



# The Teaser®

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**Editor's Note** – The opinions expressed by Capt. Skip Smith are his and reflect his years of experience as a captain, angler and tournament director. Skip is not a member of the BBC Steering Committee.

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## Anglers, Crews and Teasers

By Captain Skip Smith

What is the difference between an angler and a 'paid crew' angler? What are the advantages?

I have heard this from quite a few people, "Once you win money, aren't you a professional angler?" There are many boat owners that are lucky enough to fish a couple hundred days a year. They get more opportunities than any mate. They get really good and get to compete quite often in numerous tournaments. But then again, when someone picks up the whole tab, that makes them an 'owner angler.'

As Jimmy L.' says, "Once a crew member is retired for the three years, he still knows how to ride a bike." But tournaments have to start putting a definition somewhere. There are many other tournaments using this three year rule and they are having very few problems (most tournament directors' goals are to have 'very few problems').

One of my reasons for endorsing the no paid crew angling rule is that when an 'owner angler' keeps getting beaten by a 'crew angler' of another boat, that owner either quits fishing tournaments or they may just sell the boat and let the crew go. Either way, everyone loses ... less money in the tournament and more competition for the captain and crew jobs.

The paid crew that acts as an angler can take all the winnings he gets and most likely cannot buy a boat capable of fishing in a big money marlin tournament; much less employ a crew. On the other hand, if a boat owner brings a (wealthy) friend or business partner aboard, that guest may get 'hooked' and buy a boat because he wants to win the prestigious BBC title. A boat is sold. A crew is employed and more jobs are created. Another possible entry into the tournament and more money for the crews to win.

Recently, I was riding along on a very competitive boat in a tournament. The owner was behind the rocket launcher that held the two long riggers with a couple of swimming ballyhoo. There were four other rods with baits or lures out; two on each side of the boat in the covering boards. Five minutes after the committee boat called 'lines in,' the captain shouted, "Left teaser." In a flash the mate had the rod and had the bait in front of the fish.

I failed to mention that there were two mates; one on each side of the rocket launcher. (They stayed there **ALL DAY!**) The crew had just set the baits out and they were in position to check the baits to make sure they were swimming right, shake off any weed, untangle the baits (due to the wind) and any other task that came up.

What advantages did they have? A lot has to do with where they were positioned and that they knew where each rod was and what bait was attached to that rod. Their eyes are trained to notice any 'other' movement in the spread. So when the captain yelled, the mate went directly to the flat line; picked it up without looking at the rod; found the fish with his eyes and moved the bait to the fish. It was only another couple of seconds when the mate had the fish hooked.

One of the advantages of working as a team lies with knowing your tackle and knowing which rod is attached to what bait. Just taking your eyes off the fish to find the right rod and then look back to locate the fish is enough for the fish to leave the teaser and, while you were looking for the rod, turn around and then



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last the bait while you still had the reel engaged and not the right grip on the rod. SANCOCHO, you reel in the dreaded head of the ballyhoo.

When an angler can help put the baits out and reel them in throughout the day, he or she becomes familiar with the rod/reel and where the baits belong. By reeling the baits in throughout the day, you become familiar with the sea conditions and how the bait will react to you trying to get that bait to the fish when it appears in the spread. You observe how the wind is moving the bait; how you had to put your rod tip in the water to get it around the teaser earlier due to the wind wanting to blow the bait into the teaser, etc.

On the other hand, there are 'fishing team owners' like 'team owners' in the NFL, NBA or MLB. Most of these 'fishing teams' compete in numerous sailfish tournaments. I will agree that you do need a 'team' to compete in these tournaments.

Most of the sailfish tournament boats have 400 rods on the boats, 2 million live baits and six dozen kites all in a 36' triple engine outboard that can run 60 miles to fish at 60 mph in 6' seas. Once you get there and store the bean bag chairs, you get to start deploying a spread and using quite a few of the 100 rod holders in the covering boards. You finally get your spread out and you get a couple of 'cover ups' of bonitos. You then need a few mates to re-rig the rods and tie on new hooks while the 6 anglers reel in all the bonitos and others try and put another spread back out. And this goes on time and time again throughout the day; sometime they are sails, kings, bonitos and sharks. Don't forget, the cooler full of Red Bull and Mountain Dew.

So whenever anyone grabs a rod in these sailfish tournaments, you could get bit and having a designated angler is obsolete. The tournaments do alter their rules to allow for all of this. Anyone can be an angler. One guy can fight numerous fish at one time and even fight a fish out of the rod holder and so on. Also, if the tournaments let us 'stack the deck' and allow us to use professional crews as anglers, why not? We do it with fishing line, with an over-test line compared to the manufacturer's label or whatever we can to get an advantage. Sort of like a NASCAR team, always looking for that 'little advantage.'

I have heard the term recently that lure fishing is so 'easy' compared to how most boats are fishing these days. The crews put all the lures out (and numerous teasers) and when the lure snaps out of the rigger and begins taking drag, we can run to the rod that is making all the noise, pick it up and go to the chair. This was proven in the USVI, when one boat won the Boy Scout tournament and the anglers were inside playing dominoes and would come outside to reel in the fish when they were called.

Lures are great for blue marlin fishing and for later in the season when there are more blues around. Yes, there is still a lot of angling skill to be used with lures, but usually it is when fighting the fish.

I have personally been an angler in the Boy Scout, Los Suenos, the Gold Cup and a few others. I have really enjoyed the challenge of bait fishing and you really do need to be on top of your game to compete in these angler tournaments. The mezzanine does not get used too much! I have been able to fish with the late Jim Lambert, the wild and crazy Rob Ruwitch and many other tournament tested anglers. They are all very good anglers and most of them will challenge ANYONE. But, they too, like to compete against the other owner anglers. They can level the playing field in golf by asking you for your handicap and offering or taking strokes. This is the same thing when fishing against your peers.

One reason I spent so much time explaining the bait fishing angling skills is that the biggest problems (or advantages) I see, is that 'dredge teaser' fishing is not going away. So the sails and whites are going to be a large factor early in the season. The bad news is that you need to be good at delivering a bait to these fish and use all your angling skills.

I was on the video review committee for a Texas tournament this summer. There were a record number of billfish caught and most were whites and sailfish. The boats fishing lures did not catch much other than a blue and a sail on one boat and a blue here or there as they worked over the oil rigs. However, the boats that pulled the dredge teasers caught numerous sails and whites with quite a few misses. The winning

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boat in 1-½ days of fishing had 13 sails, 5 whites and a blue. Were they just on the fish or did the dredges raise them? It makes you wonder how many fish (whites and sails) that do not respond to our lure spread? How many billfish have we driven over in the past? Now my thoughts go to how many blue marlin do we drive over that do not respond to any of this.

Over the years, we have watched the teasers change. From the 60's and 70's, when we used a small single lure to the 80s, when we had a daisy chain of mullet or a single XXL tuna mullet. Then came some really strange teasers in the 90's. There were boat fenders, buoys, PVC pipe. All of these items got painted to look like a fish. Don't forget about all the fish that were painted on the bottoms of boats! There were also 'Voodoo boards,' bowling pins, 'birds' of all sizes. Then came some of the largest lures ever made. Boone made some real big lures in the 70's and when the boats went to 8 to 10 knot, I guess fisherman thought they were too big or didn't stay in the water very well.

Now come the dreaded dredge with hundreds of dollars a day for mullet, ballyhoo and even mackerel. Then you spend even more for the Lindgren Pitman reels to do the job of retrieving these rigs. Don't forget about the reinforced outrigger support bar, the pulley system and the reinforced rod holders. The only equalizer for everyone is seaweed and unfortunately it affects all of us!

But there is hope on the horizon. There is someone out there coming up with a new invention and we can only hope it is easier and more affordable. Right now, I have even heard of a 'poor man's dredge.' Look for details to follow in the next issue of *The Teaser*.

A personal 'Congratulations' to *Zues* on winning the BBC and to the *Double Dog* on their monster catch!

**Tight Lines and Good Fishing!**

*Captain Skip Smith*