

Cheaters caught in the act



Tips from the Posse

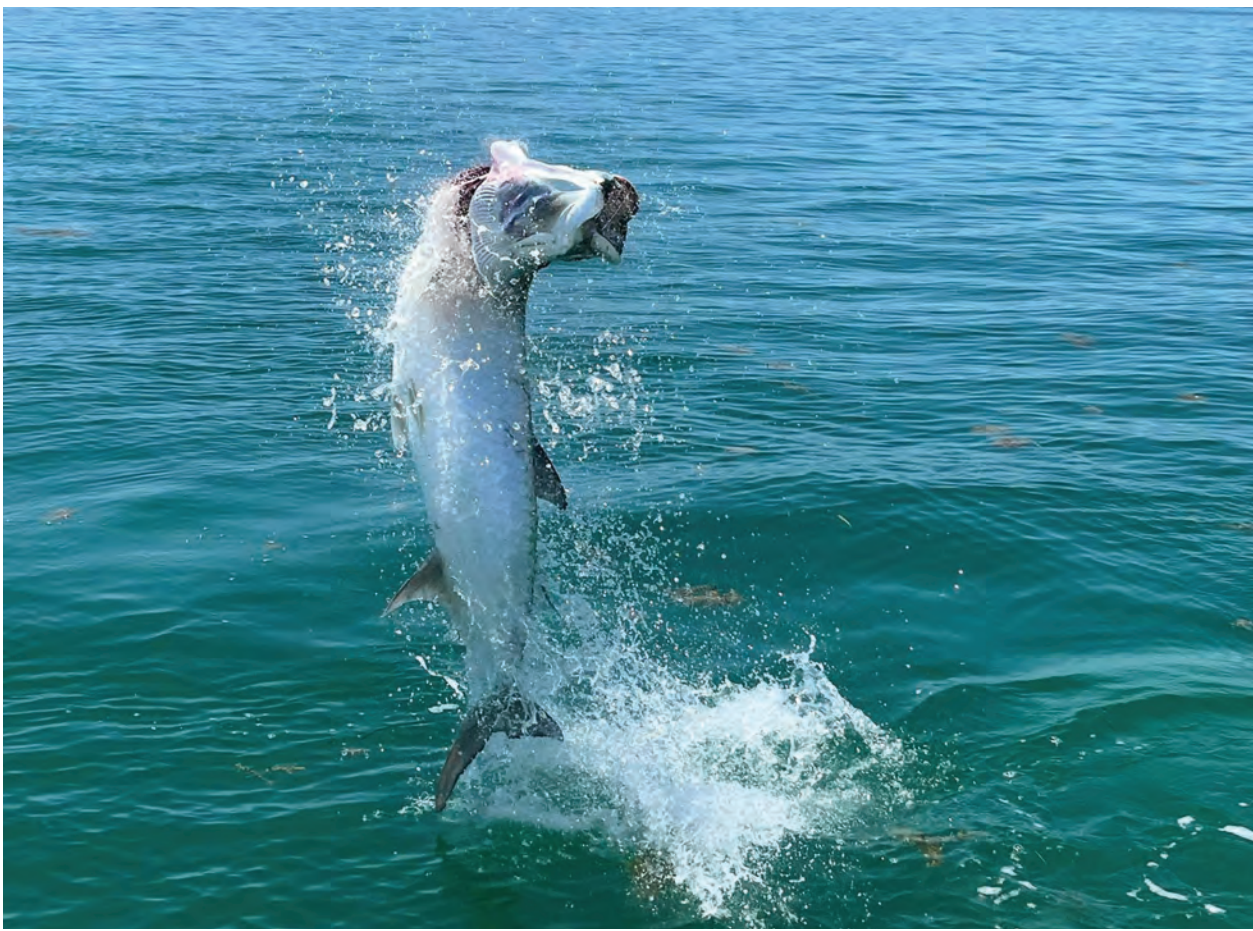
By Mark Rackay

The fishing world was rocked recently by a video showing how two anglers were caught “stuffing” the walleye they had submitted in a tournament. Fishermen Jacob Runyan and Chase Cominsky were accused of packing lead weights into fish, in an attempt to win close to \$30,000 at an Ohio fishing tournament.

The video was taken of an inspection of the fish by tournament officials, while the two men looked on during the Lake Erie Walleye tournament in Cleveland, Ohio. Before the discovery, the two were poised to win the competition and be crowned “team of the year.”

The video set fishers the world over into an uproar, but folks really should not act so surprised. Anytime there is a competition involving money, the cheaters seem to emerge. These two clowns were not as crafty as they thought they were. For their trouble, they both received 10 days in jail, fined \$2500 bucks, and forfeited their bass boat valued at \$100,000. The pair also lost their fishing privileges for three years. I think they got off easy.

Back in the 70s and early 80s, I fished in many tarpon tournaments in South Florida and the Keys. Some of these had a prize worth over 100



Catching a big fish can be difficult, especially in a tournament. But when money is involved, watch out for cheaters. (Mark Rackay/Special to the MDP)

grand, so cheaters had to be watched out for. Shoving weights down a fish’s throat is not a very original idea.

When you consider a tarpon, weighing in at 150 pounds, without additional weight, you have a fish that can hide 10 or 15 pounds of lead very easily. A round lead weight, about the size of a golf ball, called an egg sinker, can be slid down the throat of a large tarpon. A handful of weights, totaling maybe 10 pounds is not visually detectable by the judges on a fish that size, and not enough weight to raise suspicion, but sometimes enough to help a cheater become a winner.

After this practice became evident, judges began cutting open fish looking for the presence of these weights. That is how the two Ohio cheaters were discovered. Fortunately for tarpon

anglers, kill tournaments were banned and weight of the fish no longer mattered. Winners are crowned by live length measurements, and the fish released alive, or strictly by the number of fish caught and released. The practice not only eliminated the standard method of cheaters, but it also saves a lot of killed tarpon, leaving them to be caught again another day.

Release tournaments do not eliminate all the cheaters. In 2020, Brent Taylor was charged with cheating when a severed fish tail was discovered in his boat during a kayak fishing contest. Prizes in this release tournament were awarded based on overall length of the fish caught rather than weight.

Anglers documented their catch by photographing the fish stretched out on a measuring board. Officials

determined Taylor used the tail to place over another bass, to make the fish look longer. He finally admitted he did it on several fish.

Even Taylor’s idea was not new. Terry Long, in 2018 was charged with fraud in a similar scheme during a tournament. Long trimmed tails off of fish that were too large to count for the tourney, as this contest had a slot limit, and only fish within a certain length range could count. Long trimmed tails on numerous fish to make them short enough to enter the contest.

In England, cheating anglers seem to get a little more creative. Angler Matthew Clark was declared the winner of Guernsey’s 2012 Ballwick Bass Club tournament for a 13-pound, 13-ounce which topped the 2nd place fish, caught by Shane Bentley, by a full 3 pounds.

As the post weigh-in photos were being snapped, second-place Bentley called foul on the play, realizing he had seen that fish somewhere else, at a visit to the local St. Peter Port Aquarium. Clark later copped to climbing a cliff and dropping a rope ladder down to break into the aquarium, where he was previously employed. He planned to return the fish after he collected his winnings, but it never happened.

I knew of a Florida snook, redfish, and trout tournament that took place on the West Coast of the state. The prize money was based on length of one fish from each of the three species. Each specie has a slot limit, so the idea was to enter the fish with as close to the maximum length as possible during the one-day, winner-take-all contest.

Seems a couple of local boys spent a week before the tournament fishing the area, and when they caught a fish very close to the slot limit, they kept the fish alive in aerated fish tanks at their waterfront home. Come tournament day, this team presented three winning fish all within quarter inch of the maximum limit.

While they were standing around, congratulating each other, and waiting with their hands out for the \$20,000 payout check, they got handcuffed instead. Seems the wife of one of the cheaters ratted them out to the Florida Marine Patrol. Alas, crime does not pay.

While it is shocking that cheaters live amongst us, in things as simple and wholesome as a fishing tournament, we really should not be surprised. It was not all that long ago that Colorado saloons were filled with poker players, and where there are poker players, there are card sharks. Remember what they used to do to cheaters back then?

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Trail leading to dino track site undergoing critical maintenance

SPECIAL TO THE DAILY PRESS

The Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forests’ Ouray Ranger District will conduct significant maintenance on National Forest System Trail (NFST) #199 – Silvershield trail Sept. 28-29. Located in the Uncompahgre National Forest, the trail will undergo repairs to stabilize loose areas on steep slopes and improve the trail’s tread.

The project was prioritized due to the increased traffic following the U.S.

Forest Service’s acquisition of the West Gold Hill Dinosaur Track site. This site features the longest known dinosaur trackway in the world, with 134 consecutive footprints spanning 106 yards.

This collaborative trail maintenance effort involves Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado, City of Ouray, Ouray Trail Group and the Ouray Ranger District. Approximately 50 volunteers will participate in the project, aiming to enhance access to the trackway and

fortify steep sections of the trail, improving long-term sustainability.

To ensure safety and avoid delays, hikers are advised to avoid the lower section of the NFST #199 – Silvershield trail, below the NFST #207 – Oak Creek trail, during the construction period. Alternate routes to the dinosaur track site include NFST #208 – Twin Peaks trail or NFST #200–East Dallas trail.

For more information, contact the Ouray Ranger District at 970-240-5300.



The dinosaur trackway in Ouray represents a unique find in the world of paleontology, as it is recorded as the largest continuous dinosaur trackway in the world. (Photo/GMUG)

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