



FRANK JOHNSON

Frank Johnson was born in Middletown, New York. At the age of four he caught and released his first big fish—a catfish that chased him off the dock. His first multiple catches at seven years old was a bucket full of sunfish. His uncle, a famous trout guide in the Catskills, made him clean all the sunfish. That was the last bucket of fish he ever took. Frank worked his way through high school running a gun shop. After high school Frank was accepted in the Pratt & Whitney Aircraft four year tool and die apprentice program followed by three year jet engine manufacturing program. While living in Connecticut, Frank became a striped bass fanatic. After 12 years at Pratt & Whitney Frank moved to Florida and acquired a position as engineer at Chemform in Fort Lauderdale, settling in Boca Raton, Florida. Living in Florida was a new found heaven for a fish-aholic such as Johnson catching his first of many sailfish off the Florida straits with his son Frank III in the families 19' Aquasport. That was the beginning of Johnson's offshore fishing world.

In early 1970 Frank purchased Mold Craft, a tool and die company manufacturing such things such as heart pacemakers, popup sprinklers, etc. Johnson's love of things marine started producing more marine related products such as plastic cleats, plastic casting rod handles for Browning Childrie's and Speed sticks. He designed and built the John Emory fly reel, still a classic hand-built large capacity fly reel. This experience sealed Frank's relationship with plastics, which would prove invaluable later in life.

The sailfishing off the Florida coastline was abundant and Frank experimented with kite fishing and subsequently entering many local tournaments. First big win was the Pompano Beach Fishing Rodeo in the Top Small Boat Division. During those years Frank participated in several seminars on kite fishing for Anglers Workshop with Phil Bart, owner of PBI (Phil Bart Industries). It was during this era that Frank designed and built a machine and a product line, including squid, for PBI.

As fishing became more about Frank's true love he saw areas of tackle that needed to be improved upon. Frank designed and patented his concept of the original aluminum rod butt which he sold to Scott Boyd and Fin Nor later selling his patent to AFTCO and becoming the famous Unibutt.

Swordfishing at night became the latest craze in the offshore fishing community, which Frank was deeply entrenched placing 3rd in the first ever Ft. Lauderdale Swordfish Tournament using his newly developed 12" plastic squid.

Frank moved up to a 25' Mako and got involved with the Mako owners tournaments, Mako writers tournament and won the Mako Masters Sailfish Tournament several times. On the same 25' Mako with Frank III captaining he won the Clint Allen First National Sailfish Championship beating out many of the sailfish legends of the time. Of the 50 some boats the next smallest in the fleet was a forty-two footer.

On a trip to Mexico with Scott Boyd and Charlie Forman he was introduced to Captain Peter Wright. Capt Peter had fabricated a "softheaded" lure out of rolled up inner tubes. This was a start of the SOFHEAD concept, which he designed and put into production with the help of many great Captains over the years. Softhead lures have taken more tournament money and have taken more IGFA world records than any other big game lure ever. For 30 plus years he has developed and refined these designs to number more than 80,000 part numbers. This includes Number One Marline Lure (Senior Wide Range) and Number Two Marlin Lure in the World (Senior Super Chugger) as voted on through an independent survey by Marlin Magazine. He has also designed a recoil pad for the shooting sports, Mold Craft's only non-fishing product. Frank helped start the building fund for the IGFA, which he has actively supported for many years. Fishing with his wife Shelley he released a 1,000-pound marlin in Australia and boated 722-pound bluefin tuna with his squid spreader bar. He is now semi-retired and traveling with his lovely wife Shelley and faithful Labrador retriever Shamy. His son Frank III now runs the bulk of Mold Craft Products.

TIPS FOR THE NOVICE AS WELL AS THE SEASONED

The best captains, crews and anglers in the world are continually learning and evolving. They are at all times gathering information from a variety of sources. It could come from other captains, crews, tackle shops or local fishermen. I started Mold Craft 30 plus years ago and I have always been a believer of this valuable exchange. In that spirit of exchange I have enjoyed giving credit where credit is due. Most of the professional captains and crews spend many more hours on the water than I and, as a result, have contributed significant design ideas to me, therefore, I have not been timid about naming some of my lures after them. It is part of the charm, imagination and camaraderie that is Mold Craft.



Frank holding a Palm Beach sailfish during the early days.

Reading this and other sport fishing magazines is an excellent tool in the learning process and a fine place to start. There are many excellent books, DVD/videos and magazines on the market today. The topics may vary from seamanship to bait rigging and bring the angler the latest and most complete information possible. Television fishing shows are also an excellent source of information.

The fastest method to learn about fishing is by hiring a local expert in

the area of fishing you are interested in. A professional crew can save you countless hours of trial and error and their expertise is usually willingly shared. If you are not sure who to contact visit your local tackle shop for a referral. Express your desire to learn and let your captain know up front you are new to the sport. As an example of this, 30 plus years ago I had the good fortune to meet the famous Captain, Peter Wright. I had acquired my first large boat and he

spent several hours tutoring me on boat handling, setting the outriggers, use of the fighting chair, drag settings, etc. His years of experience saved my son and I countless hours of frustration from experimenting. His keen sense of reading the water taught us valuable tips on what to look for in a potential strike. You will be amazed how much you can pick up in a half-day charter if you pay attention. This holds true for more advanced anglers also. Whenever fishing an unfamiliar area local knowledge goes a long way.

Another very informative platform are fishing seminars. Boat shows often offer angling seminars, Betty Bauman features "Ladies Lets Go Fishing" clinics, Bass Pro Shops offers workshops for the beginning angler, George Poveromo of Saltwater Sportsman has a very comprehensive seminar series, and Marlin Magazine's Marlin University offers a complete hands on session designed for beginner, intermediate and experienced anglers. Research what fits your needs and budget. Discover what fishing clubs are available in your area. Joining a fishing club offers shared interests and knowledge gained. This is another great step to becoming a better angler and meeting new friends.

When considering tackle and equipment buy the best that you can afford. Visit your local tackle shop and ask advice of where to start and convey what your budget is. Having matched tackle is very important. When that moment of chaos occurs you don't want to find yourself having to stop and think where the strike lever is. A mixed bag of rods and reels can mean the difference between catching a fish and losing it. It is also important to match the rod and reel to the line test. This is especially important for trolling applications. For the most part, there are tackle selections at the middle of the road that will more than serve the needs of

the average angler. Again, this is an area to do some research. Some shops may have used equipment on consignment. In the long run, however, it is usually best to purchase good tackle the first time. There is an enormous variety of tackle at moderate prices that will serve you well for many years. Utilizing the Internet is another good source of information and will provide you with price comparisons, features, and testimonials. The mass merchants and independent catalog houses also offer great selection and competitive pricing. Other equipment that proves useful when searching for fish is a good depth finder and a GPS. If you are fishing on someone else's boat that equipment will probably be provided.

Tying good knots is essential for whatever type of fishing pursued. You will be glad you did when hooked up with something big. There is much information on the subject in this and other magazines. Look on the Web for Mark Sosin's Practical Fishing Knots or find video/DVD's on basic knot tying. With some practice you will soon find you will be able to tie many of them with great expertise.

Sun glasses, sun screen and a good hat will make your day of fishing safe, comfortable and enjoyable. Sunglasses should be UV rated and Polarized. Buy the best glasses you can afford for optimum visibility, comfort and protection. The UV rays from the sun are proven to cause skin cancer so cover your skin with good sunscreen/sun block protection. It is especially important to apply sunscreen when you get out of the shower in the morning and continue to apply during the day on the water. A good hat keeps glare away and also provides protection from the sun.

Even the experienced angler sometimes needs to be reminded of some very basic exercises. Here is a checklist of things to keep in mind and remember to pay attention to the condition of your tackle:



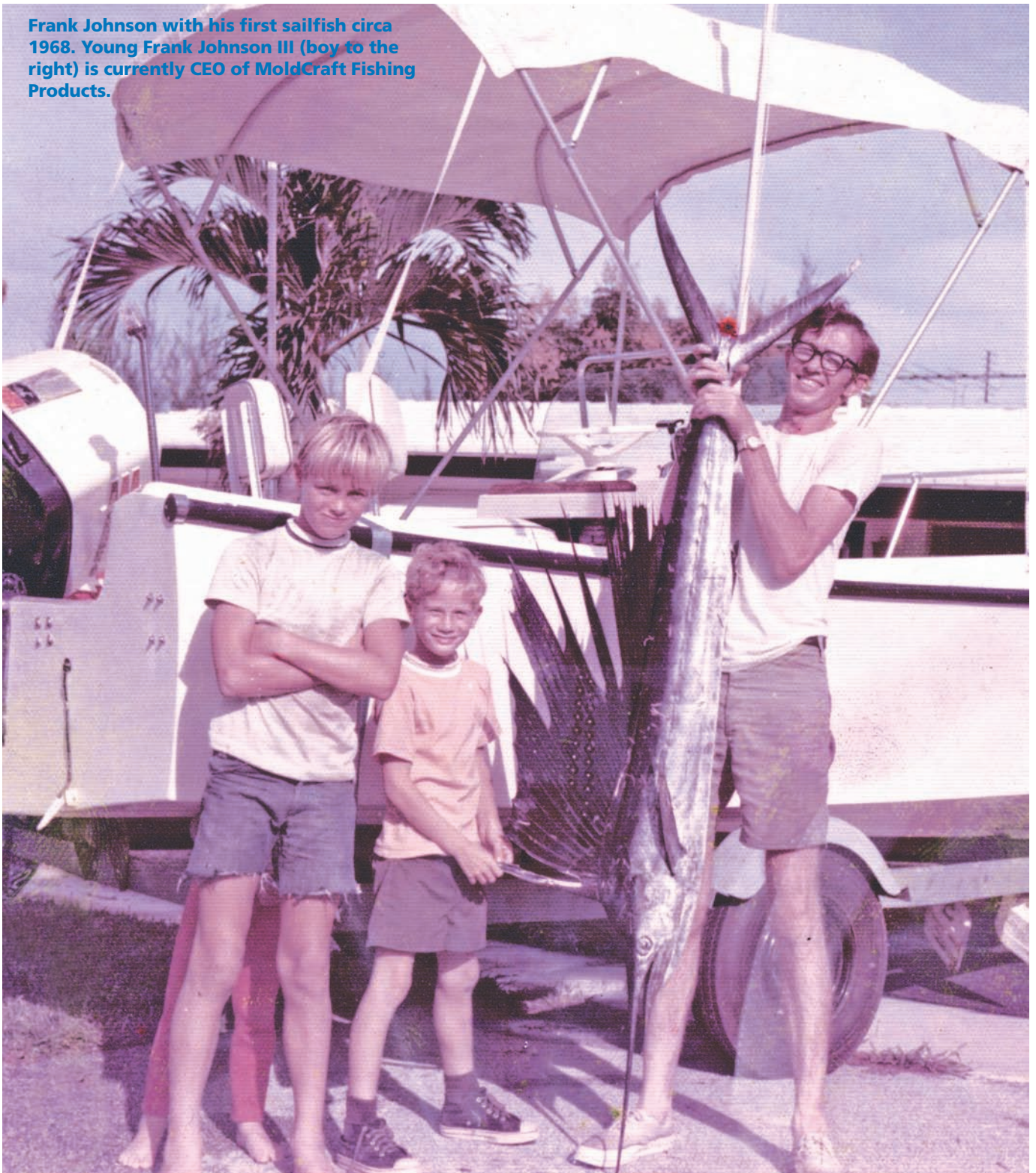
A young Frank Johnson (center) with his "Catch of the Day."

- 1) Fresh line, ball bearing snap swivels, greased reels and roller guides.
- 2) Sharpen all hooks and mark the hook blade surface with a "Marks A-Lot" pen. This proves to prevent rust and it serves as an indicator that the task has been done.
- 3) Set your drags before fishing. My preference is 20 percent of the line strength using a good spring loaded

- pull scale over the guides. Never set drags by feel.
- 4) When trolling artificial lures, single hook rigs will provide the opportunity to facilitate drop-back techniques, which helps to increase an angler's hook up ratio. This method acts much as one would do with dead bait.

- 5) Circle hooks with bait (live or dead) equal the best hook up ratio and best concern for the welfare of

Frank Johnson with his first sailfish circa 1968. Young Frank Johnson III (boy to the right) is currently CEO of MoldCraft Fishing Products.



the fish. Circle hooks have become the newest chapter of conservation fishing methods.

6) When trolling artificial lures the rule of thumb regarding color is to

begin with a mix from light colors to dark colors. When the strike occurs you will be able to decide which color is best for that day of fishing. Some captains prefer to use dark colors such as black and purple

on bright days and light colors such as pink and white on overcast days allowing for contrast. It is also important to have a redundancy of a given color in the event that a popular color is the "hot one" for that



Frank Johnson (right) with a sailfish prior to release.

good and very effective to get a semi-interested billfish's attention, however, bigger is better. The largest commotion behind the boat will attract a fish's attention from much farther away. The use of a big soft teaser or bumper will cause that commotion to occur and bring the fish to your spread. My son, Frank III, and I were fishing the Father & Son Tournament out of Fins and Feathers Lodge in Guatemala one year and we had our fender teaser out. A blue marlin came out of nowhere and attacked our fender-teaser breaking it off. Tim Choate was fishing further offshore managed to find the teaser floating with lots of bill marks. That blue just did not want to give up on that teaser.

day. If I could only use one color anywhere in the world it would be purple, silver, black.

7) Should you find yourself fishing a tournament as a visiting angler where you rotate from boat to boat, I have found that the best method to "win" the bite is to be the "odd" one out. Look at what the other anglers are putting out and then select the smaller or least obtrusive lure in your kit. Fish are opportunistic and aren't going to work too hard for their quarry they will pick the weakest link.

8) When fishing dead calm days, it is some times a good thing to create commotion. Try putting a bird on a dropper rig in front of your lure. This method proved successful for Roberto Armorin in 1992 off of Victoria, Brazil, when the IGFA world record all tackle line class Atlantic Blue Marlin weighed in at 1,402 pounds. Mr. Armorin was using a pink and white Senior Bird in front of a pink and white Senior Super Chugger. That record still stands today.

9) When deploying teasers keep in mind that multiples work. (One girl walking down the dock in a bikini or six girls walking down the dock in bikini's) An example of this came to mind when I was fishing with Guy Harvey at Tropic Star Lodge one year. The Indian mate on our boat offered me a contest. His daisy chain or mine. He added a super Chugger at the end of the squid chain. I used straight squid. His method raised twice as many fish and was more durable than mine. He won. Hence the Tropic Star Daisy Chain was born.

10) Teasers are

11) Lure placement is import and I do not believe in third or fourth wave theories. I prefer to place the spread parallel. When a fish comes up into your spread this manner gives you the

flexibility of “zig zagging” to entice the shopper to bite. You can speed up the lure spread as you turn without changing engine speed, which would spook a fish away. You also avoid tangling your lures. The distance back behind your boat that you place your lures depends on what kind of boat you have and sea conditions. The perfect distance is when you can see them working well by creating smoke trails and not tumbling out of the water. Outboard boats usually require a spread further back than inboard boats.

12) The general consensus for trolling speed for marlin is eight knots, however speeds can vary up or down depending on sea conditions. The exception to the rule is that fish can be caught at 16 knots and this technique can be incorporated into your travel plans. It is important to note that you should send the lures as far back as necessary to keep them from coming out of the water. I would recommend two rods with standard size wide ranges about 200 yards back as your perfect high-speed trolling/transiting situation. Captain Peter Wright, caught a 902-pound blue marlin in Hawaii trolling at 16 knots. Bill and Brad Priestman have been consistently successful catching blue marlin transiting back and forth to Bimini, in the Bahamas, in their older 35-foot Bertram, cruising at 16 knots. An important note here, however, is to be sure you place someone in the cockpit to watch the reels. On a trip to Bimini in my 36 Hatteras I had four 80's filled with Andy Line. On a trip down from the bridge to get more refreshments one of my guests discovered that all the reels were empty. Obviously, we must have passed through a school of tuna and got stripped. It did teach me a valuable lesson to always keep a watchful eye on your tackle when traveling at any speed! At the end of the day the most consistent hook up ratios from

captains that I have polled over the years agree that eight knots is a dependable trolling number, but you can incorporate higher speeds when coming and going from offshore.

While trolling offshore be sure to keep a constant vigil of your surroundings. Look for birds working the surface, a weed line, color change, wind direction, current rips, water temperature, and weather. When you are hooked up—take your time. Many fish are lost at the boat by an over anxious angler that uses too much drag pressure and breaks the fish off. Take your time. If the fish runs off you will retrieve him again. Take your time. When bringing a fish to tag or gaff make sure the fish is in your control by swimming him parallel to the boat or pointed away from the boat. Again, remember these situations are charged with adrenaline and in that state it is easy to forget that this fish is fighting for its life. The added stimulus of presenting a gaff or tag could cause him to suddenly jolt and join you in the boat. Grabbing the leader and taking wraps could set up a situation for disaster. Unless one is an experienced mate be very careful. Remember, the fish came to the boat from a certain amount of pressure at the rod tip and the reel drag. Changing that pressure can cause the fish to instinctively flee jerking you off your feet and possibly overboard.

Another tip that I learned from Captain Peter Wright is if you see a billfish “free jump” remember where he came out of the water and do figure eights in that vicinity for a while to see if you can attract him to your spread. I have personally seen this work. Some people say that a fish free jumps to rid itself of parasites and is not interested in eating. The jury to some is still out on that subject, however I think fish instinctively pursue food if it presents itself anytime.

The last, but certainly not least important tip to the emerging new angler is to remember to enjoy your-

self. Fishing is fun. Having stories to tell at the dock—priceless!

GREATEST MOMENTS

I've put together some of my proudest, most thrilling, funniest, awesome, greatest most humble & scariest moments I experienced sport fishing.

In the early 1970's I was fishing in our 19' Aqua Sport with my son Frank III who was 10 years old at that time and his neighbor friend, also 10, and I caught my first sailfish offshore from Boca Raton Inlet.

Another early great moment was again, with my son Frank III when he caught his first sailfish using our brand new six-inch squid while trolling back from a picnic in Palm Beach.

Catching my first swordfish at night in the first Fort Lauderdale Swordfish Tournament. When I got the 170-pound fish along side my little 25' Mako, it was so impressive it took a few moments to decide who would gaff this fish. The deed was done and we ended up in fourth place.

Darrell Lowrance (Lowrance Electronics), Chuck Gerlach (Andy Line) and I were fishing in the Mako Writers Tournament from Chub Cay in the Bahamas. I caught and released a blue marlin over 700 pounds in front of about 20 outdoor writers all wanting pictures. The fish never jumped and by the time Darrell got the leader to the boat the fish was gone.

In the early 1980's I was fishing by myself in the Mako Masters in Palm Beach and was simultaneously entered in the IBL with Tom O'Connell on the RENEGADE. I was fishing on Tom's 25' Mako (tender to the RENEGADE) that was not set up to fish and had no tackle. I did have a bait-well full of goggle eyes and two borrowed spinning rods, however, and managed to catch and release a total of 16 sailfish in one day by myself.

The result I won the Mako Masters and my team, RENEGADE, won the IBL. What an incredible weekend.

Another great moment was when I won the First National Sailfish Championship in Stuart, Florida in my own 25 Mako.

On a trip to Cape Cod to promote my 12" Squid Spreader Bars for catching giant bluefin tuna I was invited to fish with Bob Mayo, creator of the spreader bar rig for tuna. I caught and landed a 722-pound bluefin tuna using that spreader bar rig and my 12" squid. I have never experienced a fish that pulled that hard before. What a thrill.

In the late 1980's fishing off Venezuela, aboard the 65' Hatteras, SINTRA with Captain Bobby DeHart I caught my first billfish grand slam, a blue, white and a sail.

In 1994 my wife, Shelley, and I fished aboard SHAMY FREE, a 31-foot Bertram out of Cairns, Australia. I caught my first over 1,000-pound black marlin and released it with great joy. You ask "How did you know it was over a thousand pounds if you released it?" My captain, John Phillips, and partner with Capt. Peter Wright, has caught and landed his share of 1,000 plus pound black marlin and he knew my fish was a grander. Capt. Peter Wright is responsible for 77 marlin catches over 1,000 pounds. These professionals do not exaggerate and know their fish. Shelley hooked up with an 800-pound black and tagged and released her fish. It was a thrill to see her catch her first big fish.

In the spring of 2004 Shelley and I flew to Panama to fish with Capt. Trevor Cockle on the GOD'S WILL and GOD'S WAY (formerly Madam & Hooker fame) anchored in Pinas Bay. While trolling for sailfish Capt. Trevor spotted swordfish basking. We were casting live goggle eyes on 20-pound spinning outfits when all of

a sudden I was hooked up. This fish jumped several times and was the most incredible color of neon purple that I have ever seen. Trevor estimated the swordfish was in the 250-pound range. Next Shelley was hooked up with her first swordfish on 20-pound spinning gear. This was an absolute blast. The next day more swordfish were basking on the surface. We concluded the swordfish were feeding on a massive school of squid down very deep (1,000 plus feet below) and were digesting their squid by warming on the surface. They were not really hungry when we cast the live goggle eyes at them. However, by the second or third cast they struck with a vengeance and were hooked. By the third day Capt. Trevor asked me if I wanted to try for a world record on 12-pound test. Fishing from a world-class boat for a world record swordfish—I am always ready, I said, "Sure why not!" The fish were in the 300-pound range and Jerry Dunaway held the record for 12-pound test with a 170-pound swordfish. It was worth going for. On the third day I was hooked up using the 12-pound outfit with a 300-pound plus bruiser. In an hour I got the fish to the boat, but the gaffman (new to the boat) missed. The fish took off. An hour or two later the fish is alongside and the gaffer missed again. By this time Shelley was ready to throw the gaffer overboard and gaff the fish herself. One more try and another two hours later I got the fish to the boat and no gaffer in sight, but this time a giant manta ray jumped up between me and my swordfish and cut the line. This fish would have definitely beat Jerry's world record by at least a hundred pounds.

So much for my only world record! It was a hell of a weekend, though, catching and releasing

dozens of sailfish, striped marlin and three surface swordfish during the daytime on 20-pound spinning rods and live goggle eyes. Doesn't get much better than that anywhere! We spent the rest of the week at Tropic Star Lodge playing with sails and visiting with Mike and Terry Andrews, owners of the lodge.

Probably my most exciting and humbling moments have been being asked to participate in writing articles like this and all of the support from the media over the years; from "Broadbills at Night" by Mark Sosin in July of 1978 to being named top two trolling lures of all time in July, 2007 from a survey of fishermen around the world. WOW—thank you all.

CONSERVATION

Conservation organizations such as, the International Game Fish Association, The Billfish Foundation, Recreational Fishing Alliance, Coastal Conservation Association, United Anglers, National Coalition for Marine Conservation and others are another additional source of reference and education for all of us. Protecting this valuable resource is a very worthwhile effort not only for oneself, but also for future generations to enjoy and learn from. Everyone can learn lessons from past conservation efforts. In the 1960's the New England striper fishery was exceptional, only to fall into near collapse by the late 1970's. With the help of sweeping reform in conservation this fishery has rebounded in less than two decades. Another example of how well conservation works is swordfishing in the Florida Straits. With restrictions in place for commercial longlining, our swordfish populations have returned in respectable numbers. More work needs to be done and it is incumbent on each and every one of us to do our part. Support release of all fish and only take what you and your family can consume. 