

'We fish every available day the weather gives us. Not just shark, but we enter all the major billfish tournaments, year-round.'

GEORGE BARNARD,
big-game fisherman

Big appetite for fishing

By Tony Chamberlain
GLOBE STAFF

FAIRHAVEN — So you think you're a motivated angler?

■ You fall in the industry's category of "regular" by fishing at least twice a month.

■ You studiously ignore the ratio of hours or dollars per pound of fish you catch in a season.

■ And you really don't buy into the argument that all real fishermen care about is being on the water. No, it's more exciting to catch fish.

■ You even sport one of those bumper stickers (or possibly the T-shirt) that reads, "A bad day fishing is better than a good day doing anything else."

If this pretty much defines your place in sport fishing, meet Joe Vezzino, Dave Schunke, Peter Schott, and George Barnard. These anglers are among a growing number of men who spend every day and dollar they can possibly spare in pursuit of the big game end of the sport — shark hunting. Guys who will spend \$3,000 for a weekend's fuel, and untold money for barrels full of bait, equipment, ice, and, of course, beer.

"It's an addiction!" declared Barnard last weekend as he swigged a Bud Light while the catch of the day, a 115-pound mako, floated behind his sport fisherman, Olivia Grace.

The weekend-long shark hunt is part of a tournament run by the Outdoor Life Network, pitting West Coast and East Coast teams. It is, said producer Scott Gurney, a "reality series" not just of man vs. man, but of all opponents against nature. The tournament, which ends next weekend in Marina Del Rey, Calif., will air on OLN in four hourlong shows through October.

"The thing that separates this from your average fishing show is that this is in your face," said Gurney, who heads his own production team. "There's not a lot of heavy editing, so you get the bad with the good, the real language — the real extremes of hard-core big-game fishermen who spend their own money to go out and chase these creatures around the ocean."

Most of the anglers in the tournament fish other species — other big game such as bluefin tuna and marlin. But sharks hold a certain fascination, which perhaps explains the subtle wording shift from "fishing" to "hunting" when discussing a species such as mako. While not exactly a new game, the intensity in the sport dates back some 30 years, when the Steven Spielberg film "Jaws" celebrated a shark hunt on Martha's Vineyard.

The film inspired interest in shark tournaments throughout the fishing world, including a well-known annual event in Oak Bluffs, just a few miles from the setting of "Jaws."

And if the 70-inch carcass floating behind the Olivia Grace did not actually inspire the fear of a 16-foot great white, West Coast anglers have a warning for the East Coast guys: Just wait! When they fish Southern Californian waters next week, things could be different.

"The makos out here are much bigger than the East Coast," said Chad Compton, "Here you'll average over a 300-pound fish and 20 percent [of anglers] will land fish over 800 pounds. Anyone can hook up to fish like these, but to land them, you really have to know what you're doing. It can be ugly and dangerous when you get the leader to the boat. So, I don't know — I think some of the guys from the East Coast are going to have their hands full."

In his third season, Compton, 35, has fished big-game species such as marlin and tuna, which he shares with his 14-year-old son, Dylan, who often drives the boat. But when shark tournament time comes around, Dylan stays home, for now.

"He really loves it," said Compton, who



SCOTT GURNEY/SPECIAL TO THE GLOBE

Shark fisherman Dave Schunke (left), who is featured on an OLN show about a shark tournament, shows off his catch to Chris Ciaco (center) and Rob Pami.

placed second last year. "He's caught 150-pound makos. The only thing I can ever punish him with about grades or anything is to not take him fishing. But for now, when we're tournament fishing, there's just too much going on and too much to go wrong. Maybe by next year he'll be part of our team."

Compton, an outside sales representative, acknowledges his serious fishing lifestyle leaves little room for life beyond the docks, and that his passion has taken a toll on his family life. While his son may love fishing, his first wife got to a point where it was too much.

"I'll be honest, the fishing caused the divorce," he said. "All the time and work and preparation it takes to fish like this. That's just the way it is. She got to a point where it was time to leave."

Things are not so different on the East Coast, where Barnard, who owns a large East Coast real estate business, said that since he started fishing as a child with his father, it has become the focus of his life.

"We fish every available day the weather gives us," said Barnard, who has a 10-month-old son and 3-year-old daughter (whom his boat is named after). "Not just shark, but we enter all the major billfish tournaments, year-round. We target big game by starting in April

out at Cape May. I'm not one to flounder fish in the bay, I just like the big game."

Echoing the familiar theme, Barnard added, "My fishing addiction is absolutely putting a stress on my marriage, no doubt about it. My wife is getting close to her wit's end. But she's a saint, and I bless her for letting me fish so much."

For Dave Boggini, from Glastonbury, Conn., who captains a three-engine 600-horsepower boat, adrenaline comes in many forms.

"We saw a lot of action [Saturday], but no fish big enough to take into the dock," Boggini said. "Around 9:30, we got a fish on that didn't seem like much. It was only 62 inches, but when the guys were trying to measure it, it took a couple of good chops out of the side of the boat. It was pretty exciting."

Five East Coast teams and their five California opponents are fishing for the first-place prize of a \$200,000 boat, with a \$1 million award for a world-record mako. The shark hunting prospects for next week's final hunt are pretty much on track, and the prey will be large and nasty, the apres-fish parties rowdy, PETA will still be irked, and many wives will continue to burn.

And the adrenaline and Bud Light will be flowing as usual.

