

THE 2007 WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP BILLFISH RELEASE TOURNAMENT

An inside look at the dynamic and exciting fishery that is Cabo San Lucas, Mexico

A journal by an official WCBRT observer

By David Garza

Growing up as a little boy in Avalon, California, It did not take me long to discover the electric atmosphere created by the majestic marlin. Like many kids who have grown up in Avalon, no matter where we played, my friends and I would be stopped in our tracks by the sound of Rosie Cadman's cannon. This cannon would signify the capture of the elusive marlin, it would also start a dash to the green pier filled with anticipation, as we all knew somewhere behind that yellow polypropylene line would be the magnificent marlin there for us to view. These images were mesmerizing and would forge my life time fascination with marlin fishing.

Since these early days, I have always followed the sport, its top boats, captains, and various trends and issues. Several months ago I was presented the opportunity to be an official observer for the 2007 WCBRT. In less than 10 seconds I had rationalized why I should participate and quickly sent my response to WCBRT committee member Bill Morris. I waited anxiously as I thought surely I would be too late, fortunately I was not!

The WCBRT was founded on the principle of promoting billfish conservation by the use of circle hooks on dead and live baits. As such this would be a mostly circle hook (I don't believe there was a single jig fish) and all release tournament.

Main Characters:

Steve Lassley- The heavyweight champ or CEO, because he is a winner but he is also very business like.

He walks with a confidence that says “I am on land now, but just wait until I get out on the water”

Pete Grosebeck- Kid in a candy store, because he genuinely looks like he enjoys every minute of a tournament and at his age he is still in great shape, which allows him to out fish guys half his age.

Mike “beak” Hurt- The professor, this larger than life man is very humble and a great sportsman, but he has fishing to a science and can and does give lessons.

Dave Brackmann- A dedicated sportsman who is equally committed to protecting the marlin fishery as he is to being a competitive angler. He is very much the face of the WCBRT.

Tom Lansing (or Tomas) - A cool character with a hairstyle befitting a top marlin fisherman, Tom is about as cool as a Pacifico at Baja Cantina after 12 hours of marlin fishing. Tom is extremely organized, his crew is a well oiled machine, on board you will find the hooks, Gatorade and sushi all in order. Tom’s pre game preparations include quality music and sea surface temps on his laptop like the morning paper.

Steve Geary (or Esteban)- Kind of a Billy the Kid, an up and coming gunslinger, this guy is a cant miss future star in tournament fishing. He has fish intelligence, can see tailers a hemisphere away and he is fearless.

Vincente/Memo Bojorquec- These brothers are like a machine, very hard working, they both have eyes like a frigate and are experts at baiting fish.

Bruce/Ramon Montano- Another set of brothers who know this game well, Bruce is as sharp as a circle hook.

Eduardo Angeles Cecena- This was the proudest fisherman I met, often times guys like Grosebeck and Jim Kingsmill will get a lot of the attention as top anglers (rightfully so, considering there impressive resumes) but there are guys like Eduardo who are just as good if not better than the rest. Eduardo was so proud of the amount of fish he had caught, he wanted to make sure I had his name spelled right before I departed the dock.

Fishing Day 1

I was an observer on board the “Extraction” a polished fishing machine with a precision crew and a solid captain in Felipe Gonzalez. After the shotgun start, the morning began slow, as the team had decided to work an area away from the majority of boats that had been holding fish. After some very disturbing returns on this decision, the crew became impatient (especially with all of the radio chatter), they eventually picked up and ran to where the majority of the fleet was around the “Shark Bouys”.

1130 Baited tailer that lit up when bait hit water, bait had no chance.

1230 Baited fish that sunk out, soaked baits for a hook up.

1329 Got one fish in feeders balling bait.

1345 Double hook up in the middle of intense action between feeders and boats.

The feeders put on a show today, action was hot, including doubles, triples, yelling, screaming, and engines roaring. Top boats on this day would get 10 or more releases.

Fishing Day 2

I was an observer on board “Bull Rider” a beautiful fishing machine. I believe after the previous days feeder show, that captains and anglers were probably loosing sleep dreaming of running out to the same area for a repeat of that feeder activity. However day two would prove to be quite different from day 1 for most of the boats. The morning was slow on “Bull Rider”

1215 very few fish for fleet so far, top boats struggling, Bad Company has two.

“Bull Rider” owner Rick Twamley, lights a cigar and demands a change in tactics from his skipper Martin. This subtle challenge would lead to a flurry of activity. Previously slow trolling dead baits, “Bull Rider” switched to fast trolling jigs and teasers.

1337 Raised three fish to jigs in last hour, drop back on last fish was good (all fish observed by Eduardo Cecena)

1510 Fish in jigs, dropped back got a double, lost one of double, while fighting remaining fish, soaked bait on bow, bait picked up, back to double.

There had not been any sight fish all day (except free jumpers), fast trolling with teasers seemed to entice fish in to pattern for Twamley, Martin and the rest of the gang.

Fishing Day 3

I was an observer aboard “Spartacus at Sea”, the captain Steve Geary had developed an affection during the previous two days for a spot he knew to be holding fish. After the final day’s shotgun start, it was clear that he intended to fish this same area again. “Spartacus at Sea” did however stop to bait 3 tailers and a sleeper on the way to Geary’s “sweet spot”. The morning was slow but Geary would push back any suggestion of switching locations by pointing to the sounder full of bait and fish (the sounder was lit up).

1225 Wind picked up

1230 Missed at a tailer, followed up with a baited sailfish, IVO Boca de Tule.

1254 Released baited tailer.

1325 Released fish from frigates and balled up bait.

1400 Released back to back tailers, tailers out of control, boat can not turn without hitting a fish, “wide open”.

1420 Released another tailer, six fish under boat.

1440 Baited tailer no bite, ran in to sleeper no bite, furious action running and baiting

Team Spartacus would finish the day with two more fish in similar action, but would be hindered by the 40 bait restriction, as more fish were sighted but bait in tanks was no longer lively.

Tournament results

There were many of quality boats and teams in this tournament but tournaments are won by making sound decisions and taking appropriate actions when necessary without hesitation. “Chiqelin” and “Bad Company” would both finish the WCBRT with 33 released fish, however in accordance with tournament rules, “Chiqelin” would win the tie breaker by 30 minutes. The defending champs “Bad Company” would be forced to settle for second place. “Get Over It” would finish in 3rd place with 30 marlin releases. Pete Grosebeck of “Bad Company” would finish with yet another top angler award for doing battle with 21 marlin in three days of fishing.

Final Thoughts

The WCBRT was an incredible experience, the tournament was filled with the highest quality of people from the committee members down to the last angler. The atmosphere around the tournament was saturated with camaraderie. I was able to interact with three boat owners Tom Lansing, Rick Twamley and Gary Sumner. They were all great people, who were very hospitable to me as an observer, they all seemed to truly enjoy marlin fishing and shared the spirit of competition. I had the privilege of spending two days with owner Gary Sumner, one as an official observer and the other as a guest on board “Spartacus at Sea”. Gary is a class act and I thank him for giving me multiple chances to throw bait at tailing marlin, no matter how inaccurate my casts were. Gary Sumner has a great boat in “Spartacus at Sea” and has assembled a great team, expectations are high on board “Spartacus at Sea”.

The “Reelaxe” a 45 ft Rampage owned by Chris Badsey (who spends a lot of his non fishing time as co-director of the WCBRT) was the topic of many conversations as the boats impressive speed, seemed to leave other boats standing still as if they were aground, as he powered to and from the fishing grounds. Teams “Protocol” and team “Tijuana” get the most dedicated award, as they fought hard up until the very end. I witnessed the crew of “Protocol” yelling and screaming as they hooked in to a marlin on the last day just before lines in, at a whopping 39 miles out.

In closing the WCBRT has a great mission statement, it is a vision I hope is realized. The fulfillment of this objective however is in grave danger with the passing of Regulation NOM-029 (Shark Norma). As an owner, captain, angler, observer or a casual fan, I ask that you do what you can to protect the Cabo Marlin Fishery and other fisheries like it, do what you can to protect innocent boyhood memories.

Authors note: This is only an account of my observations as an observer, they are solely my opinions, I did not interview the parties mentioned.



Shotgun at the arch



Tom Lansing owner/team member "Extraction"



Eduardo Cecena of "Bull Rider"



Kingsmill working feeder, Grosbeck pinning on a fresh one



A rare quite moment for Beak and "Chiquelin"



May I have this dance...



Geary spots yet another tailer, the "Spartacus" team is manning battle stations



Intense action prompts Memo to ask agua por favor



Geary makes everything look easy, just another day at the office



The author takes a quick shot with this striper, before a successful release