



Big Rock's Big Time Tournament

Learn more about the 63rd Annual Big Rock Tournament.

By Nick Honachefsky

Chatter was lively on the radio, the crowd's electricity was humming, when 51 foot Crown Marine Widespread backed up to the scales to weigh a blue marlin on Day Three during the 63rd Annual Big Rock tournament last week in Morehead City, NC. The marlin was pulled up and the scale read 479.2 pounds; enough to take third place - not the big payoff the crew was looking for, but surely well done. However, their third place marlin didn't last long as another big time catch was about to push their billfish off the leaderboard. Anticipation ran high when the call came in of a big marlin boated at 6:53 PM on Day Four. After a long run to the dock, at 10:30 PM a bulky marlin was hoisted up, the scale read a whopping 656.5 pounds to take first place and claimed the eventual \$1,678,250 million dollar payday. The real catch? It was the Widespread again! They bounced themselves out of third place to switch up with first place and ultimately earned champion status of the 2021 Big Rock Tournament!

Any time you walk the docks or fish the Big Rock, its surely a memorable event. On Day Two, I stopped by the B Dock of Morehead City Marine Basin, showcasing a who's who in the sportfishing world lined by an impressive array of

60 to 85 foot sportyachts of all makes and models from Custom Carolinas to Vikings. I jawed with some Jersey boys on the Reel Steel as they prepped Spanish mackerel baits for the next day. Talked with the crew of the Buckshot on their gameplan. The big buzz was of Michael Jordan, MJ, the GOAT, on his steel-gray hulled 80 foot Viking, Catch 23, who checked in a 25 pound mahimahi on Day One of the tourney which brought some oohs and ahhs from the crowd. Jordan was kind enough to snap some pictures with kids on the dock, sign a Nike shoe here and there talk fishing with some crews before he holed up in the cabin of his Catch 23 for the duration of the tourney, most likely to avoid the crowds for some rest, though he was spotted fishing off the stern of the Catch 23 on a lay day for whatever would bite his bait. I did try and speak with the GOAT to get his take on fishing, but some puffed up goatee guy sitting on the stern of the Catch 23 preferred I did not.

Fishing banter went wild at local bars and restaurants. The Redfish Grill was loaded with salty mates sipping beers while Jack's Waterfront was lively with shots flowing for those not fishing and just there for the good time not worrying about waking up early. As boats fished the tournament during the days, I snuck out to do some back bay redfishing in the Newport River and flats behind Morehead City with local salts Captain Joe Tunstall of <http://fishcarolinatraditions.com/> and Captain Rick Patterson of <http://ncinshorefishing.com/> to score with dozens of nice redfish between 20 and 32 inches, along with some sweet 6-pound seatrout, tying the whole Crystal Coast Big Rock experience together nicely.

Other notable paydays during the Big Rock were the 48.3 pound mahimahi caught on the Fin Print that netted \$536,000 and 2nd place Natural's blue marlin of \$1,286,700 million dollars. The Big Rock is definitely a tourney you don't want to miss, if not simply for the fun times and camaraderie of walking the docks and fishing the backwaters while you wait for the weigh ins. I stayed a 4 minute drive from the weigh in station at the historical www.innonturner.com in Beaufort through www.crystalcoastnc.org. For info on the Big Rock Tournament, and to see how the entire \$4.75 million dollar paydays were split, check out <https://live.thebigrock.com/>



Widespread's 656.5 pound blue marlin took home first place honors and a whopping \$1,678,250 million dollar payday in the 2021 63rd Annual Big Rock tournament in Morehead City, NC.



Not a bad payday for a mahimahi. The crew of the Fin Print scored \$536,000 for their 48.3-pound dolphin.



Crowds at the weigh in station eagerly wait and cheer for catches being brought to the scales.



The crew of the Reel Steel rig up mackerel and ballyhoo baits for the next day's fishing.



An impressive lineup of sportfishers rumble with anticipation of a day's fishing.



Spectators and visitors can spend the day fishing for beauty speckled trout as they wait for weigh ins to come in.



The Crystal Coast and Morehead City backwaters are known for incredible red drum fishing to experience while you watch the Big Rock action.



Stay at the www.innonturner.com for quick and easy access to all the weigh ins at the Big Rock.