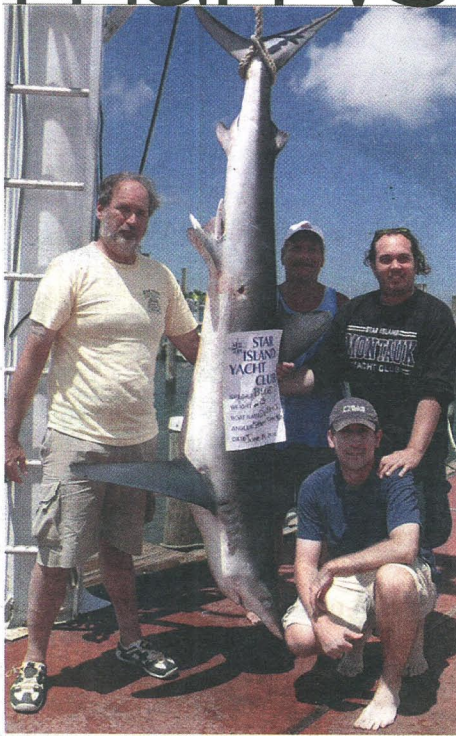


man vs. shark



The winning catch at last year's Star Island Yacht Club tournament in Montauk was a blue shark.

Landing big fish and big money

BY DANIEL BUBBEO
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Oh, the sharks have pretty teeth, dear . . . and those pearly whites are sure to be biting in local waters over the next two weekends, but that's not scaring off Peter Brancaloneo of Oceanside.

In fact, he's expecting those fin-tastic fish to be more than happy to munch on the freshly ground chum he's preparing to help give him an edge when he heads to Montauk Friday for Star Island Yacht Club's annual shark tournament, one of several such jaws-dropping competitions happening this month.

"Who wouldn't want to be at the scale when there's 2,000 people waiting to see a shark weighed in," says Brancaloneo, who estimates he's won about \$500,000 competing in shark tournaments over the past seven years. "If you come back to see a tuna weighed in, nobody's sitting there waiting for you. Sharks just have that allure."

THE RULES

While all anglers are welcome, every tournament has particular eligibility requirements. For starters, sharks must obtain a Highly Migratory Species (HMS) Angling Permit

to compete. Guns, harpoons and similar weapons are forbidden.

The No. 1 rule of shark tournaments is that it's only one fish per boat per day of the contest, and there are minimum weight limits (100 pounds for mako, 250 for blue sharks and 150 for other species). "This is not a killing field. Especially when you get to day 2, and people know what the qualifiers are from day 1," says Rich Janis, who oversees Star Island's tournament. "Tournaments over the years have raised the minimum weights to cut down on catching under-sized fish. Those that don't meet weight requirements are put back in the water."

Entry fees range from \$300 per boat (the Great Gun Anglers tournament in Moriches June 25) to \$950 (the Montauk Marine Basin sharkfest June 24-25).

BEATING THE COMPETITION

Winning is everything for shark fishermen, but reeling in the big one isn't as easy as drop-

ping a line and hoping a shark will bite. "You have to stack the deck in your favor. You want the freshest bait you can get. Usually we catch our bait the day before the tournament and ice it down," Brancaloneo says.

Other must-haves for shark fishermen are top-notch rods and reels and a device for measuring water temperature and gauging Gulf Stream waders. Brancaloneo also has a mechanic inspect his boat.

OH, CALCUTTA!

Besides winning prizes, which can range from \$500 to \$25,000, there's more money to be won in Calcuttas, the side bets made among the competing fishermen. The Freeport Hudson Anglers tournament, for example, has four levels of Calcutta — \$300, \$500, \$1,000 and \$1,500. At last year's Hudson Anglers tournament, 166 fishing teams competed, with more than \$154,000 given out in prize money and Calcutta.

THE SHARK'S TALE

Marine biologists are generally in attendance at shark tournaments, and many of the caught fish are used for research.

"Some of the fish are tagged and released; when the tags are recaptured, researchers can check the migratory habits of the fish," says Carl Darenberg, owner of Montauk Marine Basin. Some of the larger sharks are dissected and also used for study, he says.

Star Island also donates some of the shark meat to food pantries, although as minimum weight requirements have gone up, donations have been smaller.

THE THRILL OF IT ALL

While the prize money is certainly an incentive for shark fishermen, for many anglers it's the excitement of the sport that has them hooked. "Some of the sharks fight pretty hard," Darenberg says. "Mako and thresher sharks are hard-fighting fish. Blue sharks don't fight that hard, but they usually are more abundant."

"It's just a very action-packed type of fishery," Janis says. "When you're shark fishing, you're drifting out and you have your bait out, and then this fish comes up and just — pow! — grabs the bait. A lot of the thrill of mako fishing is when they just jump up and come right out of the water. There's nothing like it."



Top catches in Freeport tourney

Where to compete

STAR ISLAND YACHT CLUB AND MARINA
Star Island Road, Montauk
WHEN Friday and Saturday
INFO 631-668-5052,
starislandyc.com

FREEPORT HUDSON ANGLERS
Guy Lombardo Marina, Guy Lombardo Avenue, Freeport
WHEN Saturday
INFO 516-378-5181, fhangers.com

MONTAUK MARINE BASIN
426 W. Lake Dr.
WHEN 5 a.m.-6 p.m. June 24-25
INFO 631-668-5900,
marinebasin.com

Find more shark tournaments online.