer, he was assigned a boat called the *Marlin Clipper*. During the event, there was a mechanical failure in the engine room. Taking over, Juan observed red coolant everywhere, a bent radiator cap, a full reservoir, and a disconnected hose. Both the first mate and Captain were notified, and gave Juan the ok to "take care of this problem." He

then reshaped the radiator cap, secured the hose with a metal clamp, and used a vacuum to stabilize the coolant level. Even after re-starting the engine, high temperature gauges indicated a need to replace the impeller. They limped back to the marina – got Juan an impeller which replaced the defective one, and got the engine running at a safe temperature level. Decisions were made to return to fishing, and they even released a couple of sailfish. The crew and anglers were thrilled!

Here's a testimonial on Juan from fellow IGFTO observer, Neil Harris: “Working with Juan during the Pescadora tournament was a reminder of how calm professionalism can turn a critical situation into a win. When engine trouble hit, his quick thinking, hands-on mechanical skills, and teamwork got us back in the water faster than we thought possible. He’s not only an outstanding observer, but he’s also someone you want by your side in any high-pressure situation.”

Why IGFTO? Juan joined IGFTO to connect with a professional community of observers and anglers. It allows him to grow, serve, and give back to a sport he truly loves. In his spare time, he’s a trained freelance Costa Rican tour guide, available for custom tours, airport pick-ups, fishing adventures, nature adventures, culture, and more.

Say hi to Juan the next time you are working a tournament in Costa Rica – you can’t miss his friendly smile and engaging personality.



You Make the Call

Story by: Art McDonald

So there you are – out in the middle of nowhere observing in a billfish tournament – it’s the last day of a 3-day event. This is a tournament that targets blue marlin and the boat you’re on has done pretty well in the 2 previous days with two solid releases – although they are in second place going into this final day on time. Because it’s the last day, the Tournament has instituted a time of 3:00 when fishing ends – although any fished hooked prior to 3:00 may be played but only until a 4:00 PM deadline. If a fish is released after 4:00 PM, it is disqualified.

As fate would have it, one of your anglers has hooked up just before the 3:00 cut-off and is fighting what could prove to be the Tournament winner – but the crew knows the fight cannot last past 4:00 PM. This turns out to be one of those stubborn blue marlin – showed herself at the outset on the pitch bait and put on a pretty spectacular aerial display before sounding. The fight becomes a “down and dirty” event with a stalemate 20 minutes before 4:00 PM. The angler is fighting this fish standing up – attached to a hip and shoulder harness and he just cannot gain any line. Line slips off the reel every time he tries to pump up the fish. The captain calls out to “push the drag to sunset” in an effort to try and gain line and you notice the angler begins to use his left hand to pull line through the guides – more or less “handlining” the fish. This proves successful as the angler is able to regain line on the reel just in time for the leader to pop up and the mate touch it for a successful release. You yell “RELEASE” – but then wonder if, by virtue of the angler not pumping the fish with the rod, the fish should be disqualified.

Should it?

Answer: As long as ONLY the angler has touched or pulled the line this would be considered a legal release. This technique is seen mostly in large tuna fishing from a fighting chair but also seen on television when the rod is, illegally, placed in a rod or gunwale holder to fight the fish.

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

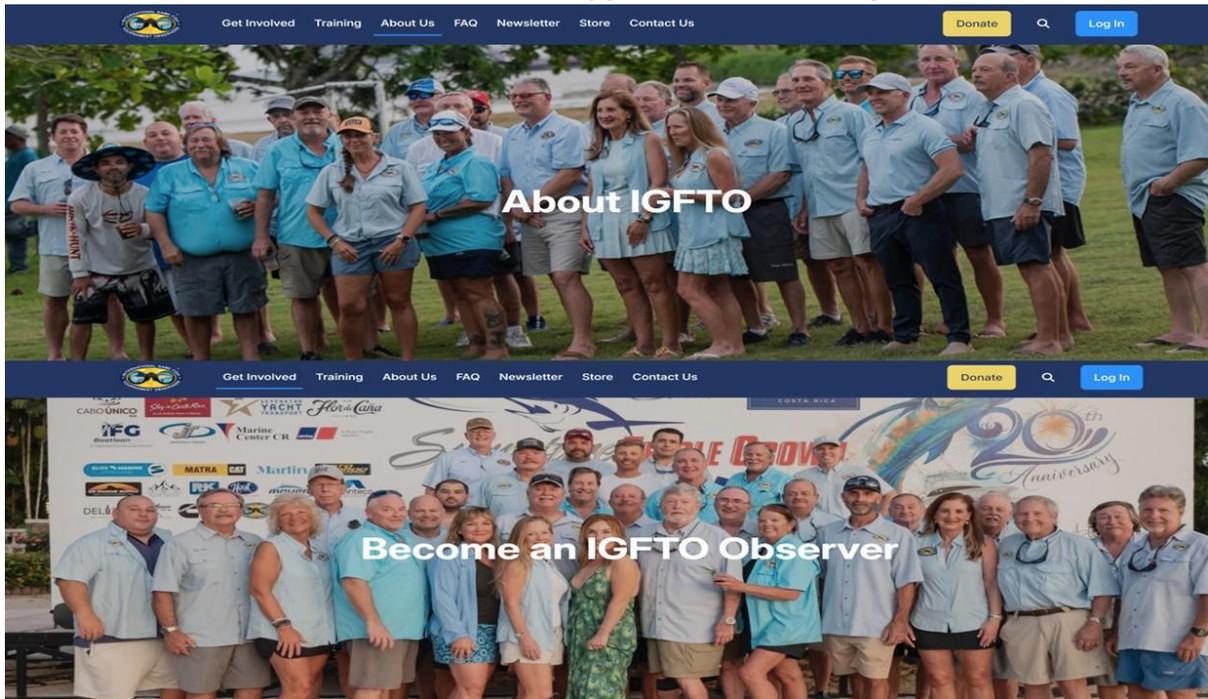
Welcome Aboard!

Congratulations and Welcome Aboard to our six newest observers from our May Fort Lauderdale, FL class. As a reminder, Observers are always welcome and encouraged to attend one of our courses as a refresher at no charge. Our next OTC is in Ocean City, MD on August 24, 2025 following the Mid Atlantic Tournament. Direct registration is available here: [OTC](#).

Scott Abeel, Stuart, FL
James Borzilleri, West Palm Beach, FL
Phyllis Conrad, Jupiter, FL
Hunter Presnell, West Palm Beach, FL
Lee Smith, Melrose, FL
Don Stubbs, Lighthouse Point, FL

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

Following up from our last quarterly newsletter, we reported that our user experience (UX) incorporation was complete. What does that mean you might ask? Well, starting in approximately one week (July 15th), module updates will be incorporated from our developer, and full incorporation is expected later this summer for our updated website - exciting times. Below are a few screenshots from the website upgrades that are coming soon!



Around the circuit.

IGFTO Observers will travel to EL Salvador in November and Guatemala in December 2025 to participate in their Billfish Tournaments. Members in good standing will receive an eBlast approximately three months prior to tournament kickoffs.

Did you know? 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 species identification and tournament rules. Since IGFTO's inception and founding, observers have witnessed releases of 76,471+ billfish [as of 30 June 2025] (all species) and have incurred millions of dollars in personal expenses in order to observe and conserve the species for future generations. *Qualified* applicants are welcomed to Join IGFTO.

Thanks for taking a few minutes to catch up.

As always, Tight lines, and all the Best,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Evan". The signature is stylized and cursive.

Evan A. Hipsley, Jr.
Member Since 2014
IGFTO President | Director | Webmaster

