



“You're just one bite away from being a hero”

- Richard Stanczyk

Daytime Swordfishing

IN THE FLORIDA KEYS

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FISHING BUDDIES

Longtime angling buddies Richard Stanczyk and Vic Gaspeny together landed their first swordfish in the daytime in 2003.

WEAPON OF CHOICE

Richard Stanczyk's son, Nick surveys a healthy supply of swordfishing gear stored at Bud N' Mary's Marina.

For years, swordfishing was an elusive dream for many anglers in the Florida Keys. Not much was known about the habits and whereabouts of this apex predator.

Today, Islamorada is not only the Sportfishing Capital of the World, it's also where daytime swordfishing began in earnest.

Swordfishing had always been a nighttime activity and experienced fishermen believed that daytime

swordfishing was a pipe dream. In the Keys, fishermen have to venture far out to reach deeper waters, but that wasn't the only problem. It was the way it was done.

Richard Stanczyk, venerable owner of Bud N' Mary's Fishing Marina in Islamorada, was working as a

charter boat captain on the Miami River in the 1970s. That's when he and other boat captains "began to see the bills of swordfish at the local bait house.

Establishing the possibility of catching swordfish in the daytime was significant.





FISHERMAN BY ALL ACCOUNTS

Richard Stanczyk admits that for two years of his life he was obsessed with daytime swordfishing.

BARBERSHOP CHAIR

Vic Gaspeny sits in the fighting chair preparing for a long hard fight with the apex predator.



VENERABLE OUTPOST

The well regarded Bud N' Mary's Marina is essentially the birthplace of daytime swordfishing.

Eventually a guy named Tony Harrison began to question where they came from," Stanczyk remembers.

Conversations were struck up with some of the fishermen, who'd recently come from Cuba. Not long after, some local fishermen, brothers Jerry and Jessie Webb, decided to go out at night to try it off Miami. "I actually lent them the rods and reels to do the first trip ever at night," Stanczyk said, but "I missed the boat. At three o'clock in the morning, they called me, and they had two 300-pound swordfish."

Stanczyk joined the swordfish fray that ensued and "ended up fishing for swordfish for a year and a half." He's still got vivid memories: "I thought I'd died and gone to heaven. [The swordfish] were just so prolific. There were so many, you could hardly miss."

In 2001, following a rebuilding plan by ICCAT, the International Commission for the Conservation of

Atlantic Tuna [and Billfish], the U.S. reduced landings of swordfish and closed some fishing grounds to allow the population to grow and rebuild. After the new guidelines were set in place, Stanczyk went back out "to see if there were any swordfish left." He found that "they were smaller fish but there were quite a few of them."

This respected fisherman was convinced that landing a swordfish, or broadbill, in daylight off the Florida Keys was possible. He was ultimately

They found that swordfish aren't too particular about what they'll bite: Mahi, bonita, barracuda.

right. He'd heard about swordfish being caught during the daytime off Venezuela but he also knew the conditions there were quite different.

"First off, it's not that deep over there. Two, there's not a current. And three, there is not horrific structure [fishing regulations] to deal with," Stanczyk says. "The idea of fishing for them out here [in the Keys] was just about impossible.



When we decided to do it, our first efforts were just ridiculous."

In January 2003, Stanczyk, his brother Scott, the boat's captain, and Vic Gaspeny went out during the day about 35 miles off the Keys. It took 20 minutes to drop a bait 1,800 feet down. Within an hour, they landed their first daytime swordfish. Establishing the possibility of catching swordfish in the daytime was significant, especially since swordfish is a bucket-list fish for serious anglers.

Richard's son Nick remembers those days well. "We caught a swordfish in the afternoon of the first day." After that, however, it was slim pickings. The trio caught only one or two swordfish per year until they changed their tackle. Richard has admitted that if they had not caught a swordfish on that first daytime trip, they would have given up and daytime swordfishing might have never emerged.

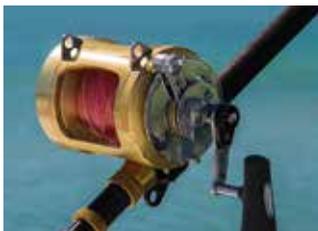
AIRBORN

A mighty swordfish breaking the surface is one of the most impressive sights in sportfishing.



WHALE OF A FISH
Foster Coffman, who works as a mate at Bud N' Mary's when not in school, is part of a new talent pool being developed at the marina.

FOR THE BIRDS
After the charter boats return and their catches are cleaned at the marina, the birds look to feast on fish scraps.



REEL TO REEL
A swordfishing reel like this, along with a break-away concrete sinker apparatus, enabled Stanczyk to get bait to the bottom of the sea floor.

By 2006, the Stanczyk fishermen knew how to deal with the Gulf Stream and had fine-tuned their gear. Nick Stanczyk explains how “instead of the traditional monofilament line, we were now using thin but strong braided line, which creates less drag in [the current created by] the Gulf Stream. The bait has to go down to near the sea bottom,” he adds, “which might mean 1,500 to 2,000 feet, and requires heavier line.”

They found that swordfish aren't too particular about what they'll bite: Mahi, bonita, barracuda. Any fish strip, apparently, will do just fine. Over time, Stanczyk and his crew have used baits ranging from squid to pelagic fish belly strips. Additionally, they also pioneered a break-away concrete sinker apparatus to get bait to the bottom of the sea floor, depths of up to 2,000 feet. Today, they are the de facto experts at the game.

“For two years of my life, I was obsessed.” Richard continues. “With

my brother and my son, we caught 200 broadbill swordfish in the daytime without anybody ever knowing. We never spoke about it. Because I really didn't want the word to get out and I watched what had happened when word got out [about] nighttime fishing.”

Today the word is out. Anyone with the right boat, gear and knowledge can venture out and test his or her mettle. Capt. Rob Dixon talks about his experience as captain of a private fishing yacht.

“We spend about 100 days a year out on the water to fish. The first [swordfish] we caught was our biggest one to

date. It was 279 pounds. We used a rig with two baits back then. We missed the bite on the first bait and minutes later hooked him on the second. The bait is 100 feet from the weight and you're fishing 1,500 to 1,800 feet deep. It's a very complex rig, much more so than any other type of fishing. You just watch the rod tip and wait patiently for that bounce.”

For years, swordfishing was an elusive dream for many anglers in the Florida Keys.



Andy Newman, president of NewmanPR, the communication agency for the Monroe County Tourist Development Council, aptly described his own swordfishing experience after being aboard the Catch 22 with Richard and his brother Scott in July 2010: "After all, you sit in a big barbershop-like chair, holding a big-game fishing rod as thick as a broomstick and a huge reel that looks like it could literally lift the world".

New talent is continually being developed at what Richard calls BNMU, Bud N' Mary's University. Foster Coffman, 17, was in seventh grade when he learned about swordfishing from Nick Stanczyk, and today Coffman works as a mate whenever he's off from school. He has helped land dozens of swordfish while working for Nick. Foster calls it "the fish of a lifetime." He's been angling with his dad [Tyler Coffman, a fishing captain at Bud N' Mary's] since he was 4 years old. He's seen a lot in those 13 years. "It's nerve-racking," he marvels. "But I'd like to catch one myself."

"One more story to give you some

perspective," says Richard Stanczyk. "The most famous swordfisherman who ever lived was a guy by the name of Zane Grey. You should know him as a writer but he was a [fishing] rock star. Grey was obsessed, and it took him an entire year of fishing every day just to capture four swordfish. He did it the right way."

"I did this thing with the swordfish for about 11 years and then five years ago, kinda like Forest Gump — remember at the end of his run he said he was done — I was done. What was cool is I was able to hand this over to my younger son Nick."

"And that is the truth about swordfishing" Richard Stanczyk says, with a wink and a smile.

North Atlantic swordfish is one of the most renewable seafood choices today. It's one of the great success stories of U.S. and international fisheries management. According to NOAA Fisheries, the stock is fully rebuilt and "is sustainably managed and responsibly harvested" under U.S. regulations.

THAT'S ONE BIG FISH

Seems like most of Richard Stanczyk's fondest fishing memories involve son, Nick, and swordfish.

CATBIRD SEAT

Nick Stanczyk has been intimately connected to daytime swordfishing and is also poised to assume more of the marina's operation.



WALL OF FAME

Decades of fishing memories and accomplishments adorn the walls of Richard Stanczyk's office at the marina.