

SPORTS FISHING AS AN INDUSTRY

Erl Roman
University of Miami

To most people, accustomed to view sports fishing merely as a pleasant form of healthful recreation, figures concerning its economic value come somewhat as a surprise. Why this should be, we do not know. Even in the days of the ancients, in Egypt and the early Roman Empire, anglers were spending plenty of money in pursuing their favorite sport.

In his quaint book, the Compleat Angler, Izaak Walton tells of his tackle, his journeyings afield, his meetings with friends in old inns, the meals they ate, the drinks they drank, and the milkmaids with whom they flirted. All these items cost money, although it appears that Walton got away with the milkmaid deal by merely buying some of the fresh milk.

Today, fishing for fun is a big business. But that business began a long time ago. For instance, The Compleat Angler has sold more copies than any other book in the English language with the exception of the Bible. Also, we read in old books of anglers making long trips to enjoy better fishing, or a new kind of fishing.

When south Florida was merely an outpost of civilization, anglers were journeying from England and France just to go fishing in these famous waters. Several of these traveling gentry wrote books about it. In the early days around Miami at least half of the settlers would have deserted the area, or starved, had it not been for fishing.

As a matter of fact, sports fishing has had considerable to do with the upbuilding of this area, and of the entire State of Florida. In all of the publicity sent out by the state and the various municipalities, sports fishing is emphasized. That it brings returns is indicated by statistic compiled at various times. For instance, figures obtained by the federal government some years ago showed that 31.5 of the visitors to Florida came here to enjoy the fishing.

Likewise, some 10 years ago a careful check was made by the Florida State Chamber of Commerce in this connection. The check revealed that approximately \$250,000,000 was spent annually by anglers visiting and residing in this state. One business firm in Miami sold more than \$1,000,000 worth of fishing tackle and fishing gear to sports fishermen in 1946. Statistics compiled by myself indicate that more than 70 percent of the visitors in the large hotels of Miami and Miami Beach go fishing while in this area.

One visitor, William Mellon of Pittsburgh, for years kept a large yacht here all winter, the Vagabondia, for the express purpose of fishing bonefish around Andros Island in the Bahamas. His expenses in this connection must have totalled not under \$15,000. Another angler, William B. Leeds, will spend an average of \$100,000 a year fishing around Florida and in the Bahamas. Either sum would represent a fine gate for an outstanding football game, yet here we have one angler spending it to go fishing.

There are about 18,000,000 anglers in the United States, 13,000,000 of whom are licensed. While they do not all spend as much money on angling as Mr. Leeds and Mr. Mellon, the average expenditure per angler still is quite large. This average has been computed at \$134 annually per angler. A little multiplication reveals the astounding total

of \$2,412,000,000 spent annually by anglers in the United States. The total spent on all sports in this country is estimated at \$6,000,000,000 annually. Thus, we find that angling accounts for approximately 40 cents of every sports dollar spent.

In 1939, Frank G. Menke, published a book entitled Encyclopedia of Sports. Menke is public relations head for Churchill Downs racetrack. He is not an angler and in his book he merely tried to give correct data on all sports. We'll quote Menke:

"These two armies--the anglers and the gunners-- who rarely are mentioned on the sports pages, spend more money each year than would be needed to buy all the racetracks in America, and all the race horses, all the football stadia, all the baseball parks and all the professional ball players, all the dog racing tracks and all the dogs, all the polo fields and all the horses, all the rodeos with their complete equipment, all the automobile speedways--and there still would be enough left to buy handsome postoffices in wholesale quantities."

In south Florida there are approximately 400 charter fishing cruisers. Averaged at \$10,000 each---a low figure, when one considers that the majority of these boats are equipped with twin engines, radio telephone and fine fishing tackle---you can see where the investment in cruisers is \$4,000,000. Inquiries at the various private docks and docks for privately owned cruisers indicate that there are 800 fine, privately-owned fishing cruisers, estimated to average about \$20,000 each in cost and equipment. That totals \$8,000,000 more, or a grand total of \$12,000,000 invested in fishing cruisers in south Florida.

The cost of operation and upkeep of these boats will average about one-third of the cost of the boats per year, over a period of years. This means that \$4,000,000 per year is spent in south Florida each year at boatyards and docks. In addition, these 1,200 cruisers employ about 900 men to captain and mate them. This means that 900 families in south Florida are maintained by the fishing cruisers. This does not take into account the bigger boats, or yachts, that visit south Florida each year.

There is a definite future in learning about sports fishing. In our course in angling at the University of Miami, we try to impress this on the students. Good fishing guides command high salaries in free lance guiding or working at their vocation abroad fine private yachts or cruisers. For instance, Capt. Bill Hatch, who has participated in this fishing guide for some of the world's outstanding anglers.

This is not an unusual thing, as it might seem, for right here in Miami we have Tommy Gifford, who has fished big time anglers in many parts of the world; Bill Fagen, who has recently returned from guiding a fishing party in New Zealand and Australia; Eddie Wall, who not only has fished in many parts of the world but who was called by the Armed Forces during the recent war to show how big, edible fish might be caught at Ascension Island; Douglas Osborne, who has guided anglers in South American fishing and, with Wall, guided Helen and Mike Lerner when those anglers took the first bluefin tuna ever taken on rod and reel in French waters.

Thousands of fishing camps, not only in Florida but in every state, constantly are in need of the services of fishing guides, camp managers, camp counsellors, et cetera. Federal and state game law enforcement agencies need wardens. Fishing tackle manufacturers, jobbers and retailers would rather employ those who are familiar with fishing and fishing tackle. There is a big field for the products of those who can invent better fishing rods, reels, lines, lures, hooks, gaffs and other angling paraphanelia.

Foreign countries, in addition to our own country, are beginning to realize the fact that sports fishing is a big industry. They are beginning to advertise their good fishing to attract visitors who will spend big money to enjoy it. Air lines, railroads, bus companies and steamship companies more and more are telling the angling public about the good fishing available at the places their facilities reach. Some years ago, we even used a dirigible to go fishing, locating and landing a shark within 27 minutes after leaving the blimp station.

The nearby Bahamas, surveyed for big game fish by myself in 1929, now attracts such a large number of big time anglers that the income from the sports fishermen practically supports Bimini and Cat Cay. That these big game anglers go to these islands for fishing and not to escape cold weather up north is indicated by the fact that the best fishing and the largest number of anglers visit the two islands in June, July and August.

It is my firm belief that a thorough survey of the sports fishing possibilities of our Virgin Islands, and a consequent publicizing of this information, would change those islands from "the poorhouse of the nation" to a fine condition of prosperity. That the federal government has overlooked this opportunity is an indication to us that more anglers are needed in the right places in government service. That is one of the inefficiencies of government---they's always trying to put factories and other like industries in places where such procedure is unsuitable, in the meantime completely overlooking the profitable resources at hand.

Sports fishing, or angling as it would more properly be called, is gaining adherents by leaps and bounds. The number of anglers has nearly doubled in the past 15 years, as indicated by the number of fishing licenses sold. It is a long time since Plutarch advised the Greeks and Romans: "For deception's sake, the hair nearest the hook should be from a white horse," and likewise: "Do not have too many knots in the line," but in the meantime angling has gone on and on, until anglers are found in nearly every country, fishing in lakes, streams, ponds, rivers and oceans.

Angling is truly a universal sport, a great sport, and due to the money spent by anglers, a big industry. It certainly is high time that all states, all countries, realized this. It is high time that scientific surveys be made to insure for all time more and more game fish for more and more anglers to catch and to spend more and more money to catch them. If these states and countries are looking for a profit motive, it certainly is there. A very little seeking will reveal it.