

Pelagic Paradise

Costa Rica's scenic Los Sueños Resort and Marina sets the stage for a white-hot winter billfish tournament series.

It was 7 a.m. when the call for the Bimini start came over the VHF. The competitive blood ran through me as the boat I was on, *After You*, a customized 45 Cabo Express, shot out of Herradura Bay, Costa Rica, to lead the pack of 21 sprinting battlewagons towards the placid Pacific. The First Annual Los Sueños-HMY Signature Billfish Series had started, and while it was late February, the billfish season was just heating up. Before this tournament was finished, the billfish action would erupt like Mount Vesuvius.

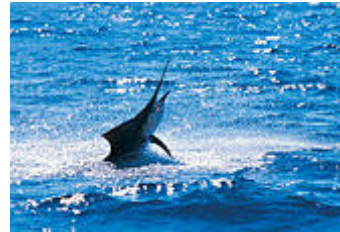


Photo: Craig Wallace Dale

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Lines were in at 8 a.m. on day one, and I perched myself atop *After You's* custom stainless steel tower (see "Special Edition," this story) to take in the hook-bait ballyhoo and two teaser spread. The four Shimano 30-pound-class TLD reels were trolling the dead bait, while two larger 50-pound-class Shimano Tiagra reels were ready with pitch-baits should a blue marlin work its way into the ballyhoo buffet. I scanned the baits as they skipped across *After You's* wake, but while I was briefly gazing back at the rainforest that blankets Los Sueños' property like a deep-pile green carpet, a sailfish smacked the right long 'rigger bait. The 30 TLD's fluorescent-green mono stripped off the reel faster than a New York City "F" train during rush hour. The baits were in the water maybe ten minutes when the fish hit, but I wasn't too surprised. I've had hook-ups from the get-go here before.

Since points matter 151; and this sail was worth 100 of them—the fish was taken by angler Phillip Arklin, who was quickly cranking down on the reel, while Los Sueños president and CEO William Royster backed down the Cabo just as rapidly. Fortunately, the sailfish was released unharmed thanks to fish-friendly circle hooks. (Circle hooks allow for a consistent jaw-corner hook set).

The radio was abuzz with reports of hook-ups (volunteer observers verified catches), and the chatter flew over the airwaves with frenzied frequency. "This is *Prime Time*, we've got a blue." "J&T, blue marlin release." "Topless release, one sail." It made me think that this is what it must have been like to listen to a big-time boxing match before there was TV. While I was entranced by the VHF play-by-play, a blue marlin worth 500 points snuck up in the shadow of the left-short bait, but the big fish quickly fell off into the purple-tinted Pacific. (If you're keeping score, that's two fish I didn't notice because I was daydreaming.) Several other bites soon followed, but there were no more fish for the *After You* crew this day.

However, there was fast and furious fishing aboard several other boats, and by the end of day one of this three-day event, the 21 battlewagons vying for the title would catch and release more than 44 billfish. That's one fish caught and released about every ten minutes during eight hours of fishing.



Photo: Craig Wallace Dale

By the end of day two, there would be another 63 billfish, and day three exploded with more than 122 fish caught and released, with the lead changing hands right up until lines out. In the end, *Desperado*, a 60-foot Bertram that was one of only four boats that didn't score points on the first day of the tournament, rallied to win with 2,900 points. *After You* finished with a respectable 900 points.

If you do the math, that's 229 total fish over three days (an average of almost 11 fish per boat per day), and that doesn't account for lost fish and those not verified.

This winter tournament series, which also includes a ladies' event and an invitational, gives anglers several opportunities to keep their skills fresh for the summer circuit. And when you're down at Los Sueños, you'll always have a good day on the water. Why? Because this oceanfront paradise features consistently calm seas, bright sun, a warm breeze, and frenetic billfishing less than an hour's run from the dock. It's truly an angler's oasis, and this first event was well organized. I think you'll want to put this on your 2005 tournament list.

I'll see you at next year's tourney; just look for the guy on a tower getting lost in the view (and who probably just missed a 500-pound blue marlin swim into the spread).

Los Sueños Resort Phone (011) 506-637-8886. www.lossuenosresort.com.

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