2026 Key West Marlin Official Tournament Rules

All Decisions By Rules Committee Will Be Final

TOURNAMENT BOUNDARIES, DATES & TIMES

Fishing will be on Thursday, July 23; Friday, July 24; and Saturday, July 25, 2026. There are geographical boundary limits as follows: External boundary limits: E81º0"; N25º0"; W82º40"; S23º40". The controlled daily departure location will be in the Lower Keys Area. Boats must assemble each morning inside the reef line between Looe Key Reef off Big Pine Key and Sand Key Light off Key West.

The Committee Boat will broadcast over VHF Channel 78 at 7:30a.m. a signal authorizing all boats to depart the assembly area. Boats must pass through the controlled assembly area after 7:30a.m. and before they begin fishing. Boats must remain in the water, i.e. NOT transported in any manner to another location. Dates and times are final. There is no weather day. On Thursday, July 23, boats are requested to assemble at 7:20a.m. in the area of the airport marker for a traditional bimini start.

8:30a.m.—Lines in the Water on a Radio Signal from the Committee Boat

4:00p.m.—Lines out of the Water on a Radio Signal from the Committee Boat

On Saturday July 25, lines out of the water will be at 3:00pm.

Bait—Bait may be obtained by any means before commencement of fishing hours of 8:30a.m. to 4:00p.m. During fishing hours boats may catch their own bait but may not obtain bait from any other boat.

GENERAL RULES:

1. Fishing must be performed in accordance with principles of good sportsmanship, and in compliance with these and IGFA rules as published in the '2017Edition' of the IGFA World Record Game Fishes' book under International Angling Rules'.

2. This is a boat event. Each boat participating must pay an entry fee of $2,550 (based on 35 entries) which allows two anglers to fish in the tournament and provides two additional social privileges. There is no maximum number of anglers per boat but each additional angler must pay $350 to enter. Angler substitutions may be made but must be called into the Committee Boat before 'Lines in the Water' each day. Boats may only be changed as a result of mechanical breakdown and the change must receive prior approval of the Rules Committee. There is no maximum number of lines in the water.

3. ENTRIES: The entry fee will be $2,550 (based on 35 entries). Entries will be accepted up until the start of the Captains' Meeting at The Perry Marina (formerly Stock Island Marina Village), on Wednesday, July 22, 2026 at 6:00pm.

Entry Refusal: The Tournament Committee reserves the right to refuse tournament applications or entry from any prospective entrant with or without cause in its sole discretion. Entrants and/or reentrants proposing to fish on boats that have been barred from other fishing tournaments can expect to have their Entry rejected. Any applicant refused entry shall be entitled to a refund of entry fee.

4. THIS IS AN OPEN EVENT: Professional Guides, Captains, and Mates are eligible to participate as anglers.

5. All tackle must meet specifications for each category.

6. Angler must hook and play fish without help. Rod, reel and line must not be touched by anyone until the leader is brought within the grasp of the angler, other angler, captain or mate at which time more than one person is permitted to hold the leader.

7. Fish injured or mutilated are not eligible.

8. Double line, if used, must leave rod tip during the fight and fish must be fought most of the time on specified class line.

9. Line Test Limits: It is the responsibility of the angler to ensure that the proper test line is used. Line test limits must be adhered to. Manufacturer's stated test line is a maximum of 130#. Lower test line may be used, but no bonus is awarded for using lower test line.

10. Since January 1, 2008, anglers fishing from HMS permitted vessels and participating in billfish tournaments must use only non-offset circle hooks when deploying natural bait or natural bait artificial lure combinations. Tournament anglers may deploy "J" hooks with artificial lures.

VALIDATION REQUIREMENTS

1. VIDEO—Each boat will provide their own video camera in order to record the fish during the fight and before the release showing the mate's hand on the leader. The tournament will provide each boat with a series of validation sheets that each morning will be instructed by the committee boat a photo of the designed sheet which will precede all other photos of that day. The boat must provide to the weigh master a means to download the camera to the official records of the tournament, this can be achieved by either having a removable sim card or having a cord to download to a computer. All fish caught and released should be photographed several times during the fight and at the time of release. Failure to photograph a fish may result in disqualification of that particular fish. In the event that a camera malfunctions or some other unusual circumstance results in no photographs, the angler may petition the Rules Committee to have his catch allowed. The Rules Committee may request special polygraph tests or other corroborating evidence that would help validate the catch. The decision of the Rules Committee is final.

2. LINE / LURE—Boats which have caught and released a target species must turn in the camera, along with the leader, or a portion thereof, the double line, and at least 10' (ten feet) of the single line closest to the double line after each day's fishing. Cameras and line must be turned in at the weigh station, Stock Island Marina Village, within two and one-half (2 ½) hours after the Committee Boat calls for 'Lines out of the water' but no later than 5pm on the final day of fishing.

3. POLYGRAPH— All winning teams may be subject to and must pass polygraph testing. Refusal to take the test will result in disqualification. Any person aboard the boat may also be subject to and must pass polygraph testing. Refusal to take the test will result in disqualification. Polygraph tests will include questions on angling and release procedures and species of fish. Polygraph tests are final and winners are not official until all test results are completed.

4. RELEASE—Proper release techniques must be used. Release is official only if the following conditions are met:

A. For blue marlin, white marlin, spearfish, and sailfish—ALL billfish MUST be released.

B. Fish must be fought on the specified class line (i.e. the double line and the leader must leave the reel) for the majority of the time the fish is hooked-up.

C. The fish must be brought close enough to the boat for the mate, angler, or captain to touch the leader (and photo should be taken of the fish at this time) to qualify as a catch and release. After the leader has been touched, the angler may continue to fight the fish in an effort to tag it. If possible, multiple photos of the fish, angler, and tag should be taken. There are no additional points for tagged fish.

COMMUNICATIONS & REPORTING

1. The Committee Boat will monitor VHF Channel 78.

2. All boats must report 'Hook-ups' and 'Releases' to the Committee Boat at the time of the occurrence, identifying the species and the Anglers name. Reports may be relayed by another boat or may be by telephone if the reporting boat cannot reach the Committee Boat.

3. If any boat is 'Hooked-up' at the time the Committee Boat calls for 'Lines out of the Water', the boat must reaffirm the 'Hook-up' with the Committee Boat.

4. Cameras and line must be submitted within two and one-half (2 1/2) hours after the Committee Boat calls for 'Lines out of the Water'. An exception to this rule will be allowed in the event that a 'Hook-up' was reaffirmed with the Committee Boat at the time of 'Lines out of the Water' in which case the camera and line may be submitted up to two and one-half (2 1/2) hours after the Release time reported to the Committee Boat but no later than 5:00 p.m. on the final day of fishing.

ACTS OR SITUATIONS THAT WILL DISQUALIFY A RELEASE:
Any violation of these Rules or violation of the guidelines as published in the '2017 Edition' of the 'IGFA World Record Game Fishes' book under 'Angling Regulations' will disqualify a fish. If an angler has a fish disqualified, he/she may attempt to catch another fish of that species during the tournament timetable. All decisions of the Rules Committee are final.

PROTEST
All protests must be in writing and submitted to the Rules Committee on the day of the alleged violation with a deposit of $500.00. If the alleged violation is upheld, the deposit will be refunded. If not upheld, the deposit will not be refunded. The decision of the Rules Committee will be final.

SCORING SYSTEM

1. Blue marlins score 400 points for a release. Any blue marlin killed for record consideration will also receive 400 points provided it weighs a minimum of 600 pounds. If a blue marlin is killed for record consideration and weighs less than 600 pounds it scores zero points.

2. All white marlin releases score 400 points.

3. All spearfish releases score 400 points.

4. One fun fish per day can be entered for additional points as follows:

   SAILFISH — release 50 points (must turn in camera).

   DOLPHIN — 1 point per pound. i.e. 38.5 pounds scores 38.5 points.

   WAHOO — 1 point per pound.

   TUNA, YELLOWFIN, BLACKFIN, and SKIPJACK — 1 point per pound.

   Minimum weight on dolphin, wahoo and tuna is 15 pounds.

5. In the event of a tie on points, the boat with the earliest catch or release time on their last scored fish will be the higher placed boat.

6. Boats entered in the Marlin Division of the Key West Marlin Tournament may pay an additional $450 entry fee for the Fun Fish Division to compete for a total of$10,000 in cash prizes for the three heaviest dolphin, wahoo, and tuna (yellowfin, blackfin, and skipjack). Minimum weight for these species is 15 pounds. All dolphin, wahoo, and tuna, must be weighed at the Stock Island Marina Village in the Historic Seaport within two and one-half (2 1/2) hours after the Committee Boat calls for 'Lines out of the Water'. An exception to this rule will be allowed in the event that a 'Hook-up' was reaffirmed with the Committee Boat at the time of 'Lines out of the Water' in which case the fish may be weighed in up to two and one-half (2 1/2) hours after the fish boated time reported to the Committee Boat but no later than 5:00

p.m. on the final day of fishing. Boats wishing to weigh-in dolphin, wahoo, or tuna should notify the Committee Boat that they are bringing in a fish to weigh. Wahoo, dolphin, and tuna may be transported to the weigh station by land or by sea, thus allowing boats fishing out of Big Pine and the Lower Keys to return to their home dock and bring their fish to to the Stock Island Marina Village by car or truck. The Weighmaster's announced weight at the time of weigh-in will be entered into the record as the official weight and the Captain and/or Angler will be asked to witness the weight. In the event of a tie, the boat with the earliest fish weighed in will be the higher placed boat. It is not necessary to turn in camera, line, and leader for these fish except for sailfish release where the video must be turned in.

TOURNAMENT WINNERS

1. Cash prizes totaling $40,000 will be awarded to the three boats with the highest points in accordance with the Tournament Scoring System. [* this payout is based on 35 registered boats]*

2. Cash prizes totaling $10,000 will be awarded for the three heaviest dolphin, tuna and wahoo weighed in by the boats entered in the Fun Fish Division