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Predators of the Famous St. Thomas North Drop

Photography by: Brooks Smith and Art Sabates

In the depths below the serenity of a sparkling blue horizon lurk some of the most menacing opponents known to BVI marlin fishermen. Beneath the species-rich waters of the famous St. Thomas North Drop, there is an age-old m le e that continues to rage between the magnificent blue marlin and the merciless shark. This leaves many anglers questioning who is really on top of the subaquatic food chain. Is it the 500 plus lb. blue marlin or the giant tiger, bull or silky sharks always waiting for them to become weak and tired on the end of an angler's line?

Amidst the pristine beauty of this well-known fishing haven, we set forth on a journey

to battle blue marlin in the St. Thomas North Drop on the notable sportfishing vessel Uno Mas along with owner Brooks Smith and his guests Dave Holding and Art Sabates. We set off that morning from Red Hook surrounded by the huge bursting sunrise. Lush green mountains speckled with peacefully nestled residences added a scattered handful of colors to the tropical landscape. Shimmering silver baitfish exploded on top of the glassy indigo water in tiny eruptions of crystalline beauty in the harbor as we departed. Breathing deeply, we took in the awe-inspiring backdrop at our stern as we headed out on the Uno Mas for a day of sportfishing. Our morning commute was 25 miles to the North Drop where the

shelf plummets from approximately 200ft. to 1,200ft.

The peak blue marlin season in St. Thomas is July, August, and September. During these months it's optimal to fish for the five days before and after the full moon. Blue marlin and sharks commonly stay there hunting for prey, sharing the same food source. Blue marlin generally consume tuna and bonita, while sharks have a tendency to prey on weak or injured fish. With this combination of marine activity, there is a consistent underwater power struggle between these two top predators. This creates a definite wild card for the serious marlin fisherman, and can prove to be a hindrance in any blue marlin fishing agenda.

On this particular trip, we had a really great start, pulling in and releasing both a 300lb. and a 500lb. blue marlin before lunchtime. The exhilaration throughout the boat was contagious, and spirits were high. Abruptly, another monster came up on our spread, and Dave had his first-ever blue marlin on the line, which was in the 500 to 600lb range! It jumped toward the boat several times and frothy white water plumed on the horizon as the powerful marlin hurled its glistening body through the air.

After an extended fight, it made a long blistering run away from the boat, forcing us to begin fervently backing down. After an hour and a half of the characteristic marlin fighting style, the fish was clearly running for its life, although it wasn't running from us. With a few violent thrashes and adrenaline-fueled shouting from our boat, suddenly there was dead weight on the line. Cranking the rest of the way in, he pulled up a gruesome sight; a huge blue marlin tail and shreds of what once was a large blue marlin. The jumping blue marlin had somehow gotten tail wrapped, dislodging



ABOUT THE ANGLER & AUTHOR

Capt. Lace Allenius

LACE spent her formative years in the Florida Keys fishing with her father, and then grew up in the Bradenton, Sarasota and Saint Petersburg area. Her first memory is the colorful schools of parrotfish swimming by the seawall in her backyard.

Moving from Florida to New York City for an internship at Good Morning America didn't deter Lace from her lifelong passion for fishing. She helped first mate on a striper boat out of Sheepshead Bay in Brooklyn. Living in Manhattan, Lace also stayed busy by assisting in the production of two student films at Yale University.

Now, as a senior in journalism school, Lace is a columnist for several fishing magazines. She currently works for NBC Sports' Extreme Fishing Adventures as their Business Development Manager. Combining her media training with her love of fishing, she has achieved the perfect combination in her professional career.

In New York, Lace enjoys fishing for stripers, blackfish, bluefish, and tuna. She regularly surf casts at the lighthouse on Montauk or from the shore at Mecox Beach. On Florida's west coast, Lace spends long hours on the water fishing for grouper, snapper, kingfish and cobia. When not in one of these two places, she is generally in the Caribbean or Central America battling the fiercest fish of the tropics. Having a residence in both New York City and Saint Petersburg, Florida allows Lace to experience the best of both worlds when it comes to her fishing career.

When she's not reeling them in, you can find Lace composing piano music, checking out NYC's best seafood restaurants, or playing chess in Central Park. She can also be found filleting Sarasota grouper or scouting the best spots to catch snook in the Florida gulf. Living between New York and Florida is exciting for Lace, and escaping from big city life is what keeps this angler happy!

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the hook from the fish's jaw, creating a loop on its tail. With its powerful tail disabled, the marlin was easy prey for the ferocious sharks of the North Drop. It had been eaten alive head first, and the vicious sharks had only left the shredded tail fin to reward Dave's efforts. Welcome to the famous North Drop, where the thrill of victory can be turned into the agony of defeat in an instant!

When fighting a blue marlin, it's a good idea to keep the fish down sea. Work hard to restrict the fight to 45 minutes or less to avoid entering the "shark zone". This is when marlin will begin to show signs of fatigue, and become more attractive to aggressive sharks. Using 80lb. tackle as opposed to 50lb. usually doesn't help you because it can cause the marlin to sound (go down deep) and get tired more quickly, therefore getting your fish killed by sharks sooner. Remember that the boat does much of the work when using light tackle, and you should try to use light tackle to your advantage.

Some of the world's best blue marlin fishing is on the Saint Thomas North Drop. Consequently, there are some of the most tenacious sharks found prowling in the same fruitful waters. Accomplished marlin fishermen are familiar with this threat, and have tried for years to evade this un-purposeful marlin death. The question of who is on top of the food chain is yet to be answered as hard-hitting blue marlin continue to clash with the ravenoustiger, bull, and silky sharks competing for the same source of sustenance. It's astounding how the blue marlin, who usually reigns as the top predator of the sea, can suddenly be devoured by a pack of scavenging sharks and become reduced to nothing but modest bait. It is heart breaking for the participating anglers who practice catch and release marlin fishing only to have their catch killed by the sharks. END

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