

Cayman Islands International Fishing Tournament

The water was smoky blue just before sunrise. The air was still. A full moon hung over the horizon, and soft, white froth trailed behind our Bertram as we slowly rumbled out of the mangrove-lined channel. Picking up speed, the froth turned into curling crests of water on either side of the heavy vessel. The boat's lights gleamed, reflecting off the polished ladder leading up to the bridge. The temperature was warm, thick, and humid. Our offshore rods rocked back and forth in their holders as we headed toward Conch Point. We had our Bimini twists tied and our swivels rigged. Soon the clouds began bursting with the fresh orange sunrise, and its reflection in our wake was breathtaking. We were targeting marlin, and we'd come to compete in the Cayman Islands International Fishing Tournament.

We kicked off our journey by flying out on Cayman Airways. It was wonderful to fish as a team with Franklin Thompson, the President of the Cayman Islands Angling Club, Capt. Mark Bothwell of the CIIFT Tournament Committee, and Capt. Jimmy Nelson, the TV host of Extreme Fishing Adventures on NBC Sports. Our vessel was the *Deep Thought*, a beautiful 38-foot Bertram. The qualifying fish in the four-day tournament were marlin, wahoo, tuna, and dolphin.

The tournament was a top-notch experience on the water, even though we were contending 6- to 9-foot seas during the first two days, followed by 2- to 4-foot seas on the last two days. Regardless of the weather, we were on a mission for marlin, and our team was in for a wonderful sport fishing adventure. Scanning our surroundings from the deck, flying fish flitted across the white-capped surface of the water. Marlin generally chase them, so

we had a feeling we were in the right zip code for a hookup.

Sure enough, we were in the right area, because we saw another boat a few hundred yards away with a marlin jumping and thrashing against the navy blue horizon. Not long after that, Capt. Mark yelled, "Marlin, marlin, marlin!" We saw the glorious fish come up on our spread. It looked at the lure on our left rigger and then at our flat line, before disappearing into the deep blue water. We raised several marlin during the tournament, but none willing to take the bait.

Exhausted but elated at the end of each day, we enjoyed the festivities at the Barcadere Marina weigh station. We made friends with some of the local fishermen, and dined on freshly caught tuna, wahoo, and dolphin. Sharing our stories each evening, we talked fishin' late into the night.

Waking up at 4 a.m. every morning can wear on any fisherman in a long tournament. Believe me, I was happy we had a stash of Reel Adrenaline energy drink in our cooler to keep me alert for the battles ahead!

During our quest for marlin, the dolphin bycatch was amazing. Every time we came across structure, I made sure to have either a Tsunami or Yo-Zuri lure rigged and at the ready. It made me grin from ear to ear as I

ripped my lures through the water and watched the dolphin fight over them in a chaotic fury.

When fighting any sizable gamefish, it's important to protect your abdomen, hips and legs from the rod butt. Fighting belts are common, but I prefer a Cush-It because it's so quick and easy to use. No need to adjust a belt; just slam it on the rod butt and go. This makes it easier to reel and eliminates the bruising that can result from battling powerful fish.

Taking it all in at the end of the final day, I recounted the events of the four-day tournament. Because we were mainly fishing for marlin, we didn't hook into any tuna or wahoo, but we did fight and land several gorgeous dolphin. Unfortunately, we didn't land our marlin, even though we had an awesome time raising them!

Bad weather couldn't stop us, and the 6- to 9-foot swells soon faded in my memory. There was a sentiment shared on the *Deep Thought* that made us all smile and appreciate the sport we know and love. Competing in the Cayman Islands International Fishing Tournament was an action-packed experience, and it's definitely a tournament I plan to continue competing in for years to come.

-Lace Allenius **G**

