

What a hell of a weekend!

Fished the first annual Gold Cup Black and Blue Marlin Tournament put on by several developers in the La Paz area who put up prize money and volunteered all their time to organize and carry out this event. They selected the Rotary club of La Paz as the recipient of the charity money for their cause to provide prosthetics for children in need. First prize was one million pesos, the equivalent to about \$100,000 US dollars, plus a new Ford Lobo pickup truck if the fish was over 400 pounds. I have fished several big money tournaments but have never experienced anything as well organized as this one, and it is hard to believe this was their first. Also, there was a twist in the rules that made things even more interesting. A \$50 per pound penalty was imposed for any team weighing a fish under the 200 pound minimum. What a fantastic idea! We are lucky to have one of the best fisheries in the world and this certainly discourages the killing of short fish. It also raised extra money for a good cause.

OK, on to my experience.

Our team doesn't have much experience fishing the waters around La Paz but it is well known that El Bajo and La Reyna are noted for holding big marlin. Because El Bajo is famous we decided that is where we would fish the first day. Our plan was if that didn't work out well we would look at La Reyna the last day. Chatter at the docks was that fishing had been dead, and the tournament would be lucky if anybody brought in a qualifying marlin.

First day 7:30 AM shotgun start here we go! 80 participating boats charging out. What a sight! It is well over an hour run for us to El Bajo. By the time we arrived and started fishing another panga had already radioed that they were hooked up on a large blue marlin. Shortly after the fish was boated, that team headed for the scale. The official weight was announced to be 343 pounds, which put them in 1st place at the end of the first day.

It was a very long day for us. We never had a bite, never saw a fish. Conditions at El Bajo did not look good so we decided it was time to change our game plan. Pangeros had been getting small tuna at Las Arenas, so we figured there might be some big blues hanging nearby.

Second day 7 AM off we go. A 2 hour run the opposite direction from the day before. Cruising through the channel near the southern tip of Cerralvo Island we spotted a gathering of pangas fishing the southern tip of the island. Chuy decided we need to change course and check them out. Sure enough they are in the middle of a full on tuna bite. Took about 15 minutes to fill our tuna tubes. Now we are excited to have great bait and things are looking up. After another 10 minute run southeast of Cerralvo we bridle the live tuna and start slow trolling. Water looks good. Just need to run over the right fish. In a short time, the tuna in the short teaser position dies, and the one in the port rigger is not looking too good. Diego spots a small Dorado in our pattern that we are able to catch and replace the dead tuna. Again our baits are looking pretty good just waiting for the right bite.

Have a little snack, watching the baits, doing a little day dreaming of the big one when Chuy shouts we're bit! All eyes are now on the long line where a slight dark shadow is seen under the bait. The clicker on the reel didn't go off and it looks like the fish missed the bait. A moment later a huge shadow appears under the bait on the starboard rigger. This huge marlin eats the tuna and turns toward the Dorado on our short line. Chuy throttles up the boat and bendo! I'm on! The fish is flailing and thrashing the water. Now we get a good look and can see blood gushing from this monster's gill plates. I am hyped, pulling and grinding as hard as I can knowing I have a strong contender on the line. The fish is not putting up much of a fight and within five minutes the line is wound to the leader. Diego leaders the fish and grabs the bill just as I sink the flying gaff into it. Chuy jumps down from the bridge and sinks another gaff in the fish. That is when the real battle

began. In the end it took us longer to subdue the fish after being gaffed than the fight on rod and reel.

The ride back to the scale couldn't have been more fun. We are pretty confident that this fish will win the tournament, and also believe it will be close to meeting the 400 pounds for the new truck. Almost to the scale, we get a report of another boated fish coming to the scale. It is a black marlin estimated to be 500 pounds. Now we're a little nervous.

Lots of spectators at the weigh station. The scale crew helping to unload our fish are congratulating us and are all in agreement that we will be driving away in a new Ford. The digital scale had been zeroed and stops at 395 pounds. A heart breaking 5 pounds short for the truck. OK, that is that! We are now in first place and looking for the other boats reported to have big fish. Next boat to arrive has the reported 500 pound black marlin. Weighs out at 291 pounds. Whew! We can breathe again! Four other boats come in throughout the hours left one by one with fish that do not meet our mark.

Five O'clock lines out. There is still one boat fighting a fish hooked at 3:30 and they say it is huge. Finally, at 6:30, the fish is boated with an estimated one hour ride to the scale. That last hour was a long one. It was a very climactic ending with more than 100 spectators waiting for the finish. When the boat finally arrived the sun had gone down and it was dark. As it pulled to the dock we could see their fish, and with a sigh of relief knew it wasn't going to measure bigger than ours. After being weighed, James Curtiss the tournament chairman declared us the 1st place winner and we became a 100K richer! It wasn't until the awards banquet that I realized we had just won the biggest fishing tournament in the history of La Paz.

It appeared to me that the tournament was a huge success and went off without a hitch. Every detail was covered and the red carpet was rolled out for the participants. Hats off to James Curtiss and Gabriel Ley for doing a fantastic job and making everybody feel welcome. The tournament committee must have lain awake at night thinking of every detail. From a smooth registration through a spectacular closing awards banquet, it was the best. Other big money tournament promoters should take a lesson from these guys.

One more note. I have lived on the East Cape for the last 16 years. I never spent much time in La Paz or had any desire to. This experience has opened my eyes to what a beautiful city it is and how friendly the people are. I met many very nice people and you can bet La Paz will be seeing more of me.

That is my story.

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