

Small fisherman pulls up biggest catch

More than 100 anglers and divers participate in tourney

By Ed Killer

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The largest lionfish brought in to the MCAC Reef Builders tournament in Port Salerno was 16.5-inches caught by diver Ed Morgan.

PORT SALERNO — A little rain, a little wind, some choppy seas; it all comes with territory when competing in a summer time fishing tournament on the Treasure Coast.

During the seventh annual MCAC Reef Builders Tournament and third annual Lionfish Roundup out of The Reef Waterfront Restaurant in Port Salerno, more than 110 anglers aboard 30 private boats and 22 more aboard the Safari I party boat, plus

42 divers, chose to hit the open seas in less than Chamber of Commerce-like fishing and diving conditions. Frequent thunderstorms, heavy rains, stiff winds and dark skies buffeted anglers fishing for dolphin, kingfish, wahoo, grouper, cobia and snapper.

But all returned home safely and all were happy to chip in to help raise funds to build artificial reefs in the offshore waters of Martin County.

Despite the weather, the crew aboard the smallest boat caught the largest fish. Angler Pierce Killer, 10, soon to be a fifth-grader at Jensen Beach Elementary School, and great-uncle Capt. Bob Pelosi of Palm City fished aboard Pelosi's boat, a 17-foot, 10-inch-long Renegade flats vessel, in what Pelosi described as 3- to 4-foot seas at times.

(Killer is the son of, and Pelosi is uncle of, Scripps Newspapers' outdoors writer Ed Killer.)

The 32.56-pound kingfish Pierce reeled in was the largest of his young life and one of several he caught Saturday. But just landing the big king proved to be more than the duo had bargained for.

"As I reeled it back to the boat and first saw it, I thought it was a hammerhead shark," said Pierce, whose fish earned him Top Junior Angler and earned Renegade Top Boat Honors. "Compared to the other ones I caught, it was gigantic."

Needing about 10 minutes to battle the king boat side, Pelosi stuck the gaff only to have it break in two as he tried to lift it into the boat.

“Pierce had to fight the fish a second time for about five more minutes until I could gaff it a second time with a second gaff,” Pelosi said.

They even were able to retrieve the 2-foot section of the broken 6-foot gaff that was still embedded in the fish.

Pelosi said his great-nephew needed his sea legs as rainy, stormy weather made for difficult conditions aboard a small boat with no cover or protection from the elements.

They were fishing in about 70 feet of water off the Loran Tower in Hobe Sound with live pilchard they bought at the Live Bait Manatee Pocket bait boat.

They called it quits at about 1 p.m. and Pierce said he stuffed the bow of the boat into waves three times on their way back to St. Lucie Inlet.

“But that was OK,” Pelosi said. “It washed the fish blood off the boat deck.”

Warm water throughout much of the offshore waters replaced last week’s cold water upwelling, making for better fishing Saturday despite lousy weather. However, fishing teams could not find a grouper or a wahoo to weigh.

Travis Forrester’s 21.70-pound dolphin on Blade Runners, David Long’s 21.19-pound cobia on Prime Time, Ben Moore’s 12.41-pound snapper and Bryan Williams’ 31.19-pound kingfish were division winners.

In the third annual Lionfish Roundup, the Jupiter-based team of FishRulesApp.com recorded the most lionfish hauled in with 73 of the total event’s 161 lionfish.

Don Donaldson of Stuart had the most lionfish for an individual with seven, Ed Morgan brought in the largest with a 16.5-incher and Albrey Arrington had the smallest with a 5-1/16-inch lionfish.

Visibility and current were variable based on where divers chose to search.

“We had fair visibility on several dives off Fort Pierce,” reported Team Frapper’s Bob Hickerson of Vero Beach. “I heard they had decent visibility closer to Jupiter.”

Kerry Dillon of Stuart said he hit a pocket in 80 feet of St. Lucie Inlet, where he couldn’t see three feet in front of him.

“I think it had to do with the runoff coming from the St. Lucie River that created a layer of dark water in 50 to 60 feet we couldn’t see through,” Dillon said.

Tournament participants enjoyed dinner at The Reef Waterfront Restaurant in Port Salerno and had raffles and auctions.

Proceeds from the Reef Builders tournament will help fund projects such as the Kyle Conrad Memorial Reefs, which have been sunken in two spots in recent years.

Conrad, an avid angler, diver and Jensen Beach High School and Lynn University soccer player, lost his life in an accident in 2010.

For more on the program, go to www.mcacreefs.org

RESULTS

Dolphin

1. 21.70, Travis Forrester, Blade Runners, \$1,000
2. 10.44, Doug Anderson, no boat name, \$500
3. 8.98, David Cork, no boat name, \$250

Kingfish

1. 31.19, Bryan Williams, no boat name, \$1,000
2. 26.07, Rick Roberts, Safari I, \$500
3. 25.57, Mike Triana, Wet N Wild, \$250

Cobia

1. 21.19, David Long, Prime Time, \$1,000
2. 17.90, Joe Lloyd, Booze Cruise, \$500
3. 15.30, Ivan Savric, Safari I, \$250

Snapper

1. 12.41, Ben Moore, no boat name, \$1,000
2. 10.32, James Barry, no boat name, \$500
3. 8.02, Bob Gemmill, Fore Reel, \$250

Grouper: None weighed

Wahoo: None weighed

Top Junior Angler: Pierce Killer, 10, Renegade, 32.56-pound kingfish

Top Boat, Kyle Conrad Memorial Trophy Winner: Renegade, Pierce Killer and Capt. Bob Pelosi

Lionfish Roundup

Most lionfish team: 73 FishRulesApp.com, \$250

Most lionfish individual: 7, Don Donaldson, \$500

Largest lionfish: 16.5 inches, Ed Morgan, \$250

Smallest lionfish: 5-1/16 inches, FishRulesApp.com, \$250