

# 12-POUND TEST

Whether you're in charge of the club's annual fishing tournament, or organizing one from scratch, proper planning and preparation will make for a well-run event that provides hours of excitement and enjoyment for sponsors as well as participants. Tournaments have been part of the recreational fishing scene in Texas for many years, so there's a wealth of experience you can draw on to make your tournament one of the state's best. This checklist will alert you to critical areas of organization, and help you avoid problems which could quickly ruin your tournament's reputation.

**1. Registration Requirements and Tournament Rules.** A rules committee should be appointed to develop detailed, yet easily understood rules. Follow through with a thorough briefing of all tournament personnel having any involvement whatsoever with the administration of these requirements, weigh-in functions, documentation procedures, dispute arbitration, etc. Never assume the contestants, or even those working for the tournament, have full knowledge of the contest rules and registration procedures, or that they completely comprehend the rules' intent. Also, schedule a formal rules overview session for tournament participants prior to the start of the event. This exchange provides all parties the opportunity to clarify any questions on the rules and avert most potential misunderstandings.

**2. Public Notification.** Clearly and precisely convey the rules and pre-designated consequences of willful violation of these rules at every available opportunity. These items could be effectively communicated to your potential contestants in brochures, flyers, posters, radio and television announcements, or letters of invitation, etc., to the event.

## ONE DOZEN CHECKPOINTS FOR AVOIDING SNAGS IN YOUR FISHING TOURNAMENT

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**3. Qualifying Responsibilities.** The tournament rules committee should have the sole privilege and responsibility for determining the valid status of all fish entries. The weighmaster should assist in this decision process *only* to the extent of pointing out discrepancies which he may view in the performance of his duties. The weighmaster generally does not have time to make intensive examinations of the fish or to conduct inquiries of the contestants. A formal mechanism for fish examination and verification should be established. (see Item 4).

**4. Physical Examinations.** Thoroughly inspect and, if necessary, conduct analytical tests on all fish in the running for prizes or awards (if they are not contenders, it is not required). The fish should be examined to determine:

- (a) the correct species;
- (b) if the fish was caught during the time period specified in the rules;
- (c) if it is a legitimate fish which meets tournament, state and federal requirements for length, condition, and means caught; and
- (d) if the fish has been altered in any unnatural or illegitimate manner (i.e. weight added, mutilated, etc.).

Technical training and assistance on judging tournament fish is readily available for saltwater tournament officials through the Texas Marine Advisory Service or the Sea Grant Program in your state. Tournament directors should contact their respective county marine agent for assistance.

**5. Condition of the Fish.** The simplest and most indisputable way of disqualifying a fish which arouses the suspicions of the rules committee, fish inspectors, and weighmaster is on the grounds it was found to be inedible. In most cases, this removes the burden of proof from the tournament officials that a fish is an illegal or illegitimate entry (frozen, pre-caught, netted etc.). A rule clearly stating a fish must be in an edible and uncut state removes nearly all grounds for protest from a contestant who is careless in the care and handling of his fish, or who is attempting to cheat. Exceptions, such as gaffing large fish or shooting sharks, gars, and rays, may be made if the rules committee so desires.

**6. Weigh-in and Measurement.** Weigh each fish once and only once. Make no exceptions. Reweighing is an unnecessary exercise and could create a myriad

of problems; therefore, address any weight questions from the contestant while his/her fish is on the scale. After recording the weight, have the contestant initial the entry on the official weight log.

To reduce frivolous complaints, require that all protests be filed in writing. If desired, this complaint document could be accompanied by an appropriate cash deposit which is refundable only if the complaint is found to be valid.

In the event disputes or protests arise, handle them as discreetly as possible, out of view of the public eye. Involve only the contestant(s), members of the rule committee and parties pertinent to the question at hand in the settlement of the affair.

If a contestant is disqualified because of suspected fraudulent manipulations, do not make public notice of this action. Outwardly such openly communicated notification appears to promote the tournament as an honest and well-policed event. However, in this day of litigation fever, the tournament could possibly be faced with an unwelcome and potentially costly legal confrontation with the ousted party if he/she believes they were purposely, publicly ridiculed or slandered by the tournament. Besides, most tournament participants seem to sense the improprieties of fellow anglers and will draw their own conclusions as to why a contestant's fish was not placed on, or withdrawn from, the tally board.

Don't sponsor a modern-day buffalo hunt where the animals are slain for sport and the carcasses cast aside. Permitting beautiful fish to rot at the weigh station is not only a shameful waste of a valuable resource, it is pitifully poor public relations in this era of resource conservation. Make a conscious effort to use the fish. Enhance the goodwill aspects of your event by donating the fish to charity or holding a tournament fish fry. A catch-and-release tournament might be an issue your tournament may wish to consider, either as a special angling category or as the full extent of the contest.

Any person or persons found to have purposely circumvented the rules and their intent, at the discretion of the rules committee, should:

- be barred from further participation in this and any future tournaments you may sponsor;
- forfeit any entry fees paid to the tournament.



face the possibility of having a civil suit and/or criminal charges filed against them (the mere public notice of such a possibility may serve as a powerful deterrent against tournament fraud).

Though not widespread, some tournaments rely on polygraph tests to insure the honesty of their contestants. In order to claim their prizes, contestants must willingly submit to and pass this examination. Such a method may be desirable for contests offering large cash awards or expensive prizes.

11. Disposition of Prizes. Retain the right for the tournament to withhold the disbursement of all trophies, prizes, or checks until all disputes or questions have been satisfactorily settled by the rules committee. Since such delays tend to reduce the goodwill and perceived enjoyment of the event, they should be avoided or minimized if possible. However, it should be clearly recognized that a delay is far less onerous and embarrassing than attempting to correct a misdirected awarding.

Shortly after the tournament, have each sponsoring member participate in an evaluation exercise. This could be done formally, such as a specially held meeting, or informally, perhaps through casual contacts and phone calls.

Regardless of the method, the intent should be to identify:

- (1) problems which were encountered, or had the potential to occur, during the tournament and means of avoiding them in the future;
- (2) ways of improving the logistical operations of the contest; and
- (3) methods for maximizing the primary objective of the function (i.e. promotion of area tourism, business enhancement, organizational fundraising, group social event, etc.).

It is likely an evaluation survey of the participants would prove extremely enlightening. Consider polling those who entered to discover their likes, dislikes and recommendations.

## PROTECTING YOUR TOURNAMENT

Remember, it could take but a single premeditated act of deception to permanently — and perhaps terminally — taint the reputation of your fishing tournament. Like most such damaging prejudices, it is often easier and less costly to avoid than to remedy. Protect your angling contest through adequate planning and preparation. In the sophisticated world of fishing tournaments, an ounce of prevention is truly worth a pound of cure!

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