



ALLEN ELLIS of Fayetteville (left) and Lynn Hunt, first mate on the Sea Wolfe, display a 28-pound African pompano.

Triumph, Tragedy Part Of Offshore Fishing Scene

BY JAMIE MILLIKEN

I truly do not know where to begin. There have been three, or four stories cycling through my brain during the past 24 hours. I don't know where this will end up, but let's get started.



CAPTAIN JAMIE MILLIKEN OFFSHORE FISHING REPORT

Once again, 3 a.m. comes early, but we've been through that before. I had lined up a Gulf Stream trip this past Friday. The weather had been absolutely perfect for five consecutive days, and Friday's forecast was no different. Three-thirty found myself, the famous "Grouperman" himself, David Rourke, and a newcomer to our sport, 17-year-old Charles Fox Jr. leaving our dock. I was excited about fishing with this younger, and I am always privileged to have a talent like David onboard.

We found the last set of markers and cleared Shallotte Inlet at 4:05 a.m. The ocean was flat and I pushed the *Caribbean Soul* up to 4,000 rpm. We settled in for our estimated three-hour run to the tuna grounds. We were not the only angler capitalizing on the beautiful forecast. Joining us offshore were the *Reel Chase*, *Oil Slick*, *Shooting Star III*, *Chris T*, *Tossin' and Turnin'* and *Outlaw*.

Things did not go absolutely smoothly on the run out. A series of thunderstorms were lined across the water roughly 35 miles offshore. These storms really split up the fleet, with some running way west, others adjusting to the east, and some hanging back inshore to see what was going to happen. I adjusted the *Caribbean Soul's* course to the east as I studied the clouds.

So far so good. With David asleep on a cushion and Charles standing lookout in the dark, we headed on. Once daybreak came the thunderstorms quickly dissipated. The fleet was so broken up, though, radio contact was mostly non-existent among the boats.

Our gamble turned out good, as the fishing was steady for us. The thrill of the trip came for me as Charles hooked up with a yellowfin tuna. As you have heard me say before, these tunas are the Mike Tyson's of fish. They will break you down and wear you out in their relentless battle. Charles had one on, and I was steady coaching: "Pump up! Reel down! Don't give him any slack! Don't rest! When you're resting, he's resting! If you're going to beat him, you've got to out-fight him!"

With the nice yellowfin circling 20 feet below the surface, Charles was worn down and so was the fish. It was during this part of the battle that Charles really made my day. I was steadily giving him orders and the sweat was pouring from his body when he looked at me with cutting eyes and a broken back and said, "I'm only human. I can only do so much!"

Man, that was great. When you hook up with a nice tuna it is really hard to say who's caught who. Charles won, as the 40-pound-plus tuna made one too many circles within gaff reach. Charles had won, but he went and sat down beside his trophy, and I still could not tell who was worn out the most. What a fight!

Most of the boats that day scored with the tuna and dolphin. I was surprised that no one picked up a wahoo, but maybe next time, we'll find one.

This has been a busy week with fishing tournaments. The Atlanta Salt Water Fishing Club held a club tournament this week at Georgetown, S.C. I haven't got all the results, but my fishing buddy Rube McMullan recorded a bull dolphin catch that topped the scales at 51 pounds!

The tournament story for the week has to be the "Big Rock" Blue Marlin Tournament. This is the "Big Boy Tournament" for sure. The best of the best assemble every year in Morehead City for this prestigious event. As of this writing, the unofficial results put local angler Dan Kinlaw, along with the rest of the crew aboard Dr. Cavaness's boat from Fayetteville in the lead. They successfully landed a blue marlin that was 649 pounds! This is the fourth largest marlin ever taken in the tournament's history. Guys, if this fish holds on to win, it will be a time in ol' Fayetteville! Congratulations on a great catch. This fish is worth over a quarter of a million dollars!

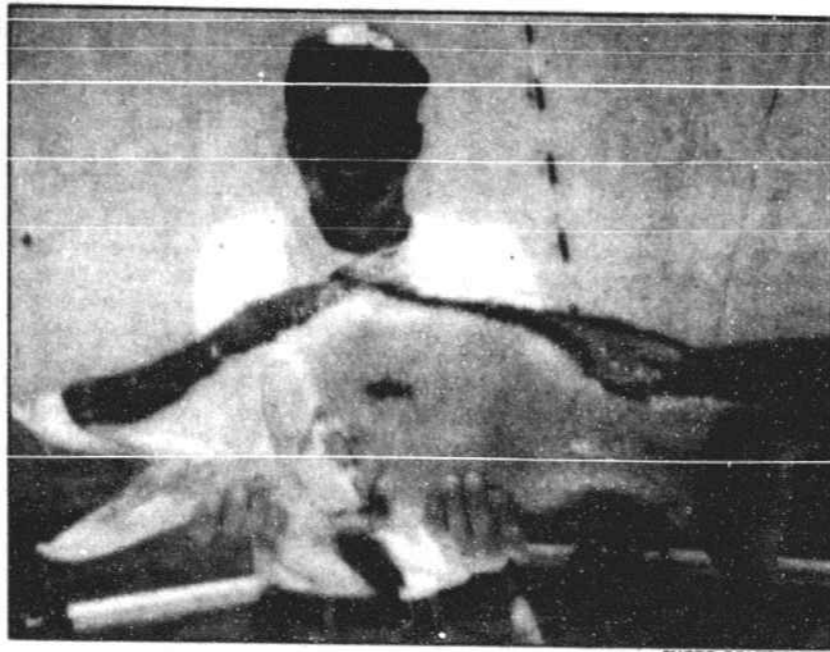
The tournament was not without tragedy, however, and this is the part that has laid so heavily on my mind ever since Scott and Valerie Taylor flagged me down with the news. Crewman Chris Bowie is dead. From what I've learned, Chris was the mate aboard the *Trophy Box* out of Ocean City, Md. These guys achieved their goal, as is the goal of all tournament fishing teams—to hook up with a "nice one." Little did they know as they battled the big blue marlin that tragedy was just around the corner.

It appears that the fish was brought alongside and Chris, being the mate, was the "wire man." This is when the excitement turned to horror. Chris Bowie wired the fish, but something was wrong. When the marlin made his last-ditch effort for freedom, the wrap that Chris had placed up his arm did not release. Chris was pulled overboard by the fish, and one can only speculate the outcome. The only thing for sure is that Chris was gone in a matter of seconds.

I can only hope that his suffering was brief as he was pulled to the depths of the Atlantic Ocean, so appropriately named the "Graveyard of the Atlantic" off Morehead.

My hours have been filled with this terrifying story. I have tried to place myself in his shoes. I've tried to figure just what went wrong. But I have also grieved for the crewmembers that were there.

I know from tournament experience what excitement abounds when a nice "money fish" is hooked up. These poor people have to live the memory of backslapping, high-fiving, laughter, hoping that they would land the fish that they came after. Then, in a matter of seconds, they were left standing there with their friend and fellow crewman snatched from their lives. God rest Chris Bowie's soul. I promise I'll never forget this man I never knew.



JOHN LANGEVIN of Matthews landed this 20-pound hog snapper last Wednesday on the *Intimidator*.

Coast Guard Auxiliary Flotilla Helps With Patrols

Coast Guard Auxiliary 10-08, serving a portion of the area from Oak Island to the South Carolina line, is assisting the Coast Guard and the boating public with regular patrols each weekend and on busy weekdays.

The auxiliary is available to help boaters in distress through radio contact with the local Coast Guard stations or the auxiliary vessel.

Auxiliary operators and crew are trained to the same qualifications and test as the regular Coast Guard. Last year the flotilla operated 525 manhours on patrol.

George Knott is current commander of Flotilla 10-08. Stuart South is

vice commander and Ken Roberts is staff officer in charge of ordering and conducting patrols.

Seniors Fishing Trip Is June 29

The Brunswick County Parks and Recreation Department will sponsor a seniors' fishing trip Wednesday, June 29.

Participants will leave from Captain Pete's Seafood on Holden Beach aboard the *Mega Flite* at 7 a.m. and will return around 4 p.m.

For more information, call 253-4357 or 1-800-222-4790.

Waters Opened To Shellfishing

Brunswick County coastal waters south of the Intracoastal Waterway and west of the Odell Williamson Bridge at Ocean Isle Beach have been temporarily opened to shellfishing.

The N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries authorized the temporary opening last Wednesday. The causeway canal at Ocean Isle remains closed to shellfish harvesting.

Fishermen's Group To Elect Officers

The Carolinas Commercial Fishermen's Association will elect officers for the coming year at its regular meeting today (Thursday) at 8 p.m.

The group meets the second and fourth Thursday of each month at Oceanway Auto Sales, located on N.C. 904 at Grissetown.

For more information, call Lloyd Ward at 579-5536.



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