



THE 2005 OFFICIAL GUIDE TO
BILLFISHING[®]
BLUEWATER ADVENTURE

**WBS GRAND
CHAMPIONSHIPS:
DESTINATION MAZATLÁN**

**TRAVEL GUIDEPOST
HAWAII
THE BAHAMAS
EL SALVADOR**

**14th Anniversary
Edition**

SHOWDOWN IN MAZATLÁN

THE FORMULA WAS SIMPLE:

TAKE OVER 30,000 OF THE WORLD'S BEST ANGLERS.

RUN THEM THROUGH A HIGHLY COMPETITIVE QUALIFYING FORMAT OF TOURNAMENTS.

ONLY THE BEST OF THE BEST WOULD MAKE IT TO THE ELITE YEAR-END CHAMPIONSHIP EVENT.

IT'S ANGLER VERSUS ANGLER. EAST MEETS WEST. A MEXICAN SHOWDOWN, MAZATLAN STYLE.

SCOTT RICKERT 2003 CHAMPION MIKE VIDAL 1999 CHAMPION BRUCE BOSLEY 2001 CHAMPION
 MARK WODLINGER SOUTHEAST DIVISION ANDY KONTOS MID-ATLANTIC DIVISION JENNIFER BACARDI CARIBBEAN DIVISION
 LUIS BACARDI CARIBBEAN DIVISION MIKE CROMER PACIFIC COAST DIVISION GREG CAMPBELL GULF COAST DIVISION
 CHRIS TURNER GULF COAST DIVISION SCOTT BOWERS MID-ATLANTIC DIVISION PERRY PEACE MID-ATLANTIC DIVISION
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ON LOCATION MARINA EL CID HOTEL AND BEACH CLUB, MAZATLÁN, MEXICO





ON LOCATION

The city itself was first established by the Spanish in the early 1800s. With its location on a deepwater cove, largely sheltered and protected from the Pacific's large waves and frequent storms, Mazatlán quickly became the capital for the surrounding state of Sinaloa, and even functioned as the state's capital for several years. The 1930s brought along a boom in commercial fishing and shrimping, placing the region squarely on the nation's economic map, but it wasn't until decades later that travelers from around the world began to sample the world-class marlin fishing that existed just a short distance offshore.

Mazatlán quickly became a closely-guarded secret among traveling anglers as one of the top billfishing destinations of the world, a title it still carries proudly today. While its stunning neo-Gothic architecture remains evident in the town's center and historians reporting that Mazatlán has perhaps one of the best-preserved historic centers in all of

Mexico, the action this year was centered not on the town's interior but offshore in the blue waters that border the picturesque coastline of golden beaches as once again the World Billfish Series Grand Championships headed south into the land of iguanas, tequila, fiestas and great billfishing.



Few resorts in the nation are as inviting as the Marina El Cid Hotel and Yacht Club, the host facility for this year's tournament. With its top-notch marina facility, Mediterranean-style suites, numerous pools, excellent dining and friendly staff, the Marina El Cid is certainly one of the finest resorts of its type in the entire

nation. Owners Carlos and Julio Verdegue have cultivated a degree of hospitality among their employees that really sets the Marina El Cid Beach Hotel apart. From the registration fiesta to the celebratory awards dinner to the after-fishing cocktail parties each afternoon, the anglers of the WBS were made to feel

right at home by the hotel staff. Tourists in general are welcomed in Mazatlán with open arms and a friendly grin, but the reception at the Marina El Cid was especially cordial.

SETTING THE SCENE

While December is normally a crossroads in the billfishing off the west coast of Mexico, there are usually good numbers of blue and

black marlin in the area, plus enough big Pacific sailfish to really spice things up. An unexpected bonus for many anglers is also the good chance of spotting a swordfish on the surface, a rare treat during daylight hours as this hunter of the deep rests after a long night of chasing squid and baitfish in the murky depths.



Mazatlán offers one of the world's best shots at baiting a swordfish on light tackle, and more than one was spotted during the event. Hordes of striped marlin also invade these waters, albeit later in the season, making for a truly mixed bag of billfishing available off Mazatlán.

The wide variety (and sizes) of the billfish available also made for some difficult choices for the WBS anglers that gathered for this year's event. While 30-pound test line is certainly adequate for a 100-pound sailfish, it's woefully inadequate for a marlin that may weigh

in excess of 300 pounds or more. Conversely, it's very hard to cast a small live bait, generally less than a pound, to a fish that's spotted on the surface using anything greater than 50-pound test line. Tournament rules also governed the choice of tackle, with double points for any species of billfish caught on the lighter 30-pound class line. As a result, the experienced group chose to target their fish using light tackle whenever possible. It would be a determining factor later in the event.

The choice of live bait versus dead bait or artificial lures would also prove to be a factor in deciding the winners. Since it's decidedly easier to entice a marlin or sailfish using live bait, double points were also awarded to those who chose to use dead bait or synthetic trolling lures. This is also where the angler's individual experience came into play, as the local boats often fished in a manner entirely foreign to some of the visiting top guns. By pulling a spread of all artificial lures, the boat could cover more ground and possibly locate hungry fish, while others pulling dead rigged baits like ballyhoo and mullet were forced to do so more slowly, covering less water but with a more enticing marlin appetizer at the end of the leader. Finally, those who went with all live baits could only move at a snail's pace, but had the best chances of raising a fish if they were located in the right area. Often, boats would choose to cover more ground using one style of fishing, then switch to

another when conditions looked right. It would come down to the experience of the angler at this point, knowing when and what to pull in order to locate and catch fish.

As the tournament registration kicked off on Tuesday, though, more than one participant was quite appreciative to discover a long-sleeved WBS T-shirt in their angler bag. The weather had turned downright blustery, with the winds gusting between 10 and 25 miles per hour and the temperature taking a very un-Mexican dip into the unseasonably chilly range. Mother Nature had taken aim at the central west coast of the country, unleashing a cold front that would also prove detrimental to the billfishing as well. Still, the gathered crowd of anglers, WBS tournament directors and VIPs took the weather in their characteristically easy-going style, with most having another Pacifico beer or shot of tequila to ward off the chill.

By Wednesday morning, the winds had subsided enough to allow the 3rd Annual WBS Golf Classic to kick off, as the gathered group of golfers took to the links at one of the many nearby courses. Mazatlán offers some world-class golf for those so inclined, although world-class would hardly describe the gathered four-somes that teed off that day. However, by noon everyone had returned to the comfort of the Marina El Cid with more than a few tales of birdies missed and putts made, entertaining everyone within earshot. Others took to the ocean in order to test their tackle as well as their charter boats, reporting a few marlin seen and a few more missed. The tournament was shaping up to be one for the books in more ways than one.





Left: The action heats up as Mike Cromer battles a striped marlin.

Right: Jennifer Bacardi makes her on-camera appearance.



presented to the team who travels the most miles each year in order to compete on the World Tour. Her experience was enough to gain her top spot on the leaderboard with 150 points.

Bacardi wouldn't be alone on the leaderboard, though. Shortly after noon on Day One, veteran West Coast angler Mike Cromer also scored a sailfish release aboard his 75 Mikelson, the *After Midnight*. "We had been pulling lures when we found some good-looking water," Cromer reported. "There were tons of little skipjack tuna around, so we decided to switch over to live-baiting with them. I had a strike before we could even get the rest of the baits in the water!" With such initial success, the team was certain they had found the correct strategy to catching fish but would go without a strike for the remainder of the day. Mike would receive 100 points for his nice Pacific sailfish, released in short order on 30-pound gear.

As the anglers gathered poolside for the after-fishing dock party, it seemed that even though the fishing was very much slower than usual, there was plenty of action to be had. Numerous schools of ten- to 20-pound class yellowfin tuna accompanied by hundreds of porpoises had been spotted within 20 miles of the marina, and several boats had seen tailing

marlin and swordfish on the surface nearby as well, so Day Two was shaping up to be a promising one.

Later that evening, the crowd gathered in the lobby of the Marina El Cid for the Mazatlán Meander, a tour of the city's nightlife. The fish tales seemed to grow larger as the overall sobriety level of the participants declined, but it was agreed that a good time was had by all.

The second day of a three-day tournament is often known as moving day, with anglers either making a jump into the lead or falling off into obscurity. This event would be no different, as angler Mark Wodlinger, representing Singer Island, Florida, was able to release two sailfish, both on dead bait/lure combinations and 30-pound tackle. This would vault him into the lead with 400 points for the tournament. "We found some really good-looking water yesterday and went back to the same area today," he said at dockside. "I just hope we can catch a couple more tomorrow."

Another East Coaster, Jupiter Florida's Andy Kontos, also scored a billfish release

THE SHOWDOWN

Day One began with a shotgun start at 6:30 a.m. as the fleet spread out far and wide. Some of the faster boats elected to test the limits of the tournament-imposed 50-mile boundary, while others decided to remain closer to port in search of productive water. Making a long run is always a gamble in competitive fishing. While the grass may seem greener in pastures well over the horizon, the downside is a substantial loss of fishing time. No one ever caught a marlin while running full speed, so the tradeoff is not one to be taken lightly.

Jennifer Bacardi, fishing aboard the Bertram 54 *Rum Bum*, scored the first release of the event by mid-morning, releasing a sailfish on an artificial lure and using 50-pound test line. One of the world's top anglers, the Miami-based Bacardi qualified for the Championship through her efforts in the Caribbean Division, fishing extensively throughout the islands of the Bahamas, Puerto Rico, and St. Thomas. In fact, Jennifer and her husband Luis were the recipients of the 2004 WBS World Traveler award,

An acrobatic sailfish makes a quick 180 degree turn toward the boat.





Left: Mark Wodlinger (right) celebrates after releasing his second sailfish of the event on light tackle and dead bait. It would be enough to vault him into the lead on the second day of the tournament.

on Day Two. Andy connected with a nice Pacific sailfish on dead bait and light line to add 200 points to his side of the ledger and place his name on the board as well.

Never in WBS history has a Grand Championships tournament been so wide open going into the third and final day of competition. A single marlin on dead bait and light tackle would equal the score of clubhouse leader, so everyone knew that it was anybody's game to win or lose as they departed the Marina El Cid at first light. Once again, there were plenty of fish seen but they remained aggravatingly difficult to tempt with a baited hook. The noon report to the committee boat listed just one angler, South Carolina's Perry Peace, with a single sailfish for the fleet. However, by mid-afternoon the seas calmed a bit and the wind changed direction slightly, creating perfect conditions for spotting the elusive striped marlin as they tailed along on the surface. The showdown would wind down right to the 4 p.m. call for lines out.

With just over two hours remaining in the tournament, the *After Midnight* had finally found their quarry: striped marlin. These fish spend much of their time on the water's surface, slowly cruising along with just the tips of their fins giving away their location. West Coast crews spend hours with their faces pressed tightly into high-powered binoculars, glassing the ocean in search of these tailing marlin. Capt. Steve Lassley carefully maneuvered the boat into position as Cromer headed forward to the bow, preparing to pitch his live bait. The game was now on.

As the small baitfish hit the water's surface with an audible *thwack* in front of the marlin, an instant response was elicited.

The fish, once bronze-black, immediately lit up in blues and purples, its trademark flanking stripes glowing like neon in the night. In a flash the marlin engulfed the bait and immediately took to the air in a display of aerial acrobatics that the species is renowned for displaying. Cromer's expertise with light tackle was also impressive, as he had the fish boatside for a careful release within twenty minutes. The tournament-required circle hook had performed perfectly, latching the marlin harmlessly in the corner of the jaw rather than in the throat or gills. High fives were passed around as the fish, estimated at 150 pounds, swam off uninjured to fight another day.

Now in second place, Mike knew the event was his to win or lose. In the final hour, another striped marlin was spotted by the sharp-eyed crew and with visions of the tournament trophy in his head, Cromer again made a perfect cast to a marlin on the surface. The billfish's response was identical to the first: it lit

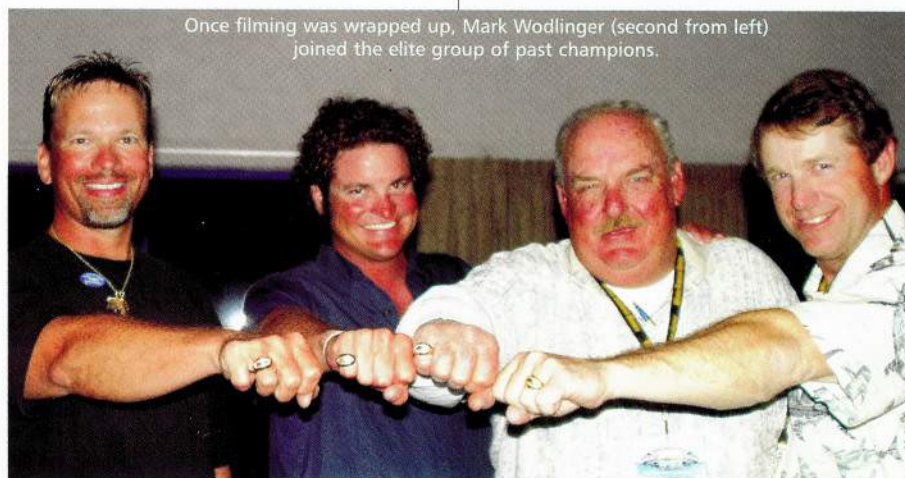
up from nose to tail with color, wheeled around on the live bait...and then disappeared from sight. A lesser competitor would have been compelled to either anger or tears at that point, but Mike simply said, "That's marlin fishing."

Back at the Marina El Cid, Mark Wodlinger nervously awaited the arrival of the remaining tournament boats. His friend and deckhand Matt Allgood had turned off their boat's VHF radio midway through the afternoon, so Mark was unaware of how close the tournament had actually become. "He was pacing the deck just hoping he would have enough points to win," Allgood reported. "So at that point I just turned off our radio. We do that in tournaments at home sometimes, because you get too wrapped up in what's going on that you aren't concentrating on your fishing."

As each angler turned in their scorecards though, it soon became apparent that his pair of sails from the day before would be enough for the win. The young Floridian would be the 2004 World Champion of Billfishing, adding his name to a very elite roster of world-class anglers that have previously earned the title of champion. Aided by his fellow competitors, Mark found his way into the pool, fully clothed, in true tournament-winning tradition. And so ended this year's Grand Championship. 🚤

CLOSING SCENE

- Mark Wodlinger, Singer Island, FL 400 points
- Mike Cromer, Ojai, CA 300 points
- Andy Kontos, Jupiter, FL 200 points
- Perry Peace, Pawley's Island, SC 200 points
- Jennifer Bacardi, Miami, FL 150 points



Once filming was wrapped up, Mark Wodlinger (second from left) joined the elite group of past champions.



ESTA NO.

PICTURE PERFECT



The capital of the Mexican state of Sinaloa, Mazatlan is truly a modern gateway to Old Mexico. Situated on the western coast of the nation, the city offers both a traditional historic area complete with 19th century neo-Gothic cathedrals and museums combined with all the amenities of a modern 21st century destination in the form of restaurants, hotels, discos and other attractions in the Zona Dorada (Golden Zone).

The region also offers an intriguing combination of both natural and manmade attractions. Visitors are most often drawn to the warm waters of the Pacific and the miles of golden beaches that make up the transition from ocean to dry land. The sportfishing here is spectacular, with three different species of marlin (blue, black and striped) making their seasonal appearances, plus an abundance of feisty Pacific sailfish found nearly year round. An added

bonus for the traveling fisherman: the occasional chance to catch a swordfish during the daylight hours, a rare occurrence elsewhere in the angling world. The ocean teems with life here, with thousands of porpoises herding schools of baitfish accompanied by plenty of yellowfin tuna and four different whale species, including killer whales, a common sight just a short distance offshore.

Back on terra firma, the sights and sounds of the local markets will delight even the most hardened visitor as local vendors offer fresh seafood, produce and hand-made goods for sale. These markets are not merely tourist attractions—this is where the locals come to do their shopping for their own families.

Mazatlan truly offers something for everyone, representing the finest cultures of Old Mexico while embracing the new eco-tourism of the modern era. 🌊



MAZATLÁN

