

SEPTEMBER 2017
(Volume 16, Edition 6)

InTheBite®

THE PROFESSIONALS' SPORTFISHING MAGAZINE

A CAPTAIN'S CULINARY GUIDE

PAIRING AND
PREPARING

MOVING DAY

Getting Your Sportfisher
From Here to a Distant
Hotspot Doesn't Have
to be a Hassle



**2016 WHITE
MARLIN OPEN**
The Captain's Account
An *InTheBite* Exclusive

**LIGHTS,
CAMERA,
ACTION!**

**YOUNG
GUNS OF
SPORTFISHING**

**THE
BIG ROCK**
A Fishing Festival



The Big Rock—A Fishing Festival

Photo courtesy Zimmerman Agency

by Elliott Stark

For many, the Big Rock marks the first tournament of the year. After a long winter, the build-up for large blue marlin and large payouts draws contenders from up and down the East coast.

The storied tradition of the tournament is matched by the list of quality of the participants. The 177 participating boats in this year's tournament—the Big Rock's 59th edition—departed from Hatteras, Beaufort, Okracoke and Wrightsville Beach inlets. The tournament's epicenter, however, is Morehead City.

In its conception, the Big Rock is more than a fishing tournament. More aptly it is a community event that both showcases and heavily benefits Carteret County, North Carolina. Home to some 70,000 residents, Carteret County and the lives of its residents are shaped by the ocean. This is a fitting home for an event that is equal parts marlin fishing tournament and town celebration.

Randy Ramsay has been a board member of the Big Rock Tournament for 22-years. He is also the President of Jarrett Bay Boats and the voice on the tournament radio. Ramsey's perspective reflects the unique nature of the event. "The mission of the tournament is to increase fishing awareness and conservation and to impact the local community. We've been very diverse in our giving," Ramsey describes.

"At the local level, we support the Salvation Army, the Hospice House, and the Boy Scouts. We sponsor a program to introduce kids to fishing with the North Carolina Aquarium. The tournament has also been heavily involved with education and the local school system and has helped with local soup kitchens and domestic violence shelters. In 2016, the tournament donated heavily to hurricane relief efforts. Total giving reached north of \$4.3 million since 1986. Last year we donated \$687,000 to charities."

While charitable giving is a staple of many tournaments, it is the community-centered ap-

proach that makes the Big Rock remarkable. The entire county turns out for the tournament. The awards banquet and a midweek pork chop dinner are held at the civic center. Joining the anglers, captains, and crews are hundreds of people who are not fishing the tournament. The weigh in station sits in the waterfront in downtown Morehead. Were you not to know what was happening, you might think the tournament was a music festival—a music festival where the headliners are 500-pound blue marlin.

The 177-boats in this year's tournament fished for a purse of \$2.4 million. Captain Brian Harrington and the *Run Off* earned a check of \$1.1 million for their tournament best 533.8-pound blue marlin. Catching the winning fish on Monday, the *Run Off* team endured an anxiety-filled week of fishing before their victory became official Saturday afternoon. Captain Bull Tolson on the *Sea Toy* took top honors in the release division, catching six blues and a sailfish. Captain Bobby Schlegel and the *Islander* greased a dinosaur of a dolphin that weighed 69.1-pounds, good for \$137,000.

I was fortunate enough to see this year's festivities for myself. Emerald Isle Realty was gracious enough to put us up for the tournament. Beyond being really nice people, they are extremely hospitable. The housing they provided was "The Boathouse"—a five bedroom, sound front home with a pool and hot tub. It was quite a place from which to base operations for a week.

As for the fishing, the tournament set me up with Captain Ralph Griffin of the *Reel Easy*, a 55-foot Jarrett Bay. When it comes to fishing, Captain Ralph has done it. A past winner of the Big Rock, Griffin's fishing roots run as deep as they come. Growing up, his father owned an Oregon Inlet-based charter boat that Buddy Davis ran.

Owen Andrews owns the *Reel Easy*. He's a nice guy and quite a bit of fun to fish with. The highlight of the tournament was when I was in-

troduced to another North Carolina tradition—creeking. It turns out that the little blue marlin that Owen caught on Friday was his first blue one. After some dockside discussion, the guys decided that the risk of incurring bad luck was too great not to jump in the creek. Fishing with these guys was a blast.

For the final day of the tournament, Brad Wachowiak invited me to ride along on his 63-foot Spencer, the *Katherine Anne*. Joining the *Katherine Anne's* standard team of anglers was Paul Spencer. Captain Daniel Spencer was at the helm for the tournament. I am not sure how others approach this, but I have decided that the opportunity to catch up with Paul on the water is not something to be missed. Beyond the chance to raise a sticknose or two, the day is likely to result in informed conversation and increased perspective. On a day that turned out to be a boat ride for most tournament participants, we had a good time. The two Seakeepers in the *Katherine Anne* made the potholes disappear on what was a bumpy day.

That is one of the charming things about fishing. The relative enjoyment of the activity sometimes does not directly relate to how many fish are caught. In this way of thinking, it is the act of chasing fish that provides the verb around which everything else—the conversations, the joking, the time spent with friends, the thrill of trying to catch a million-dollar fish, and the rum drinks—takes place. This metaphor extends quite applicably to the Big Rock Blue Marlin Tournament itself.

Is the Big Rock a marlin tournament? Absolutely. But it is also an engine of commerce that creates jobs, provides the occasion for a big week-long festival, and benefits its surrounding community in clear and obvious ways. The tournament maintains an office building in Morehead. It generates retail sales 12-months per year and has year-round employees. Randy Ramsey estimates that the Big Rock sold around 30,000 tournament shirts this year. "Our tournament has become the largest philanthropic organization in our community," concludes Randy Ramsey. 🐟