

# Rough Seas Challenge WBS Tournament Anglers

By Jim Niemiec —

MAZATLAN, Mexico — The traditionally calm waters along the Pacific coast of mainland Mexico turned into choppy seas making billfishing extremely difficult for the group of World Billfish Series anglers who had gathered at Marina El Cid Dec. 9-11 to compete for WBS angler of the year.

Anglers also had to deal with winds howling out of the northwest at 30 knots, swells running into a current chop, and cold water.

The format was an "all-release" tournament with points awarded for all billfish.

Anglers would be awarded higher points for spikebills released on light line and those which were hooked and released on dead pitched baits.

All billfish counted, and the waters off the coast of Mazatlan are home to a huge population of striped, blue, and black marlin, Pacific sailfish, and swordfish. Anglers would be fishing two to a boat, be responsible for putting out their two rods, and be rotating positions every hour.

Day 1 of the tournament started with boats leaving the harbor and heading to spots on the grid chart within a 50-mile radius of the entrance to Marina El Cid harbor.

## Even Veterans Were Green

By 7 a.m., seas were building, and even some of the most veteran of anglers began to feel a little green as the Aries Fleet of sportfishers pounded their way to the fishing grounds.

Fishing was tough for all anglers with only a couple of sailfish released while other anglers reported to tournament control short bites on trolled baits and being zipped by billfish that came up to hures trolled over angry seas.

Conditions on Day 2 didn't show much sign of improvement as the winds kicked up again before the boats left the marina.

Skippers and anglers adapted pretty well to the tough fishing and ended the day with a few more billfish released from an area some 25 miles south of the light-house.

After coming in from back-to-back days on a nasty ocean, anglers and captains compared notes during the evening cocktail reception around the pool and hoped that conditions would improve for the final day of fishing.

The winds backed off, and calmer seas awaited the anglers as the boats headed past Deer Island. It was flat calm on the fishing grounds, but cold water (75.5 degrees F) had pushed down the coast, and there were not a lot of marlin or sailfish to be spotted.

## Competition Was Close

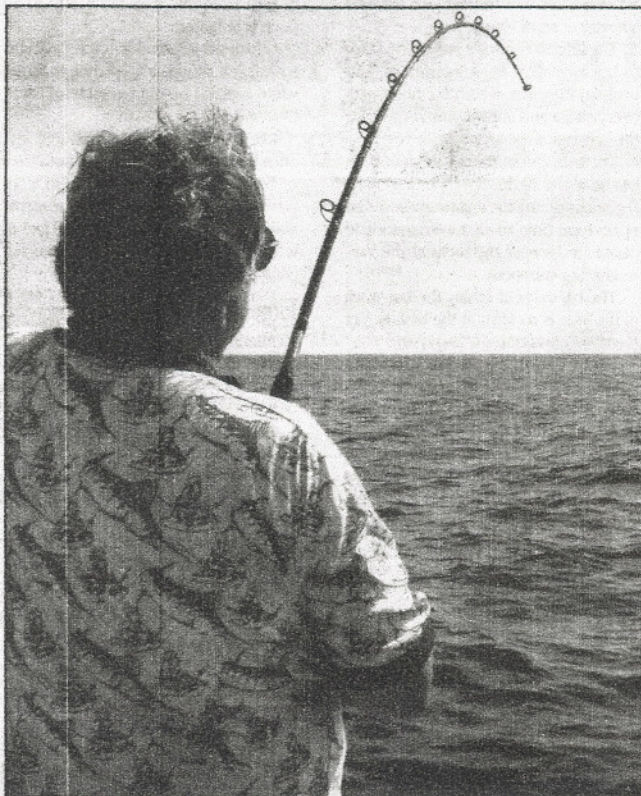
Competition for WBS angler of the year was still close with at least six anglers in position to win the coveted trophy and drive away in a new Mercedes Benz.

Mark Wodlinger, fishing aboard the Aries Fleet Sportfishing boat *Pro Billfish*, was leading the tournament with a double hookup as "lines in" was called over the radio at 7 a.m.

Perry Peace was fishing aboard *Blue Marlin* and called into radio control with the first released sailfish of the day. Not much action was reported, but at least conditions were greatly improved as Capt. Steve Lassely, on *After Midnight*, spotted a tailing marlin off the bow.

WBS's Sam White would have first cast to the sleeper and hit a spot right in front of the bill of the marlin.

Veteran billfish angler Mike Cromer of Ojai cast out the second live bait and ended up hooking the striped marlin on



Jim Wodlinger

**FIGHTING A STRIPED MARLIN** — Mike Cromer of Ojai, Calif., fishing aboard his sportfishing yacht *After Midnight*, hooked into a marlin on 30-pound tackle and released the fish after it was brought to leader. The marlin was enough to win Cromer a second-place finish in the WBS Grand Championships.

30-pound tackle.

There was a lot of pressure on Cromer to land the fish that would hopefully move him into the lead of the tournament. It took Cromer 25 minutes to bring the marlin to the corner for a quick release by his deckhand Pepe, and all he could do was wait and see if his catch would win him top place.

## Committed To Catching

"Fishing was very tough for these anglers, but they are very committed to catching marlin and sailfish. Normally at this time of the year we have big schools of striped marlin move in along the coast, which mix with the blues and sailfish to

provide an excellent fishery.

"The ocean was not cooperating, and that cold-water current that moved in didn't help either. I think everyone enjoyed their stay at the marina, and hopefully they will return next year to fish our productive waters," stated Geronimo Cevallos, general manager of Marina El Cid.

The awards banquet was held at the Marina El Cid Beach Club under warm, windless skies where anglers, captains, crewmembers, and Mazatlan dignitaries gathered to share in a fun evening.

WBS tournament director Jim Simons hosted the evening along with Cevallos and Wayne Bisbee presenting awards to the most-traveled angler.

They also made a special Ambassador Award presentation to Mike Vidal for his accomplishments in the world of billfishing, having released over 1,000 marlin/sailfish.

## Wodlinger Wins

When it came time to determine the winner of the 2005 WBS Grand Championships, it would be Mark Wodlinger. He qualified for the tournament, finishing high in the South East Division, winning this year's competition.

Mike Cromer of Ojai, Calif., fishing aboard his own 70-foot sportfisher *After Midnight*, took second-place honors, and coming in third in the event was Andy Kontos who won the Buccaneer Cup tournament in Florida.

The WBS Grand Championship brings together some great fishermen with a wide variety of techniques and fishing knowledge.

The East Coast and Southeast fisheries are as unique as their style of fishing, and putting these seasoned anglers on Pacific waters was a true test of their ability to adapt to fishing conditions and new techniques.

## One For The Books

Some anglers trolled spreader teaser rigs; others opted for flashy knob heads. One group from Florida shipped cases of frozen ballyhoo, which they would troll inside a Billy Bait, while others mixed their preferences with tips passed on by the knowledgeable captains of the Aries Sportfishing Fleet.

"This year's grand championships will certainly go down as one for the record books. The competition was remarkably tight going into the final hours and even minutes of the tournament, with several anglers within striking distance of the winner.

"The 2004 World Champion of Billfishing Mark Wodlinger earned his way to this event by fishing numerous tournaments around the world, and he was able to make the best of the conditions, fishing against some of the best anglers anywhere," were the closing comments from Jim Simmons.

For information on fishing a World Billfish Series tournament, contact John Molifetto, membership director, at (727) 319-3449 or log on to their Web site at [worldbillfishseries.com](http://worldbillfishseries.com).