



# Tournament Blog

## What a Day!

By Les Boyle



The 7th Annual Ding Darling/Doc Ford's Catch Care and Release Tournament is in the books. Congratulations to all the winners including the first five places, Female Angler, Senior Angler and Amateur Team. A special congrats to Team Costa, with Caloosahatchee Cowboy Charters for their First Place win with 6 releases in a very competitive field. After presentation of the trophy and money Captain Josh Constantine was



presented the coveted pink, er I mean salmon colored tournament jacket by Marty Harrity, owner of Doc Ford's, the Title Sponsor. Amazingly 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th place teams all had 4 releases with time of the first fish released deciding their finish position. The best Tarpon fishermen in the country come together to compete in this tournament and proved it with 49 releases

and 21 of 55 teams reporting at least one release.

Weather can make all the difference on tournament day and it did this year in a good way. The weeks leading up to the tournament were windy almost every day right up until the days just before the event. This made scouting out in the Gulf very difficult, as well as in the Bay where the fish would appear one day and be totally gone the next. Friday morning changed all that and the results proved: what a difference a day makes! The wind laid down late morning, there was a very strong outgoing tide after 11 AM, pods of threadfins were abundant and the Tarpon began to show outside. My team was one of the first boats to go out in the Gulf but as the day wore on we counted over 30 boats out there in our area.

Captain Josh Constantine, whose day job is a charter captain, said *"This tournament is a battle of the best of the best! These are the best Tarpon fishermen in the country and there are many of these guides who are capable of winning this tournament on any given day. We are all friends and share information with each other daily but we do battle every day for bragging rights. Winning this tournament is awesome and I'm on*

*cloud nine!*” When Josh saw most of the top fishermen heading North he decided to go out in the Gulf first even though the wind was a little dicey at that time. It paid off because they were able to triple up on the first pod and release three fish before 8 AM.



Another amazing feat by Team Costa with Caloosahatchee Cowboy Charters with Chris Magnano, Kyle Potts and Chris Mills, was that they were able to release every fish they jumped....6 for 6. When 50% is considered pretty good, that's phenomenal. This was Josh's 3rd time to be in the winners circle having placed 3rd and 5th in previous years.

One of the premier Tarpon fishermen in this elite field is John Landry, Captain of Team Doc Ford's, who has come in first twice and second twice including this year's tournament. John shared his team's strategy which started out in the bay using Threadfins. He always tries to catch the first fish which is like catching two because of the importance of breaking ties. His team caught their first fish at 7:31 with Bob Ranaletta doing the honors. This was the second fish of the day which gave them the second place finish since they tied with 4 releases with 3rd place Mabry Electric, 4th place Barker Boatworks and 5th place Captiva Cruises. As the sun rose, John's team switched over to cut bait and jumped and lost a big fish. Needing more numbers they went out front in search of a large pod, found them, doubled up and released two more Tarpon. One more jump and a loss completed the action for their team.

Sean McGarry of Team Captiva Cruises, and 5th Place finishers with 4 releases, commented that they jumped more than enough fish to win but couldn't keep them hooked. "That's Tarpon" he said, and we all know how true that is.

There were several family members fishing together which is always great to see the younger generation releasing a tournament fish as well as spouses on the same team. Sixteen year old Carson Towle got his team's two releases which earned Team On Island the amateur title for the tournament. I guess he showed his Dad Doug how to do it. Dena Fischer, Ozzie's wife, released two Tarpon to help her team Barker Boatworks to a fourth place finish. Deb Powers, on Team Fishin'Divas, released two of the team's four Tarpon earning her the Female Angler of

the tournament. Husband Rick fished on Team Gotta Go which didn't fair nearly as well.

In an unfortunate side story, angler Jimmy Stevens got a 5-0 circle hook buried in his arm as his team, Raiser's Edge was getting bait. Jimmy had to go to an emergency clinic to get the hook removed and was unable to fish. See photo for Jimmy's demonstration on how to properly set a circle hook.



Angler Jimmy Stevens demonstrating how NOT to set a circle hook.

Our buddies from across the Pond representing the UK, Scotland and Denmark didn't seem to make the leader

board despite a lot of smack talk prior to the tournament. I guess their bagpipes, funny looking hats and knee length pants didn't attract the Tarpon. Once again, the Americans did a little tap shoe on their heads to the tune of Yankee Doodle Dandy. Just kidding guys....hope you had a great time.



Team Fish & Chips with anglers flying in from England, Scotland and Denmark started the day with great enthusiasm!

The biggest winners of all were the fish and wildlife that will benefit from the efforts of the Ding Darling Refuge. This tournament raised more than \$100,000 that will be put directly toward conservation efforts. Thanks to all the sponsors for making this happen and thanks to the "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society – Friends of the Refuge staff for all the hard work to make this a well-run and successful tournament.

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Left: Staff and volunteers of the "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society in white tournament shirts who organize this tournament to benefit the conservation efforts at the J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge. Rangers Nate Caswell and Toni Westland were there representing USFWS.

