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Video Shark Tournament?

Proposal for Video Catches Doesn't Catch On

By Eugenia Bartell

"A better fishing ground cannot be found than off this bold, desolate promontory. Within a rifle shot of the lighthouse...is to be caught almost every fish that swims in the Northern Atlantic."

What makes this quote noteworthy is that it was published over 120 years ago on August 25th 1889, in The New York Times. It still holds today.

In 1927 when Carl Fisher opened the inlet to allow larger boats to enter Lake Montauk, eventually replacing Fort Pond as Montauk's main port of entry, indeed they came. Long, luxurious corporate yachts headed straight for the Montauk Yacht

Club where notables with names such as Morgan, Whitney, Vanderbilt and Wanamaker began to enjoy big game fishing.

After WWI, the lake boomed with commercial and sport fishing, making NY State the number one fishing port. Since then, Montauk is known as "The Sport Fishing capital of the USA."



Photo by Eugenia Bartell

Legendary Captain Frank Mundus had a lot to do with game fishing. In fact, he pioneered a fishery that no one else was doing. By pursuing sharks, he introduced a new, astounding fishing sport for which he was acclaimed. The Shark Tournaments of the 1970s were astonishing feats of Herculean, monster fishing. Maintaining his maverick free spirit and easy style throughout his career, Mundus became as important to the event as the shark he hooked on his boat. Mundus' great white weighed 4,500 pounds, the largest shark ever caught in the USA. Today its replica hangs outside the Star Island Yacht Club.

During those tournaments, as each boat pulled up to the weigh-in station, the frenzied, cheering crowd almost drowned out the announcer's statistics. Camera freaks went wild, and "dock rats," as Mundus called them, were the gawkers who scraped up every memento they could find and some they shouldn't have taken. However, Frank became an advocate for shark conservation and criticized the detrimental way in which the film "Jaws" portrayed sharks and shark fishing.

Today, fishing conservation, a main focus, limits the number of boats; increases weight limits, enforces tag and release and allows only one shark per boat to be brought in. Both owner Carl Darenberg of the Montauk Marine Basin and Rich Janis, manager of Star Island Yacht Club, who are hosting their tournaments this weekend and next, remind all that the shark meat is prepared and frozen to donate to many Long Island food pantries.

Recently, a local group from the Humane Society of the USA, joined by the entertainer brothers Sean and Brooks Paxton, who it was rumored tried to exploit Frank Mundus in a "fishy film" deal, are now endeavoring to push through another form of film, this time live video of sharks being caught and released during tournaments

"The Shark Brothers" as the two call themselves have developed a scheme that involves sending one or two boats to the location when a shark is spotted. A radio signal, "Shark On" is the indicator for the boat or boats to race to the location of the hook-up and videotape the action. "To race out to a 30 mile location, in perhaps 6' to 8' high seas, is dangerously ridiculous," explained Carl Darenberg.

Everyone in Montauk agrees that Shark tournaments generate tremendous excitement and business for the community.

The idea behind creating live videos is for spectators of tournaments to watch the fishing take place live, and then measure and release the shark, versus bringing the dead sharks back, and weighing them where fishermen get their picture taken in front of them. The brothers are making an effort to green up shark tournaments, however, not everyone is welcoming the idea, with the economics of shark fishing and tournaments being very strong, and with fair regulations already in place, such as only being allowed to catch one shark.

Those that are directly involved in shark fishing are the ones truly concerned about maintaining and rebuilding the shark fishery stocks. The rules will not be changed this year to accommodate the live video concept, however, it is being put into practice in other tournaments in southern states.