

Tampa visitor decks Reef Builders Tournament winner

Tampa visitor reels in Reef Builders winner

By Ed Killer

Sunday, July 8, 2012



Capt. James Ewing of Bone Shaker, Kayla Hall, Bone Shaker mate Stuart Hutchinson, Donnie Donaldson, Clay Bryant, Will Bryant and angler Andrew Bryant of Tampa pose with the MCAC Reef Builders Tournament winning 42.3-pound gag grouper Saturday in Port Salerno. ALLISON WIGLEY CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

PORT SALERNO — Anglers and divers enjoyed fantastic weather for fishing and diving Saturday, although many who returned to port came back with catches a little smaller than they had hoped.

But that's fishing.

The arrival this week of cold water temperatures had a slowing effect on much of the fishing off Martin County waters. As a result, the anglers aboard the 33 boats entered in the sixth annual MCAC Reef Builders Tournament found slow fishing for popular catches such as the tournament's eligible species of dolphin, kingfish, wahoo, cobia, grouper and snapper.

The fish of the event was a 42.3-pound whopper of gag grouper reeled in by Andrew Bryant of Tampa, who was fishing aboard the charter boat Bone Shaker. Bryant battled the beast up from the depths near the Eight Mile Reef, a natural coral reef about eight miles from the St. Lucie Inlet.

"He hooked it on a live grunt in about 140 feet of water," Capt. James Ewing, Bone Shaker skipper said. "Another angler had one on that was likely well bigger, but we couldn't do anything to stop it. Once it hit, it went right for the rocks."

Bryant said it was the biggest grouper he has ever caught.

"It about broke my back," he said.

Other notable catches included three sailfish releases aboard the Molly E with Steve Altenhoff, who caught one, and two caught by Devin Gyras. Top junior angler Will Charles fished aboard I Spirit to catch the second-largest cobia of the event near the end of the day, a 21.2-pounder.

The 25.3-pound category winning cobia was caught nearby by angler David Applegate of Port St. Lucie, who fished aboard Daymaker charters with Capt. Patrick Price.

The second annual Lionfish Roundup featured 12 divers who combined to remove 119 lionfish from area reefs, including some from inshore waters. Joe Geiger won the prizes for most lionfish collected with 68 and the largest, which measured 15.25 inches. Lionfish only grow to about 18 inches at their largest.

The Boorman family from Stuart collected one of the most interesting lionfish, the smallest at only 1.5 inches. Hannah Boorman, 13, an 8th grader at Anderson Middle School in Stuart, saw the tiny invasive species while she was snorkeling near the Hole in the Wall, a spot inside the St. Lucie Inlet along its south wall.

"It's small now, but when I saw it underwater, it had its fins spread out and looked much bigger," Boorman said. "I asked my sister to bring me the dip net to catch it."

Diving from their boat Pura Vida, the family used pole spears to nab 10 lionfish in all, six near Hole in the Wall and four near Jupiter Inlet in the Intracoastal Waterway. Haylee, 11, helped Hannah and parents Shawn and Heather by ferrying lionfish back and forth from diver to boat.

Haylee and Hannah said they like to eat the fish which they catch on their own during other family snorkeling adventures.

Attendees to Saturday's weigh-in on the deck behind the former Finz Restaurant on the Manatee Pocket were treated to a lionfish tasting. Tournament volunteers Baret Barry filleted the spiny colorful fish while April Price cooked the white flaky meat in a saute pan with various flavors and spices.

"It's pretty good — tastes a little bit like a cross between flounder and salmon," said Chloe Beall, 11, of Port St. Lucie.

Money raised from entry fees to the tournament and raffles will go toward the construction of future artificial reef projects off the coast of Martin County. Going into this year, the tournament had raised about \$70,000 in five years. It costs about \$25,000 to \$30,000 to sink one artificial reef.

For more information on work produced by the MCAC Artificial Reef Foundation, visit www.mcacreefs.org. For more information on artificial reef locations in Martin County, visit www.martinreefs.com.

LEADERBOARD

Lionfish Roundup

Total divers: 12

Total lionfish: 119

Most: 68, Joe Geiger, \$500

Largest: 15.25 inches, Joe Geiger, \$250

Smallest: 1.5 inches, Hannah Boorman, \$250

Fishing tournament

Total boats: 33

Groupers: 1. 42.3, Bone Shaker, Andrew Bryant, \$1,000; 2. 14.6, Daymaker, Harlow Sciscente, \$500; 3. 11.3, Sunseeker Too, Larry Benning, \$250.

Snapper: 1. 9.8, Booze Cruise, Joe Lloyd, \$1,000; 2. 7.4, No Name, Hunter Beall, \$500; 3. 7.0, CSA Parker, Logan Milne, \$250.

Dolphin: 1. 10.8 pounds, Reel Reptile, Greg Canibell, \$1,000; 2. 10.6, Molly E, Steve Altenhoff, \$500; 3. 7.7, Slightly Stupid, Trevor Haupt, \$250.

Kingfish: 1. 16.9, Bike Shop, Brian Williams, \$1,000; 2. 12.0, Renegade, Conrad Killer, \$500; 3. 7.5, Prime Time, Andy Long, \$250.

Cobia: 1. 25.3, Daymaker, David Applegate, \$1,000; 2. 21.2, I Spirit, Will Charles, \$500; 3. 19.3, Prime Time, Andy Long, \$250.

Wahoo: None weighed

Sailfish releases: 3, Molly E, Devin Gyras 2, Steve Altenhoff 1.

Top Junior Angler: 1. Will Charles, I Spirit, 21.2 cobia; 2. Conrad Killer, Renegade, 12.0 kingfish.

Kyle Conrad Memorial Trophy winner (top boat): Prime Time, Tom Wichers.



Treasure Coast Photos



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