

## **Grand Lagoon Billfish Classic Tournament Rules**

**August 14<sup>th</sup>, 2025 – August 17<sup>th</sup>, 2025**

**RULES ACCEPTANCE:** Rules, including published rules in print or on the website, are subject to change without notice. It is the sole responsibility of the participating anglers, captains, crews and guests (“Participants”) to know and abide by 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 decisions made by the Rules Committee as final. Tournament Start, Fishing Times, Eligible Ports of Departure are subject to change by tournament committee without advance notice, and the rules presented in the Captains Meeting trump written rules. The tournament committee may at its discretion elect to retain any fish for display, testing, or further study. GCSC has the right to use, publish, edit, and distribute any videos submitted to the club for any purpose.

**REGISTRATION & MANDATORY CAPTAINS MEETING:** Entry to the tournament can be made prior to August 14<sup>th</sup> on the website, [gulfcoastsportfishingclub.com](http://gulfcoastsportfishingclub.com), or by mailing the completed Tournament Entry Form and payment for the entry fee to the address on the entry form. The entry fee for the Grand Lagoon Billfish Classic is \$1,500.00 per team (plus applicable sales tax). Entry fees can be paid by Cash, Check, or Credit Cards (subject to 3.5% processing fee). The entry must be made by a paid member of the Gulf Coast Sportfishing Club. If the Team Representative is not a paid Club member, \$75 will be added to the entry fee to cover the yearly dues for an Individual Membership for the Team Representative. Teams must have a representative present at the mandatory Captains Meeting and the representative must sign out following the conclusion of the Captains Meeting. Failure to sign out at the conclusion of the Captains Meeting will result in the offending boat being disqualified from the entire tournament without a refund. Any changes to rules will be discussed at the Captains Meeting.

By signing out at the Captain’s Meeting, the captain, owner, or registered angler acknowledges that they:

- Know the rules including any changes or clarifications made during the captain’s meeting.
- Have received the tournament designator.
- Understand and agree to abide by all rules.
- Understand that all Anglers, Captains, Mates, Crew (“Participants”) and Guests fish in the Tournament at their own discretion and at their own risk. All Participants and Guests agree to indemnify and hold harmless the Gulf Coast Sportfishing Club (“GCSC”) and its Members, the GCSC Board of Directors, Lighthouse Marina, Sponsors and their agents and employees and all other persons directly or indirectly connected with the tournament from any liability, loss, personal injury or property damage, including Attorney’s fees they may suffer arising from their participation in the Tournament and all other activities occurring at the tournament facility.
- Understand that tournament entries must be verified before leaving the weigh dock. It is the responsibility of the angler, captain, mate, or crew to verify the appropriate species, weight, etc. and to sign off on the catch card or release card at the weigh station.

- Understand that all billfish caught (released or boated) must be videoed including GPS date and time, indicator, and any other requirements of the tournament and they should all be called in promptly via VHF (Ch. 72 to a Committee Boat) or via phone to 334-494-2907. Failure to do so can lead to disqualification of the fish. Release videos have their list of requirements including a healthy release.
- No tournament refunds will be made after the official sign out.

**WITHDRAWAL POLICY:**

- If pre-registered and withdrawn prior to the start of on-site registration, you will be refunded everything less credit card fees and Club Membership fees.
- If pre-registered and withdrawn prior to signing out and after on-site registration begins, you will be refunded all cash award entries less credit card fees and entry fees less credit card fees and 10% for tournament expenses.
- If you withdraw after sign-out at Captain's meeting, no refund of any kind will be given.

**PERMITS, LICENSING & JUDGING:** Judging for this tournament is based solely on tournament rules. Teams are encouraged to comply with all Federal and Florida state laws regarding fishing licenses, size limits, bag limits and any other regulations that may apply. An Atlantic Highly Migratory Species (HMS) Angling Permit is required. All anglers must have a valid Florida Saltwater Fishing License. For information regarding Florida Saltwater Fishing Licenses refer to [myfwc.com/license/recreational/saltwater-fishing/](http://myfwc.com/license/recreational/saltwater-fishing/) or call 888.347.4356. For information regarding Federal HMS Permits refer to [hmspermits.noaa.gov](http://hmspermits.noaa.gov).

**PORTS OF DEPARTURE:** Boats may depart from any pass between Apalachicola, FL and Fort Walton Beach, FL at 10:00 AM (CT) on Friday, August 15<sup>th</sup>. There will be a shotgun start at St. Andrew's Pass at 10:00 AM (CT) for boats planning to leave from Panama City. Teams must video their departure and must include the time, date, and their Latitude/Longitude from their GPS in the video.

**FISHING TIMES:** Teams may begin tournament fishing at 10:01 AM (CT) on Friday, August 15<sup>th</sup>. Teams may catch bait prior to 10:01 AM (CT). There is not an official "lines out" time but boats planning to weigh in an eligible fish or turn in 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 prior to the close of scales.

**WEIGH IN PROCEDURES:** Scales will be open from 5:00-7:00 PM (CT) on Saturday, August 16<sup>th</sup> and 5:00-8:00 PM (CT) on Sunday, August 17<sup>th</sup>. Tournament Scales will be located at Lighthouse Marina, 5325 N. Lagoon Dr., Panama City Beach, FL 32408 (30.1493N LAT – 85.74454W LONG). All fish must be brought to the scales by water on the boat from which it was caught. Boats planning to weigh in an eligible fish and/or turn in Catch & Release forms 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 prior to the close of scales. All fish must have a properly completed tail tag to be eligible to weigh in. A team member must remain with their fish until completion of the weigh-in procedure and must verify the weight and/or Catch & Release points by signature on the tail tag and/or Billfish scorecard once their fish has been weighed and all video has been reviewed.

**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: 110" minimum LJFL

Swordfish (Optional Category): 60" minimum LJFL

Dolphin: 10 lbs. minimum

Wahoo: 10 lbs. minimum

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 the following species per day: Blue marlin and Swordfish.
- Before a fish is unloaded, it must have a tail tag properly filled out and attached to the tail.
- Boated a Blue Marlin is allowed but must measure at least 110 inches in length from the tip of the lower jaw to the fork of the tail (LJFL). Deck checking of billfish is strictly prohibited. A boated billfish is one that has been partially or totally pulled onto the boat. Boated billfish cannot be released for points. Culling or discarding a previously boated marlin is prohibited. Violation of this rule will result in team disqualification from the tournament, including all categories entered, 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 card 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 returning a Billfish Scorecard, teams must turn in a video recording of each billfish released. To qualify the billfish release for points, the video must include the following:

- Once you start recording the end of the fight and billfish release, the recording must continue uninterrupted until you have recorded the GPS date and time. This ensures we are looking at a single event. The GPS date and time are used for breaking ties.
- The Tournament Designator handed out at registration must be included in the video. The same designator is used for all three days of fishing. This ensures the fish was caught during the tournament.
- The video must show the angler fighting the fish, the rod & reel being used, the billfish species; the billfish being caught (leader connection touches the tip of the rod or a team member touches the leader) and must show the billfish being released (no longer connected to the line).

**TOURNAMENT AWARDS:** Payouts are subject to change depending on the number of entries. Cash awards will be presented to the angler/boat for the heaviest Blue Marlin weighed in and the top three (3) heaviest fish caught (50%, 30%, 20% split) in the following categories: Catch and Release, Tuna, Dolphin, Wahoo. If there are less than 20 boats registered for the tournament at the end of the Captains Meeting, the awards for the heaviest fish will be presented to the angler/boat for the top two (2) fish caught (60%, 40% split) in the categories listed above, except the Blue Marlin category, which only pays to the angler/boat that weighs in the largest Blue Marlin no matter how many boats are entered in the tournament. If no eligible fish are caught in a category, the payouts will be rolled into the other categories.

Awards will also be given to the Top Junior Angler and the 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, Personal or Cashier's Check, or Credit Cards (subject to 3.5% processing fee) prior to August 14<sup>th</sup> or by Cash, Cashier's Check, or Credit Card (subject to 3.5% processing fee) on the day of registration. Optional Cash Awards are the sum of the money received for each division, minus 10%, which is deducted for tournament expenses. All categories will pay out 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> places with a 50%, 30%, 20% split. If there are only two eligible fish weighed in a division, the division will pay a 60%, 40% split. If only one eligible fish is weighed in a division, the division will pay 100% to the winning team. If no eligible fish are weighed in a category, a full refund (minus 10% for tournament expenses) will be issued to the teams entered in the category. If only one team enters a category, the team will receive a full refund for that division.

**PAYMENT OF TOURNAMENT AND OPTIONAL CASH AWARDS:** During registration, each tournament boat must designate a representative payee who provides their tax ID to receive payment for all cash awards. GCSC accepts no responsibility for the division of any cash awards between team members. Cash award winners will be announced at the end of the awards ceremony. Results at the awards ceremony are unaudited and subject to change. Cash award checks will be issued approximately 2 weeks after the tournament is complete provided there are no outstanding appeals or disputes. No cash award checks can be issued unless both the cash award sheet and an IRS Form W-9 are filled out including a valid Driver's License Number and Social Security or tax ID number. An IRS form 1099 will be sent to all Cash Award Winners at the year's 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 less a prorated share of tournament expenses. 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:** Disputes, protests, claims, differences or controversies relating to any aspect of the Tournament including without limitation Tournament Rules must be submitted to the Rules Committee no later than thirty (30) minutes following the close of the Weigh Station or are deemed waived. All protests must be submitted in writing with a \$500 protest fee. Only a successful protest will result in a refund of the \$500 protest fee. All decisions of the Tournament Committee are binding and final and known to be subjective. GCSC reserves the right to make exceptions to any rule when the Tournament Committee decides it is in the best interest of the participants, spectators and anglers. If the Tournament Committee cannot render or refuses to render a final and binding decision with respect to any dispute, protest, claim, difference or controversy under review, the matter shall be resolved by binding arbitration under the commercial arbitration rules of the American Arbitration Association. The decision rendered in arbitration shall be in writing and shall be final and binding upon all parties. The parties shall have no further recourse except as provided for by the commercial rules of the American Arbitration Association. Once the decision is rendered it produces the effect of "res judicata" and the parties shall fully comply with the decision without delay. The Participants specifically waive any right to a trial by judge or jury.

**WAIVER/DISCLAIMER:** It is expressly understood that all participants 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.