

Social and Economic Dimensions of Fishing Tournaments

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The number of saltwater fishing tournaments has exploded in recent years. The exact number of saltwater tournaments held in the southeastern U.S. and in the Caribbean is not known because there has been no comprehensive census. Intuitively, we know the number of events is increasing. Christian and Trimm (1986) provide some support for this view; they found that nearly one half of the tournament events held in Texas in 1983 were 1-3 years old.

There is extensive social science literature on saltwater tournaments, their participants, and economic benefits. Nevertheless, extreme care should be used in making any generalizations about saltwater tournaments and their participants based on a single tournament study. There is great diversity in the types of tournament events held today, and the findings from any one event cannot possibly hope to represent all tournament events. This paper will draw heavily from my personal experience in this research area and from two review papers that summarize the results of twenty previous studies on participation and expenditure patterns (Graefe and Falk, 1985; Falk, Graefe and Ditton, 1987). These two papers present an overview of findings for a range of saltwater tournaments and reduce the possibility that generalizations made will be inaccurate or parochial.

TOURNAMENTS AS SOCIAL SYSTEMS

Like sport fishing in general, fishing tournaments have to do with much more than pursuing and catching fish. They are multi-faceted social experiences for the participants, their families, and friends. Tournaments provide an outlet for those fishermen who are interested in the competitive aspects of fishing, extrinsic rewards such as prizes, trophies and money, and the social interactions afforded by these organized events. Approximately 15,500 individuals participated in 56 tournaments identified in six geographic regions on the Texas coast in 1983 (Christian and Trimm, 1986).

In two recent studies (Graefe and Falk, 1985; Loomis and Ditton, 1987), it is concluded that tournament fishermen are similar to other groups of anglers with respect to most of their motivations; however, there are some notable differences. Graefe and Falk (1985) report that all three groups of fishermen studies (tournament fishermen from five studies, head boat fishermen and general boat fishermen) placed high importance on motivations related to

escaping regular routines, relaxation, being outdoors, being with friends, and experiencing natural surroundings. The three groups attached relatively low importance to motives involving equipment, obtaining fish for eating, trophy fish, and skill development. The most notable differences between the three groups of fishermen was the importance of the challenge and the experience of the catch to tournament fishermen. These two were the most important motives for tournament participants; they were less important for the other two groups.

Loomis and Ditton (1987) tested for significant group differences between samples of saltwater tournament fishermen and saltwater boat anglers. They found that tournament fishermen rated the importance of catch-related motives significantly higher than did sport saltwater fishermen in general and again that both groups rated equally high the importance attached to non-catch motives as reasons for fishing. Some other statistically significant differences provide a useful profile of tournament fishermen. Loomis and Ditton (1987) found that tournament fishermen were younger (38.7 years vs 47.0 years) and fished more frequently (40.9 vs 21.6 days) than the general population of saltwater boat fishermen in Texas. They also found that tournament fishermen considered themselves more skilled, put much more of their effort into fishing for a particular species, and believed they caught more fish than saltwater anglers in general. As Falk *et al.* reports, the vast majority of participants were male in most of the tournaments they studied. They also indicate a trend toward all-female events as well.

Groups of individuals enter fishing tournaments for the experiences of pursuing challenging game species, competing with others in their primary group, and competing with other groups and individuals entered in the event. Rules are maintained to guide tournament fishing behavior. These rules result in either a luck or skill tournament. Individuals and groups choose particular tournaments based on various aspects of this orientation among other considerations.

The tournament fishing experience involves much more than each primary group's boat time together. The experiences of entering and weighing fish at tournament headquarters, socializing with friends at formal events, participation in the tournament Calcutta, spontaneous gatherings of primary group members and friends after a long day's fishing are all part of the "tournament scene." So too are the tournament caps, tee-shirts, and fishing outfits which identify their wearers as tournament fishermen in the community.

Fishing tournaments which focus solely on matters of catching fish and ignore the cultural context are less likely to be successful. Participants take part because of the socially shared symbols involved with tournaments, many of which are only understood by them. Many "older" events are rich in past experience in this regard; "newer" tournaments are often sterile with little glue to hold their participants together.

The tournament scene involves many others besides registered fishermen. Family and friends accompanying fishermen occupy themselves with other pursuits while boats are out fishing but enrich social interactions at the weigh in and at planned social events. Other participants in tournaments include the bystanders and visitors who are attracted to the weigh-in event and persons from within and without the community who provide tournament support.

Precautions need to be taken to minimize social impacts on the community and its residents. If they don't actually run the event, local "folks" need to be involved in all aspects of tournament planning and operations. Wherever possible, local products and services should be utilized to enhance local involvement and commitment (in this way, tournament dollars remain in the community as long as possible). Special efforts need to be made to train and use local residents as volunteers and paid staff wherever possible. Provisions need to be made to ensure there are recipients for fish left at weigh-in so they are not discarded. These fish can be an important source of protein for local residents. Any activity that will let locals feel that this is "their event" should be encouraged.

TOURNAMENT ECONOMICS

Fishermen who participate in tournaments make a variety of expenditures in preparation, in transit and during a tournament event. As shown in Table 1, for example, major areas of expenditure for offshore fishermen include gas and oil

Table 1. Total Direct Purchases of Offshore Division Fishermen in the 1983 Texas International Fishing Tournament, South Padre Island, Texas.

Type of Purchase	Total Amount Spent ¹	Percent of Total
Gas and oil for boat	\$ 147,014	36.0
Restaurant meals	66,699	16.3
Lodging	63,441	15.5
Fishing tackle and equipment	47,095	11.5
Snacks, beer, beverages	41,745	10.2
Other	11,226	2.7
Ice	10,268	2.5
Gas for auto	8,908	2.2
Launch fees or boat slip	7,946	1.9
Bait	4,343	1.1
Total	\$ 408,685	99.9
Registration fees	\$ 23,270	
Grand Total	\$ 431,955	

¹Includes respondents and non-respondents

for the boat; other (repairs, receptions, gifts, entertainment and charter fees); fishing tackle and equipment; lodging; snacks, beer and beverages. For this particular tournament event, 97% of the expenditures by offshore division fishermen (excluding registration fees) were made in the local community where the tournament was held.

All fishing tournaments have economic impacts on their communities to the extent they attract non-residents to the community. These individuals are a source of new money for the community. In the U.S., for example, these dollars can come from elsewhere in the local county, other counties in the state, other states or even other countries. From a local perspective it does not matter where the money comes from so long as it is spent locally.

Some tournaments have a greater economic impact on local economies than others. This impact can be due to the following factors:

1. Tournament size.
2. The fishery targeted.
3. The particular geographic location of the tournament vis-a-vis its clientele.
4. Planning efforts which focus on non-local markets.

With regard to tournament size, Falk *et al.* report a range of participants from 3,166 (1983 Greater Jacksonville Kingfish tournament) in Florida to 70 (Powderpuff Tournament) in Texas for the twenty studies they reviewed. Our previous studies in Texas demonstrate that offshore fishermen spent more per person than bay and nearshore competitors (Ditton and Loomis, 1985; Ditton and Arneson, 1986). Furthermore, we found that offshore competitors were more likely to be from out-of-county or out-of-state and thus produce important economic impacts.

Finally, there is the matter of location. From an economic standpoint, the most successful tournaments are those that attract clientele from a nearby urban area to the host community. Consequently, tournaments held in major urban areas tend to be saturated with local participants who contribute no new monies to the local area.

Previously, tournaments have produced economic impacts to a greater or lesser extent when held. Typically, tournaments have no explicit objective for maximizing local or regional economic impacts. Nevertheless, this lack of economic objective has not stopped tournaments from documenting the impacts that have occurred to make a political statement regarding the value of their event.

With the knowledge gained from a decade of Sea Grant sponsored research in the United States, it is now possible to develop and implement strategies during the tournament planning process to maximize their economic benefits. Strategies to enhance tournament participant expenditures and impacts involve five basic elements in addition to the other considerations discussed previously:

1. The number of fishermen who participate.
2. Their origin.
3. How many non-participants accompany them.
4. How many other non-participant tourists can be attracted to the host community.
5. Participants' and non-participants' length of stay.

It may not always be possible to increase the number of participants through marketing and promotion. Dock space and other constraints may limit the number of boats and participants. It may not be wise to increase participant numbers if support and infrastructure are insufficient. This insufficiency can result in chaos and dropouts in present clientele. Evaluation studies of participants after the tournament event can help in determining whether a tournament should be expanded.

The greater the number and expenditures of non-local residents, the greater the economic impacts on the community. There is an important social consideration to remember here. As the number of "outsiders" increases and precludes local participation, local support for the event is likely to decline. Tournaments should be careful to not be perceived as being run "by outsiders for outsiders;" local interest and participation need to be maintained to some extent.

The third element affecting tournament success is the number of additional people accompanying participants to the tournament. Money spent locally by non-participants is just as beneficial as expenditures made by participants. In seven saltwater tournament studies reviewed by Falk *et al.*, the mean number of non-fishermen that accompanied the competitor ranged from 2.8 to 0.5. The number of non-fishermen brought to a tournament no doubt depends on when and where the event is located and what type of activities (if any) are held in conjunction with the tournament.

Tournaments can be an attraction for others besides participants, their relatives and friends. Efforts need to be made to integrate fishing tournaments into the calendar of events that occur in coastal communities; collectively these events enhance local tourism values and many encourage visitors to select one tourism destination over another. Special provisions should be made to encourage and accommodate tournament spectators.

Finally, there is the matter of participants' and non-participants' length of stay. The longer people stay, the more money they will spend. Survey results indicate most fishermen spent between three and five nights in the South Padre Island area, for example, to participate in the 3-day Texas International Fishing Tournament (Ditton and Loomis, 1985). Graefe and Falk report a mean tournament length of 2.7 days for the 16 tournament studies they reviewed. Tournaments ranged from two to six days. Any decision to increase tournament length should make use of feedback from fishermen. Otherwise increased

revenues from fishermen staying additional nights may be offset by decreased expenditures from those who drop out of the tournament due to its length or time conflicts.

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To plan tournaments so as to enhance their local economic impacts, it is first necessary to know something about those who participate in tournaments in order to identify new tournament markets. There is an extensive Sea Grant literature on tournament participants that provide insights into directing promotional efforts to this important market segment. Furthermore, organizers who hold tournaments need to know how clientele evaluate all aspects of the tournament operation. Just how satisfied are they with the event? What are they dissatisfied with? How do they evaluate any potential changes in tournament format? Such feedback is important prior to making changes. All of the "frequent flyer" programs in effect today reinforce the idea that it is easier to keep a current customer than to find a new one. Efforts to enhance the local economic impacts of tournaments should not be at the expense of participant registrations.

From my experience, many fishing tournaments are not appreciated fully in their communities. There are several reasons for this situation. First, many tournaments are operated as if they are independent from the local community and the tourism infrastructure there. There need to be linkages with other tourism elements locally if a tournament's economic impacts are to be recognized and appreciated. However, for this link to happen, tournament officials must realize first how they fit into the local tourism economy if they are to cooperate with others in enhancing a tournament's local impacts. Secondly, many tournaments are held during the season when the tourism infrastructure is operating at full or near full occupancy. It is difficult for the business community to partial out the effects of a tournament when they would likely be busy anyway. If the business community is not saturated, this condition needs to be demonstrated locally. If it is saturated, efforts need to be made to hold tournaments during the "shoulder season" so as to enhance the local economy. Finally, the new dollars attracted to the local community are often offset by the effects of "having too many outsiders in town" who trample local customs and create social impacts for annual and seasonal residents. With a finite number of good sites available from which fishing tournaments can be staged, tournament officials need to maintain a good liaison with local residents. Efforts to enhance the local economic impacts of tournaments should not be at the expense of the present clientele, nor should the interests of the local community be ignored.

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