

Grand Lagoon Billfish Classic Tournament Rules

August 14th, 2025 – August 16th, 2025

RULES ACCEPTANCE: All rules, including those published in print or on the website, are subject to change without notice. It is the sole responsibility of all participants—anglers, captains, crews, and guests—to know and follow the Tournament Rules as published and as amended during the Captain's Meeting. By entering any Gulf Coast Sportfishing Club (GCSC) tournament and paying entry fees, participants agree to abide by the Tournament Rules and accept the Rules Committee's decisions as final. Tournament start times, fishing times, and eligible ports of departure may be changed by the tournament committee without advance notice. Rules presented at the Captain's Meeting take precedence over written rules. The committee may retain any fish for display, testing, or study at its discretion. GCSC reserves the right to use, publish, edit, and distribute any submitted videos for any purpose.

REGISTRATION & MANDATORY CAPTAINS MEETING: Entries may be submitted prior to August 14 on the website (gulfcoastsportfishingclub.com) or by mailing the completed Tournament Entry Form and payment to the address listed on the form. The entry fee is \$1,500 per team plus applicable sales tax. Payments can be made by cash, check, or credit card (subject to a 3.5% processing fee). A paid Gulf Coast Sportfishing Club member must submit the entry. If the Team Representative is not a current member, a \$75 fee will be added to cover Individual Membership dues. Teams must have a representative attend the mandatory Captains Meeting and sign out upon its conclusion. Failure to sign out will result in disqualification from the tournament without a refund. Any rule changes will be announced and discussed at the Captains Meeting.

- By signing out at the Captain's Meeting, the captain, owner, or registered angler acknowledges that they understand and agree to abide by all tournament rules, including any changes or clarifications made during the meeting. They confirm receipt of the tournament designator and acknowledge that all billfish caught—whether released or boated—must be videoed with GPS date and time, indicator, and all other tournament requirements. All billfish must be promptly reported via VHF Channel 72 to a Committee Boat or by phone at 334-494-2907. Failure to comply may result in disqualification of the fish. Release videos must also meet specific criteria, including demonstrating a healthy release.

WITHDRAWAL POLICY:

- If a team pre-registers and withdraws before on-site registration begins, they will be refunded all fees minus credit card fees and Club Membership fees. If a team registers (pre- or on-site) and withdraws after on-site registration begins but before signing out at the Captain's Meeting, they will be refunded all optional cash award entries minus credit card fees, as well as the base entry fee minus credit card fees, Club Membership fees, and 10% for tournament expenses. No refunds will be issued for withdrawals after signing out at the Captain's Meeting.

PERMITS, LICENSING & JUDGING: Tournament judging follows only the official tournament rules. Teams must comply with all applicable federal and Florida laws, including fishing licenses, size and bag limits, and other regulations. An Atlantic Highly Migratory Species (HMS) Angling Permit is required, and all anglers must hold a valid Florida Saltwater Fishing License. For license information, visit myfwc.com/license/recreational/saltwater-fishing or call 888-347-4356. For federal HMS permits, visit hmspermits.noaa.gov.

PORTS OF DEPARTURE: Boats may depart from any pass between Apalachicola, FL, and Fort Walton Beach, FL after the Captain's Meeting on Thursday, August 14. Teams must video their departure, showing the time, date, and Latitude/Longitude from their GPS.

FISHING TIMES: Fishing may begin immediately after the Captain's Meeting on Thursday, August 14. There is no official "lines out" time; however, boats weighing an eligible fish or submitting a billfish scorecard and color video must be in line at the weigh dock and acknowledged by the weighmaster on VHF Ch. 72 no later than 30 minutes before scales close.

WEIGH IN PROCEDURES: Scales will be open Friday, August 15 from 6:00–8:00 PM (CT) and Saturday, August 16 from 5:00–8:00 PM (CT) at Lighthouse Marina, 5325 N. Lagoon Dr., Panama City Beach, FL 32408 (30.1493N LAT / 85.74454W LONG). All fish must arrive by water on the boat from which they were caught. Boats weighing fish or submitting billfish scorecards and video must be in line outside the marina and acknowledged by the weighmaster on VHF Ch. 72 at least 30 minutes before scales close. Do not approach the weigh dock until directed by tournament staff. A team member must stay with the fish until weigh-in is complete and must verify the weight or Catch & Release points by signature.

TACKLE RULES: It is expected that teams will uphold the highest level of integrity and sportsmanship and compete in the spirit of the IGFA Saltwater Equipment and Angling rules. Any member of the team may set the hook and fight the fish or may set the hook and pass the rod to another team member within the first minute, but the rod may only be passed one time; the angler must then fight the fish unassisted. Electric reels may **not** be used to fight fish.

ELIGIBLE FISH TO BE WEIGHED:

Blue Marlin: 115" minimum Lower Jaw Fork Length ("LJFL")

Swordfish (Optional Category): 60" minimum LJFL

Dolphin/Wahoo/Tuna: 10 lbs. minimum

- Boats may not weigh more than **three (3)** of each of the following species per day: Dolphin, Wahoo, and Tuna.
- Boats may not weigh more than **one (1)** of each of the following species per day: Blue Marlin and Swordfish.
- Boating a Blue Marlin is allowed only if it measures at least 115 inches from the tip of the lower jaw to the fork of the tail (LJFL). Deck checking of billfish is prohibited. A boated billfish is defined as one partially or fully brought onto the boat. Boated billfish cannot be released for points. Culling or discarding a previously boated marlin is prohibited and will result in disqualification of the team from the entire tournament and forfeiture of all entry fees.

ELIGIBLE FISH FOR CATCH & RELEASE:

Blue Marlin: 500 points for each release.

White Marlin/Sailfish/Spearfish/Unidentifiable Billfish: 200 points for each release.

CATCH & RELEASE: A billfish is considered caught when the leader connection is wound to the tip of the rod, or a team member touches the leader. The billfish is considered released when, after being caught, the fish is no longer connected to the line; tagging is not required for points. All billfish released must be logged on the release scorecard in the sequence in which they were caught. They will be verified and certified by a video reviewer. The scorecard must include boat name, angler's name, species, date, and time of the release.

CATCH & RELEASE VIDEO REQUIREMENTS:

In addition to submitting a Billfish Scorecard, teams must provide a video recording of each billfish released to qualify for points. The video must meet the following criteria:

- Recording must begin at the end of the fight and continue uninterrupted until the GPS date and time are shown to verify a single event. The GPS timestamp is used to break ties.
- The Tournament Designator provided at registration must be visible in the video to confirm the fish was caught during the tournament.
- The video must clearly show the angler fighting the fish, the rod and reel used, the billfish species, the catch (leader touching the rod tip or a team member touching the leader), and the release (fish no longer connected to the line).

TOURNAMENT AWARDS: Payouts are based on the number of entries and will be awarded to the angler/boat for the heaviest Blue Marlin and the top three places (50% / 30% / 20% split) in Catch and Release, Tuna, Dolphin, and Wahoo. If fewer than 20 boats are registered at the close of the Captains Meeting, these categories (except Blue Marlin) will pay only the top two places (60% / 40% split). The Blue Marlin category always pays solely to the heaviest fish, regardless of entries. If no eligible fish are caught in a category, its payout will be rolled into other categories. Non-cash awards will also be presented to the Top Junior Angler (17 & under) and Top Lady Angler.

OPTIONAL CASH AWARDS: This is a separate entry and not required to complete for tournament awards. Optional Cash Award fees can be paid by Cash, Cashier's Check, or Credit Card (subject to 3.5% processing fee) on the day of registration. Payouts, after a 10% deduction for tournament expenses, are as follows: 10 or more boats entered in a category – 1st place 50%, 2nd place 30%, 3rd place 20%; 5 to 9 boats entered in a category – 1st place 60%, 2nd place 40%; fewer than 5 boats entered in a category – winner takes all. If no eligible fish are weighed in a category, entry fees are refunded minus the 10% expense deduction. If only one team enters a category, that team will receive a full refund minus any credit card fees paid.

PAYMENT OF TOURNAMENT AND OPTIONAL CASH AWARDS: During registration, each tournament boat must designate a representative payee who provides their tax ID to receive all cash awards. The Gulf Coast Sportfishing Club (GCSC) is not responsible for dividing cash awards among team members. Cash award winners will be announced at the awards ceremony; results presented are unaudited and subject to change. Checks for cash awards will be issued approximately two weeks after the tournament concludes, provided there are no outstanding appeals or disputes. To receive payment, the designated payee must submit a completed cash award sheet and a signed IRS Form W-9, including a valid driver's license number and Social Security or tax ID number. An IRS Form 1099 will be issued to all cash award recipients at year-end.

WEATHER – TOURNAMENT DELAY OR CANCELLATION: In the event the tournament committee feels that fishing is unsafe, most notably a Small Craft Advisory, the tournament may be canceled or delayed. If delayed, a new start time or date will be announced should weather conditions improve. If canceled, entry fees will be refunded in full less a prorated share of tournament expenses and any credit card fees. One day or part thereof of offshore fishing by one-third of the boats entered constitutes a complete tournament. Entrants shall have no claim against the Gulf Coast Sportfishing Club for return of paid entry fees. All teams and participants should make their decision to fish based solely on their own judgment. Fish at your own risk.

POLYGRAPHS: Polygraph tests may be administered at the discretion of the tournament committee. All tournament entries are non-transferable and non-refundable. Payment of the entry fee constitutes a representation by each entrant that he/she has read and fully understands the tournament rules and that he/she will abide by such rules and the decisions of the tournament committee.

TIE BREAKERS: For ties of weighed fish, placement is determined by the order of time of weigh-in at scales. For ties in catch and release, placement is determined by the first angler to reach the higher point total as verified by the boat's GPS time.

PROTEST: All disputes, protests, claims, or controversies related to any aspect of the tournament, including the rules, must be submitted in writing to the Rules Committee within 30 minutes after the weigh station closes, or they will be considered waived. A \$500 protest fee must accompany all protests; this fee is refundable only if the protest is successful. Decisions made by the Tournament Committee are final and binding, and may be subjective. GCSC reserves the right to grant exceptions to any rule if deemed in the best interest of participants, spectators, and anglers. If the Tournament Committee is unable or refuses to make a final decision, the matter will be resolved by binding arbitration under the American Arbitration Association's commercial arbitration rules. The arbitration decision will be in writing, final, and binding on all parties, who waive any rights to trial by judge or jury. The arbitration ruling has the effect of res judicata, and all parties must comply without delay.

WAIVER/DISCLAIMER: It is expressly understood that all participants and guests in this tournament enter at their own risk, and that the Gulf Coast Sportfishing Club, its Officers and Directors, and all persons connected directly or indirectly with the operation of said Tournaments, shall be exempt from any liability for libel, slander, loss, damage, negligence, harm, injury or death suffered by any participant, entrant, sport fisherman, equipment which may occur during or in conjunction with the Tournaments. Registration in the tournament, whether online, in person, or by mail provides express consent that the Gulf Coast Sportfishing Club may use without payment or restriction, any photographs in which he or she and/or their crew may appear for any purpose whatsoever, including, but not limited to resale, advertising, commercial or promotional material. The captain, crew, or any registered anglers further release the Gulf Coast Sportfishing Club, its Officers and members from any injury, loss, or damage which may result. All entrants agree to submit to a polygraph examination at the request of the Tournament Committee. Failure to submit to such an examination will result in the disqualification of the entrant at the sole discretion of the Tournament Committee.