

## Fishing Club Focus

### The Manasquan River Marlin and Tuna Club

By  
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Founded in 1936, the Manasquan River Marlin and Tuna Club ranks among the oldest fishing clubs not only in New Jersey but in the United States as well and was among the first clubs to be certified by the International Game Fish Association back in 1939. A club with a rich and well documented history, over the years many of its members were world famous anglers, internationally known authors, sports writers, entertainers, restaurateurs, industrial giants and radio-movie stars. Several of its members were and to this day still are state and world record holders. Some of the club's members from its founding days are also names well-known in sportfishing history including Lou and Eugenie Marron, Maurice and Carolyn Meyer, Jr., Ferdinand Roebling III, Van Campen Heilner, A.E. Carpenter, Hugo Rutherford and Orton Dale, Jr. Over the years many of the club's members left their mark on the marine industry while others were and continue to be known for the philanthropical generosity. Additionally, back in the late 1950's many of the clubs members were the early explorers of offshore waters and helped developed today's canyon fishery from the Texas Tower to the Hudson and beyond at a time when electronic navigation was in its infancy.

Tuna were indeed the species of choice in the early days of the club as huge schools of bluefin tuna ranging from school-sized to giants of several hundred pounds were consistently found prowling the famed Sea Bright Grounds off the northern coast, often

within sight of land. Anglers from around the world would frequently visit New Jersey with the hope of catching what they often referred to as a “horse mackerel.” Francis H. Low, the founding president of the club, was a world-record holder for the largest tuna caught on rod and reel at that time and to this day the club continues to award the Manasquan Tuna Trophy in his memory, a perpetual trophy presented each year for the largest bluefin tuna caught worldwide by a club member. In a nod to tradition of the good old days, over 80 years later, a case of scotch (or liquor of the recipient’s choice) continues to be awarded each year to the club member landing the first bluefin tuna over 25 pounds caught trolling and the largest bluefin tuna over 310 pounds caught while fishing out of Manasquan Inlet. In the club’s first year of existence a mind-boggling 37 giant bluefin tuna were weighed including a 720 pounder. Additionally, the first broadbill swordfish caught off New Jersey was taken by Francis Geer, Jr., after a ten-hour battle and weighed 382 pounds! Two white marlin were also caught by the same club member on separate days at the Mohawk Wreck, which lies less than 10 miles from Manasquan Inlet! These angling accomplishments brought recognition to the area and signs noting Brielle as “The Sportfishing Capital of the World” began to appear.

The foundation of much of what we do today with regard to tackle, bait rigging, fishing techniques, boat design and cockpit layout dates back to the early days of the Manasquan River Marlin and Tuna Club. When travel destinations including The Outer Banks of North Carolina, Florida, The Bahamas, Cuba and beyond became popular, many of the club’s members were anxious to explore these new horizons and test their fishing

potential. Today, this passion still exists as many members continue to explore new areas around the globe in search of the next “hotspot.”

Tournaments have always played an important part of the club and members have consistently participated in events where everything from bluefish to blue marlin are the targeted species. Some of the most prestigious events from New England to Florida, as well as Mexico and South America often saw and to this day continue to see vessels flying the club burgee as participants. Though many of the early events are no longer around, the Manasquan River Marlin and Tuna Club was represented well with many members taking the top prize in the tournaments.

The earliest tournament dates back to the club’s first year, 1936, when a boat from the club met another vessel at sea from the Freeport Tuna Club and decided to have a tournament. At the end of the day they relayed their catch results to each other by phone. The following year the Atlantic City Marlin and Tuna Club, Forked River Tuna Club and Brielle Marlin and Tuna Club got together with the Manasquan River Marlin and Tuna Club and Freeport Tuna Club and the United States Atlantic Tuna Tournament, or the USATT as it was known, was born, though that name for the event didn’t become official until 1938. Tournament Headquarters for the event was initially Hoffman’s Anchorage, now known as Hoffman’s Marina, in Brielle until the event outgrew the marina and moved to Sandy Hook. As fishing for giant bluefin tuna expanded up the northeast coast, the USATT’s headquarters followed.

Over the years, in addition to the USATT, club members actively participated in popular events and represented the club well. The Woman's Invitational Tuna Tournament was founded in 1972 because at that time women were not allowed to participate in the USATT. Tougher fisheries regulations with regard to bluefin tuna and a declining stock ultimately were the demise of the event which only lasted a few years. The prohibition of women in the USATT was challenged in court and women were finally allowed to participate in 1974. In the 1950's club members regularly participated in the International Light Tackle Tournament which was held in several locations over the years including Palm Beach, Mexico and Ocean City, Maryland.

Today, it's easy to spot club member boats at tournaments along the east coast and beyond. During the summer months here in New Jersey the popular offshore events held in Manasquan, Beach Haven, Ocean City and Cape May regularly draw numerous club members annually. In particular, The MidAtlantic tournament has been very popular with club members over the years and many have scored large cash payouts dating back to the inaugural event in 1992. By fall, striped bass tournaments are on the docket for those who haven't yet headed south for the winter. The winter sailfish tournament season along Florida's famed Treasure Coast and Gold Coast is a highlight for those who make the Sunshine State home for the winter season. The West Palm Beach Fishing Club's Silver Sailfish Derby as well as the Buccaneer Cup Sailfish Release Tournament and the Sailfish Club of Florida Invitational Gold Cup Team Tournament all have a rich history and support of club members over the years.

Though tournaments around the world have drawn members for decades, the slate of tournaments hosted by the club are some of the most popular. Member-only events include the year-long tournament where hand carved perpetual trophies are awarded to the winners of 19 different species categories. Other member-only events target species including bluefin tuna, fluke, striped bass, bluefish, blackfish and sea bass. The Annual Ladies and Kids Tournament is always popular with the membership and awards prizes for a variety of inshore species at a gala picnic at the tournament's conclusion. The Offshore Open is held each year in late August. Now in its 42<sup>nd</sup> year, this event draws boats from up and down the coast.

Well known around the local community as well as a staunch backer of the recreational fishing community, the club continues to be a prominent voice in fisheries conservation while also supporting reef building and recreational fishing issues by with organizations such as the Recreational Fishing Alliance, Stripers Forever, Menhaden Defenders, Jersey Coast Anglers Association and International Game Fish Association. The club's Mates Program actively recruits children of club members ages 12 and older and teaches the ins and outs of working in the cockpit. Hands-on instruction on bait and tackle rigging, boat and tackle maintenance, safety on the water, rod building and repair and fishing techniques are but a few of the topics covered. One of the cornerstones of the club is the George Burlew Scholarship Grant which was first awarded in June 1979 in honor of Captain George Burlew, a club member who helped develop sportfishing on the Manasquan River and also owned Burlew's Anchorage. Initially the grant was awarded

to high school students as well as college students. Today, the scholarship is only awarded to graduate students pursuing marine related studies.

For more information on the Manasquan River Marlin and Tuna Club please visit the club's web site at [www.mrmtc.com](http://www.mrmtc.com).