



I remember back in May 1977, like others if you weren't working at Antilles Air Boats you would be in the water or maybe on top of the water.

My landlord and friend Dallas Harris had a boat and fished every chance he could. On occasion I would crew his boat when he took others out to catch big fish. I remember the St. Croix 6th Annual Spring Fishing Tournament as a great couple of days...not so much for the fishing but just being on the water under beautiful Caribbean skies. When fishing the tournament, you monitored the radio to keep in touch with the committee boat as well as listen to the chatter from the other fisherman.

It was always a laugh when Mac made his little broadcasts.

The story from the June "Virgin Islander" tells it better.

SPORT FISHING

By Eileen Robinson Smith



St. Croix 6th Annual Spring Fishing Tournament

BIMINI or the Florida Keys, Mazatlan and Catalina are those far away places normally associated with deep sea fishing. **Adam Clayton Powell** used to fish Bimini and many mounted trophies were originally pulled from the waters around Baja, California. Yet the Virgin Islands, both U.S. and British, have their share of the "Big 7" and the St. Croix 6th Annual Spring Fishing Tournament helped promulgate this truth.

The Big 7 have the common characteristic of being essentially open ocean fish and justly famed for their highly explosive fighting tactics, their power, speed and beauty. Out of the seven, four — marlin (blue and white), the sailfish and yellow tuna — are the true big game fish. The first three are also "billfish," having long, cylindrical bills and are those most often seen mounted over living room fireplaces. A fish to be brought in by the **Ernest Hemingways** of the world, they are the most spectacular fighters, the tail dancers and jumpers. Swordfish and sawfish are also billfish but are not well known V.I. residents. Dolphin, wahoo and kingfish are the most prevalent amongst the big game fish in this area.

Tournament weekend was May 14th and 15th and by mid-week enthusiasm was up. One angler who had signed up was seen in Frank's restaurant pretending that a deck chair was a fighting chair and with imaginary pole in hand, he struggled to bring in an equally invisible billfish. In an east end home, high on the hill, a fisherman was in the bathroom with his fishing pole, setting reel drags with a watering can on the bathroom scale.

On Friday the 13th, the skippers' meeting was a cocktail party held poolside at the King's Alley Hotel. The St. Croix Chamber of Commerce, sponsors of the tournament,

officiated with executive director **John K. Thomas** telling what would be happening where and when, all in nautical time. Visiting boats, *Juany* from Puerto Rico and *Natalie* from St. Thomas, were introduced and every boat received a free bottle of Cruzan rum from the Virgin Islands Distilleries and a case of Old Milwaukee, compliments of **Bill Manz's** Sea Mount Corporation. Eighteen boats had entered, carrying 45 anglers and, as will happen when fishermen meet, they swapped fish stories, of . . . "my boat's better than yours."

"The most exciting time I ever had in my life was fishing. I had it! It was mine! It was my fish. It lasted 15 minutes . . . a 150 pound marlin . . . on a 30 pound test line!"

"Yeah! You hook it . . . you ride it. That's fishin'."

"Me? I want to catch fish bad."

"Good for you. I want to win."

"You can't expect to come out of the woods and beat the pros — those guys who make their living fishing or those who have been competing in deep sea tournaments for 20 years. And with a first prize of \$1,000, you know they're here."

The next morning. You leave the house when it's still dark. The marina by 6:00. There's already a surge of activity. Last minute provisions are being brought aboard. The drone of power boats and some are already headed out, rods pointing diagonally from their sterns.

Aboard the *Phoenix Charte* we had assembled a good group but none of them had ever fished together. Hand-some poles with annadized reels and leather grips were mounted and baited with ballyhoo. Monitoring channel 16 on the radio, we heard the committee boat announce that it

was 0800 (8 am), the official time to cast lines into the water. Instantly there was an intense whirring, the noise of line leaving reel.

Within five minutes, one of the boys caught a 'cuda, a big one, and closed him down in the fish chest. Maybe baracuda didn't count as far as points were concerned, but nonetheless, it was a fish. Now we were really fishing, happily trolling at four knots, drinking beer, eating cashews and listening to the sounds of *Undercover Angel* on the transistor.

When there's action, tension is high and spirits are up. We had a lot of action that first day — just the wrong kind — four baracuda and only one point fish, a king fish. Saturday seemed to prove productive for most of the boats and there was 'nary a boat that wasn't flying a "fish flag" as she came into port.

Humor, always a necessary characteristic for ocean goers, was rife that first day. One of the tournament rules stated "lines must be out at ending time unless fighting fish" and at 1600 (nautical time) on Saturday, the voice of Antilles Air Boat pilot, **Don McDermott** was heard over the air waves saying his boat had fish on the line.

The committee boat answered back excitedly, "Bring them in, take your time."

Don replied: "Yeah, these ballyhoo can sure be tough."

On Sunday, the weather was not as fair, the sea as calm nor the fishing as good. It makes for a long day when there are no strikes. Anglers became disgruntled and started worrying about the bets they had made. They started calling other boats on the radio, "Ya gettin' any?" They busied themselves by checking the bait, then changing the bait. It is a time when minor altercations may occur, such as, "How could you forget the transistor radio today? I wanted to listen to the Top 40." Cruising toward the weigh-in station, it was time to start preparing alibis.

Never-the-less, there was a great deal of activity at King's Wharf. A large crowd of spectators had gathered, both sarcastic friends who wished they could have gone fishing, and true well wishers. Many fish had been caught and although most were not uncommonly large, it mattered not, since all catches were scored on a point system with the weight of fish being multiplied by 100 and divided by line test. Any size fish was eligible, but of course kills like Don McDermott's 45 pound dolphin were gaining everyone's admiration.

Aside from the final weigh-ins of the tournament, there was a native fish fry and a steel band playing on the wharf. A May Day parade, originally scheduled for the previous weekend, was just concluding. Hundreds of people were on hand for all and everything that was going on.

Evening saw an outdoor barbeque on the grounds of St. Croix Marine with the awards for the tournament being presented at this time. **Jack Thomas** was the M.C. and **Fay Lindquist** of the Department of Tourism awarded the Virgin Island Government's plaque and the first prize of \$1,000 to **Steve McAuliffe**, who was overall winner with 240 points.

Despite some controversy over the intrinsic worth of the point system and the boat which weighed in gutted dolphin, it had been a good tournament, with more fish caught than the previous year and sizeable amounts of prize money being awarded. Hopefully more visiting fishermen will be attracted to the Seventh Annual Tournament. For those loyal devotees, next year it will again be Wahoo and hey doggie, with a sign upon the door 'Gone Fishin.' "



Ballyhoo bait is the ultimate saltwater trolling choice for catching offshore gamefish like mahi-mahi (dolphin), sailfish, marlin, tuna, and wahoo. Its slender silver body, natural swimming action, and oily scent trail mimic a fleeing or injured baitfish at speeds between 4 to 9 knots.

*Great memories of Dan "Mac" McDermott.
I will try to add some more in the coming days.*

Tom Anusewicz

Rest well my friend.

Blue Skies and Tailwinds