

SPECIAL: Key to the Long Cast: No Backlash

South Coast

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103-Pound Wahoo: An Epic Fishing Adventure



Anglers competing in the sixth annual Mazatlan Billfish Classic held in mid-November, 2000, knew fishing would probably be good during the three days of angling competition, but most had no idea that nearly 200 billfish – setting one of several tournament records during the Nov. 9-11 event – would be registered in the popular contest.

A large part of the record-book rewriting was, in fact, that all 173 sailfish brought to leader, plus an additional 12 blue marlin caught, were allowed to swim away, representing the highest percentage of released billfish ever impartially documented during a West Coast regional competition. Less than a dozen other billfish were brought ashore.

“It shows, beyond a doubt, that properly administered with adequate verification safeguards, a catch-and-



Big Blues Put Green in Anglers' Pockets

Blue marlin were taken in record-setting numbers and sizes during the sixth annual Mazatlan Billfish Classic, figuring heavily in the scoring. The first-place team, in fact, *Chupacabras*, finished in the lead by landing three blues during three days of competition. A 225-pound minimum qualifying weight was in effect for any billfish brought to the scales, and a penalty was imposed for any fish taken under that mark.

Weights and team names of the 11 heaviest blue marlin catches follow:

463 pounds	Big Time
431 pounds	Striped Marlin
397.5 pounds	Black Marlin
392.5 pounds	Chupacabras
355 pounds	Gene's Machine
296 pounds	Capt. Hook II
277.5 pounds	Chupacabras
271 pounds	Chupacabras
256.7 pounds	Sofia
255 pounds	Sea Fever
239 pounds	Aries II

A large Pacific sailfish is the central focus, held vertically by a person whose arm and hand are visible on the right. The fish's long, pointed snout and large, dark, deeply forked tail are prominent. The background shows a marina with several white boats docked at a wooden pier. In the distance, a resort with palm trees and buildings is visible under a clear sky.

Records Tumble at the Mazatlan Billfish Classic

by Chuck Garrison

By far the most abundant billfish species during the tournament was the Pacific sailfish, of which literally all brought to leader were released to fight another day. In all, the tourney scored an overall release rate of 94.3 percent.

The three days of fishing competition were staged out of the El Cid Marina, which also offers beautiful overnight accommodations in the adjacent Marina El Cid Resort (seen partially in background).



Steve Campbell of Riverside, a blue-water, blue-diamond aficionado extraordinaire, took a day off from his fishing-observer duties to catch and invite this large dorado to dinner.

Prior to the tournament, cadets at the Mexican Maritime Academy in Mazatlan, Mexico, were briefed on information and rules which would be important to them while serving as unbiased observers on all tournament boats.



release format for big-money tournaments can successfully be carried-out and not embroiled in controversy," says Harvey Hunnicutt, president of International Gamefish Tournament, which oversees the annual offshore angling event.

A total of 26 elite big-game fishing teams turned out for the Mazatlan Classic put on by International Gamefish Tournaments and when the final tally was made, 196 billfish had been caught, of which 185 were released to fight another day, and 11 were blue marlin brought to the Marina El Cid scales.

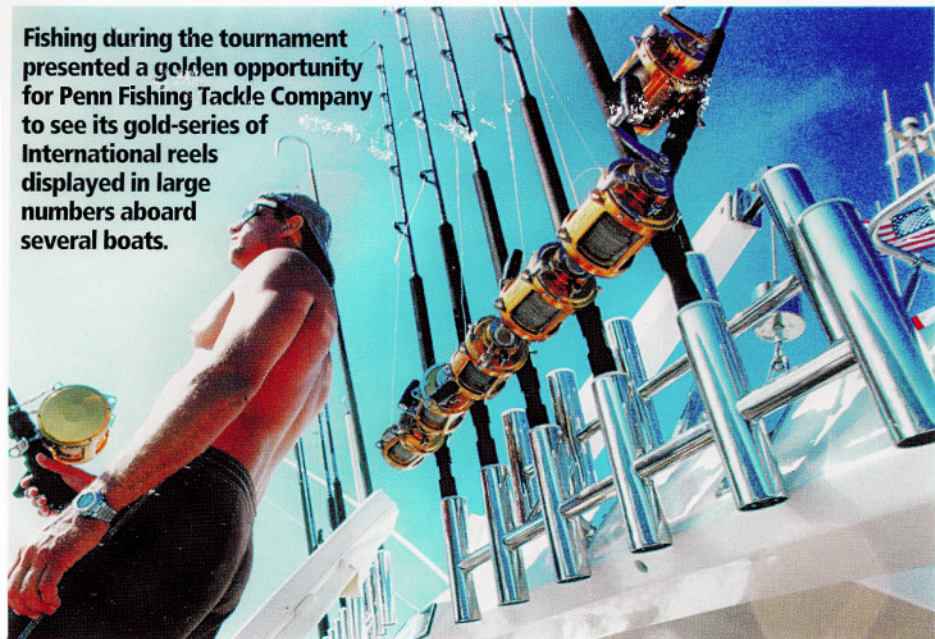
The tournament is fast becoming a showcase for West Coast regional catch-and-release billfishing because of the event's innovative use of "sequence-



International Gamefish Tournament president Harvey Hunnicutt (left) confers with Geronimo Ceballos, Marina El Cid harbor master, over scheduling and the morning's roll call of boats.

stamping" photos taken following releases, plus placing a cadre of trained observers one each to a boat among all competing craft. In addition, all liberated fish must be photographed in order to be eligible as a qualifying release.

Fishing during the tournament presented a golden opportunity for Penn Fishing Tackle Company to see its gold-series of International reels displayed in large numbers aboard several boats.



So successful was the sixth annual Mazatlan Billfish Classic held out of Mazatlan, Mexico that a record \$200,000 in prize monies was awarded, with over 84% of the \$200,000 awarded to teams whose scoring was based on billfish released during the competition.

A 225-pound minimum weight was imposed for all fish brought to the scales, hence, prompting the release of literally every sailfish brought to leader. The majority of blue marlin found in Mazatlan waters at the time easily qualified as over the 225-pound

cutoff. Each released billfish earned 100 points, while each qualifying blue marlin earned points on a basic-points-plus-extra-poundage formula.

First place in the Mazatlan Billfish Classic was taken by the team fishing aboard *Chupacabras*, which amassed 2548 points by concentrating their efforts on blue marlin fishing and turning in a tourney-record, three-blue-marlin catch. The blues weighed 271, 277.5 and 392.5 pounds.

Chupacabras team members pocketed a total of \$103,100 in winnings,

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