

# So You Wanna Be a Marlin Fisherman...

By John 'Afishinado' King

I can clearly remember the day that I became obsessed at the prospect of catching a Marlin from my own boat in my local waters off the Southern California coast. I was walking out to the end of the green pier in Avalon unaware that a major Marlin tournament, The Catalina Classic, was going on. The tournament folks on the pier were readying the scale for a weigh in. It was pure chance that my good buddies Bob Fruge and Capt. Mike Arujo pulled up to the pier and weighed in a 201-pound striped marlin that tied as the winning fish in the tournament. The excitement was contagious. Everyone was talking about the small center console that had just weighed in a winning fish. As I celebrated my buddy's victory I set a personal goal to learn to fish Marlin. Little did I know that I would weigh the winning fish in the same tournament five years later for a \$135,000 pay day.

Marlin fishing in Southern California is limited to a very short 'season'. The fish seem to show up in late August and are frequently gone by early October. The marine fisheries people keep stats on such fishing expressed in terms of "units of effort", defined loosely as "boat days". The current information suggests that a boat targeting Marlin in Southern California is likely to get one fish every 10 boat days. If you plan to fish them you better be able to be on the water a **lot** in September. You also better be able to handle the heat from your



family and friends when you return to the dock with no fish and try to tell them that you had a good day because you saw your first tailer. When you decide to target Marlin you are truly making the decision to sport fish with no intention of filling the freezer. That is a big change.

Targeting Marlin successfully in Southern California requires a very well connected network of offshore fishing buddies. Unfortunately, I had very few friends that were venturing out past the halibut and sand bass grounds. Should you find yourself in this situation you would do well to break out a chart and study the banks and high spots from Santa Barbara South to the Mexican border. Learn the names of the banks and the distance between them and the compass headings from one to the next. Build a cheat sheet and use it. Marlin guys don't

mind helping out the newbie, but you have to show them you are serious. If you show that you are trying to learn and have invested the time to build a basic awareness of the waters, then you might find a mentor willing to bring you in to the network.

My mentor was/is Mike Arujo, an accomplished fisherman with a solid background from two years in Kona and a number of years fishing from Catalina to Cabo. Mike hooked me up and to this day I give him credit for any success that I have in capturing Marlin. A good mentor will help you with the tackle and rigging as well as ease you in to the network of marlineers working the local waters. The addition of multiple boats covering many miles of ocean will dramatically increase the chances that you will be in the zone when the bite turns on.

And it does turn on...then it turns off just as quickly. There are many thoughts and theories as to why Marlin turn on and feed. Some think it is related to the moon, some think it is the tide, others feel strongly about sol-lunar relationships, many will claim it relates to water temperature, others will tell you it is all about currents. I think all of these factors play in to the bite, and it becomes a nearly impossible task to learn to fish Marlin in Southern California in one's lifetime with such a limited season. A fisherman intent on learning to fish these magnificent

creatures will speed up the learning curve dramatically by going to Cabo and getting educated.



Fish: MARLIN Date: 9/19/05  
Boat: Afishinado  
Captain: John King  
Angler: Steve Spina  
Weight: 198 Time: \_\_\_\_\_  
Gaffer: \_\_\_\_\_

Once you have caught 20 or so Cabo fish, you will be ready to give the So Cal fishery a try. Although I fish for Marlin whenever I can, I do make a point of fishing the local Marlin tournaments. I do this for a couple of reasons:

1. I learn more in a shorter period of time.
2. I develop my network of fishing contacts much faster
3. I have a lot of fun
4. I have a chance to win some money
5. It is easier

It might seem strange to suggest that fishing for Marlin in a tournament is easier than fishing them on your own. However, during a tournament anglers are required to report hook-ups by providing their location on a grid chart. Many tournaments also ask if the fish was hooked on a bait or a jig. This is extremely valuable information and it is one of the rare times when a radio fish is useful. We have a policy on Afishinado. If two fish are caught in a grid and there have been no fish caught in the grid we are fishing, we move...fast. The bite is frequently contained within a very small area of ocean, and the faster we can get to where the bite is, the better our chances are at catching.

Tournaments are a great place to learn from other fishermen. If I am not fishing my boat, I try to get on board another boat as a member of the crew. Marlin fishing requires a good team effort. To be successful you need a good angler, a captain who can handle the boat when a hot fish is on the line, a leader man who knows the rules and knows when to pull and when to give, and as many eyes in binoculars as possible. The more you spot, the better your chances of catching. If you want to learn to fish Marlin, get the best pair of binos you can afford and learn to sit in them for hours looking at the water. You will quickly become an asset on almost any boat in a tournament.

If you decide to fish your own boat in one of the money tournaments you will have to come to grips with the side bets. Marlin tournaments have a base entry and a number of side bets. The side bets dramatically increase your chances of winning, since you are competing each day for the biggest fish and only against the other anglers who are in the side bets. But, the costs escalate quickly. Forget about competing in release tournaments. Although I support and participate in such tournaments, they heavily favor the pro teams. When I fish the Zane Grey for instance, I either try to get on another boat or I limit my financial output to the base entry fee. I focus my limited resources on fishing the tournaments where a lucky fat fish can win it all such as The Catalina Classic.

Many people have asked me why I fish marlin in Southern California, and I have asked many others the same question. Although there are a zillion different answers, the most common response is "the challenge". Becoming a successful Marlin fisherman is the greatest attainable challenge for our local waters. Whether you fish from a center console, an express or a battlewagon, if you pay attention and learn the basics you can compete and will perhaps get the big fish that takes it all.

*Captain John King runs Afishinado Charters, a six-pak charter operation out of Avalon on Catalina Island. He can be reached through his web site at [www.fishcatalina.com](http://www.fishcatalina.com) or directly at 323-447-4669.*