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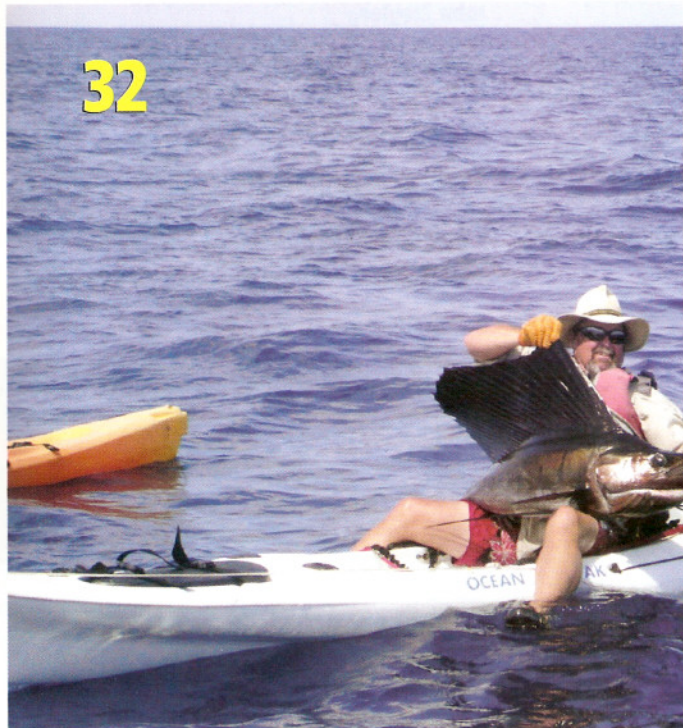
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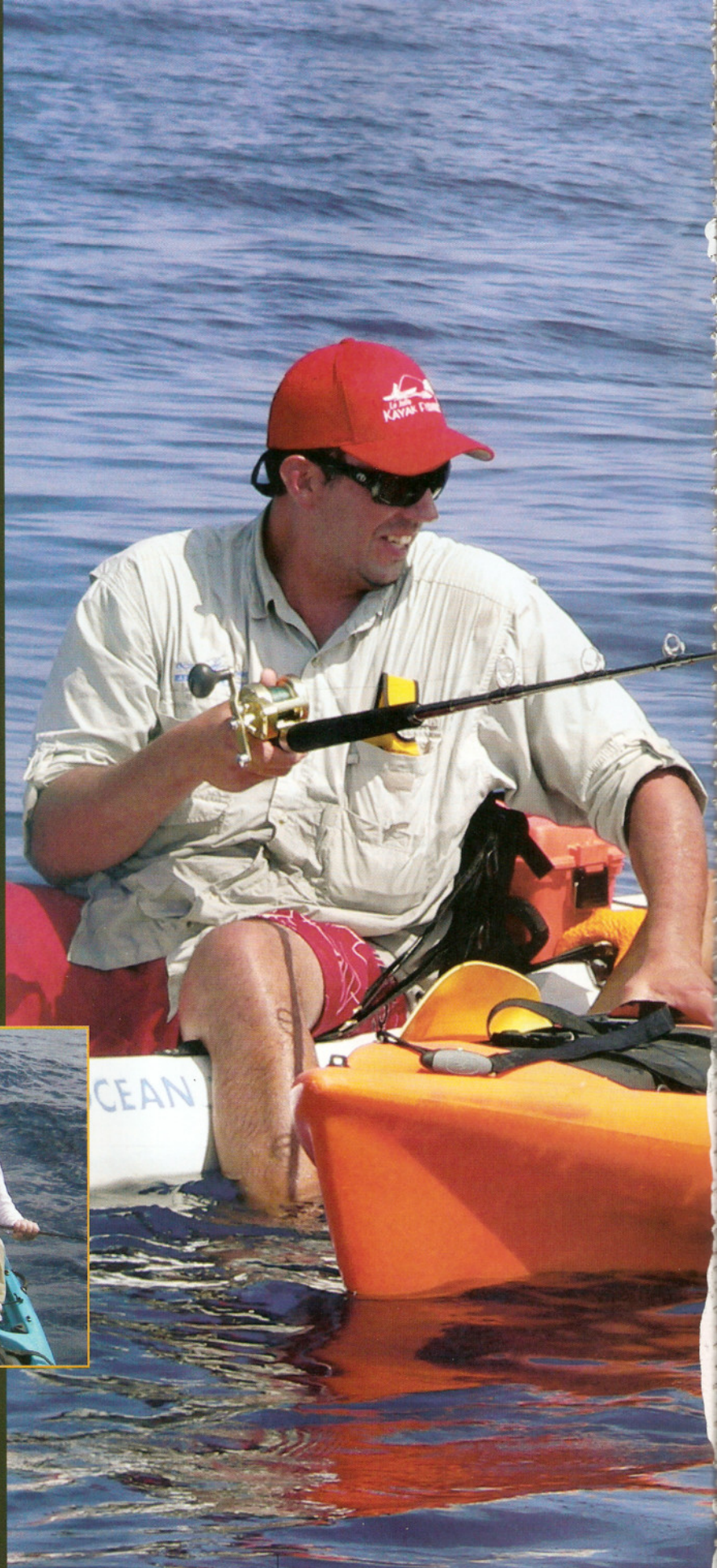
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In recent years kayak fishing has seen phenomenal growth within the fishing and paddle-sports industries. While many anglers are content to catch some of the smaller inshore varieties of fish (not that there is anything wrong with this), the desire to go after the bigger game fish that haunt our coast and the waters of southern Baja grows.

Catching a two hundred-pound thresher shark or a hundred eighty-pound striped marlin from a fifteen-foot, sixty-pound kayak is something that gets the heart pumping and adrenalin flowing like nothing else can. Personally, I am lucky enough to have been involved in the landing of many threshers as well as fifteen billfish, marlin and sailfish. One thing that holds true for all these catches is the adrenalin factor that comes from bringing a fish to color that can actually hurt you—and not just sore-muscles hurt, but physical-damage hurt. To experience a thresher shark greyhounding towards you from across the water or a marlin slashing his bill mere feet from the kayak while you sit only inches from



the water's surface will cause even the heartiest of us to wonder if this is the smartest thing to be doing. Still, we do it every chance we get.



Kayak Fishing for **BIG GAME**

BY JIM SAMMONS



Targeting big game from the kayak is not to be taken lightly; the inexperienced can quickly find that they have taken on more than they bargained. Even a thresher pup of sixty pounds can be a handful once next to the kayak, tail flailing next to your head. Having a marlin slam into the side of the kayak may also cause some second thoughts. (If you think landing

caught a marlin from a kayak. At La Jolla Kayak Fishing, there is actually a billfish club with, at this time, eleven members who have collectively landed fourteen billfish, striped marlin and sailfish. (A few other sailfish have been caught from kayaks in different locations around the world.) Members receive a certificate of their accomplishment and, even more importantly,

Sammons: It's pretty amazing how fast these fish can pull you, and with so much power. Remember Mark's fish? We had it pulling all four of us in our kayaks—plus the cameraman—in the water.

Sammons: How about some advice for someone ready to make the jump to big game kayak fishing.

Rhyno: I would say, hire a guide. At the very least, go with someone who has dealt with these fish before. They may be able to anticipate and thereby help you avoid situations that may get you in trouble

Matt: Yeah, having you, Jim, in the kayak next to me as I fought and finally landed my marlin made me feel a lot more comfortable. I would also say, particularly for the billfish, that having a support boat

out there is a great safety feature.

When landing a fish with a weapon on the end of its face, things can go wrong quickly, and you may need that boat. It also helps with the catch and release. I would also like to remind everyone to always wear a PFD (personal flotation device). I did not have mine on when I caught my marlin because we were just fishing for tuna. You never know when things can turn bad, and I should have had mine on.

Sammons: That is why we always have a panga on the water with us on our group trips to Punta Colorada. The added bonus is having a guy on the water with you that fishes these waters every day to put you on the right spots.

Rhyno: I think the most important thing to do if planning to target bigger fish is to think through the entire process before it happens. Are your landing gloves where you can get them? Is your deck clear for when you bring the fish on board for that glory shot? If you are going to keep it, do



a billfish from a kayak is easy, take a look at the videos on my Web site, Kayak4Fish.com.)

At the bar at Hotel Punta Colorada, anglers tell of their battles with marlin from cruisers in which the fight lasted fifteen minutes while the angler basically just cranked in line as the boat chased the fish. In a kayak the fight rarely lasts less than an hour and a half. We have had fights last over three hours and cover many miles as the marlin drags the angler wherever it wants. Many of us have been dragged over five miles straight out to sea at speeds that would amaze any onlookers.

Recently, a show about Mt. Everest got me thinking. More people have climbed that mountain (the summit has been reached over 2,200 times by 1,500 different climbers) than have

bragging rights amongst their kayak-fishing brethren.

I had a chance recently to sit down with Jeff "Rhyno" Krieger and Matt Moyer, both very experienced big game kayak anglers and members of the La Jolla Kayak Fishing billfish club to talk about big game kayak fishing. Below is a bit of our conversation.

Sammons: Jeff, you have probably landed more threshers from a kayak than anyone I know, and have now landed a striped marlin. Can you compare them?

Rhyno: They are both tough fish, but there really is no comparison. Nothing could pull you faster, dump more line or have the stamina of the marlin; you will never forget your first time.



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you have the proper landing tools: gaff, knife, tail rope, cutaway tool?

Matt: Too many guys go out unprepared; do a little research on the characteristics of the fish you want to target. There are lots of resources out there now on the Web, so you can always find some answers for your questions. Again, a guide is a good idea, particularly for that first time. You will learn a ton. Take your time to learn the sport before targeting the big guys.

Sammons: I have had guys want to book a trip with me to target threshers, but they have never even caught a bass from a kayak. I think people just need to slow down and get the basics down before trying to go after big game. Catch a few yellowtail, and then look into catching the big stuff.

Too many guys go out unprepared; do a little research on the characteristics of the fish you want to target.

Sammons: Like me, you both paddle and are sponsored by Ocean Kayak, so besides brand, do you have any advice on kayaks or fishing gear for big game kayak fishing?

Rhyno: The main thing is to get a kayak you feel comfortable in; you don't want to feel like you are fighting to stay in the kayak while you are fighting to land a thrashing fish. I often use one of the larger singles or a tandem kayak when targeting thresher sharks so that I have a



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nice stable landing platform. For the rest of my fishing, I like one of the faster kayaks so that I can cover more miles in comfort. On rigging, I like everything handy but out of the way. I can easily reach all my equipment, but it is never in the way of landing a fish.

Matt: As far as the fishing equipment goes, just make sure you use good gear with fresh line and leader. You may be on the fish a long time, so smooth drags can make the difference between landing and losing the fish of a lifetime. The reels don't have to be big; I landed my marlin on a Shimano Trinidad Twelve loaded with thirty-pound test line and no leader while we were fishing for tuna, and I got a five-mile sleigh ride for two hours. I really think the smooth drags saved me on that one.

Sammons: That's funny; I caught my first marlin pretty much the same way, fishing for yellowtail off La Jolla with only twenty-pound test on my Shimano Charter special. Lucky for me it was brand new line. The fight lasted two-and-a-half hours and covered eight miles.

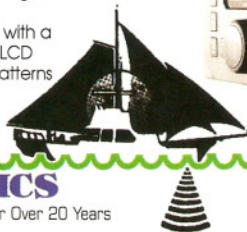
Sammons: I know we have all hooked and fought mako sharks while kayak fishing, but Matt, you actually landed one. That puts you in a very small club. Any thoughts on mako fishing from a kayak?

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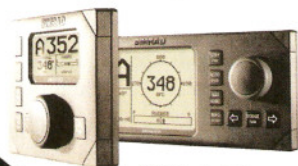
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Matt: I caught that mako fairly early in my kayak fishing career, and, honestly, I got lucky nothing went wrong. I caught that fish as much out of ignorance as any thing else. I would not recommend catching makos from a kayak; those teeth are just too big and those fish are just too unpredictable.

Rhyno: I think you can land pretty much any fish from a kayak if you have the patience and equipment, but I think mako sharks should be avoided. That is one of the reasons I use mono leaders when fishing for thresher sharks. A mako is more likely to bite though it for a nice easy release.

Sammons: Yeah, These kayaks we sit on are soft plastic, and those teeth are pretty hard and sharp. I personally don't want to find out what a mako's teeth can do to my kayak or my leg.

Sammons: So where is the best place to target the big game fish like threshers or billfish?

Rhyno: Well, for the threshers, we get a good showing off Malibu every year. Just keep an eye on the kayak fishing forums to find out when they are biting. When they show up I will post and let you know.

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Matt: All but a few of the billfish landed from kayaks have been out of the East Cape in southern Baja, with most out of Punta Colorado, so that is a pretty good place to start.


Sammons: With all this talk of the dangers and precautions needed to target these fish, are you ready to do it again?

Rhyno/Matt: When do we leave?

La Jolla Kayak fishing runs regular trips to the East Cape, focusing on tuna, dorado and roosterfish and they are available for private guided trips to target the larger game fish, sailfish and marlin. They highly encourage the catch-photo and release of all billfish and thresher sharks.

Jeff Krieger can be reached for guided kayak fishing adventures in Southern CA and at Catalina Island through his Web site, Rhynobar.com.

Matt Moyer can be reached through Kayak4Fish.com, where he works as a part-time guide.

Jim Sammons can be reached for guided kayak fishing adventures in Southern CA and to Southern Baja's East Cape at the Hotel Punta Colorado through his Web site, Kayak4Fish.com, or call  (619) 461-7172.




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