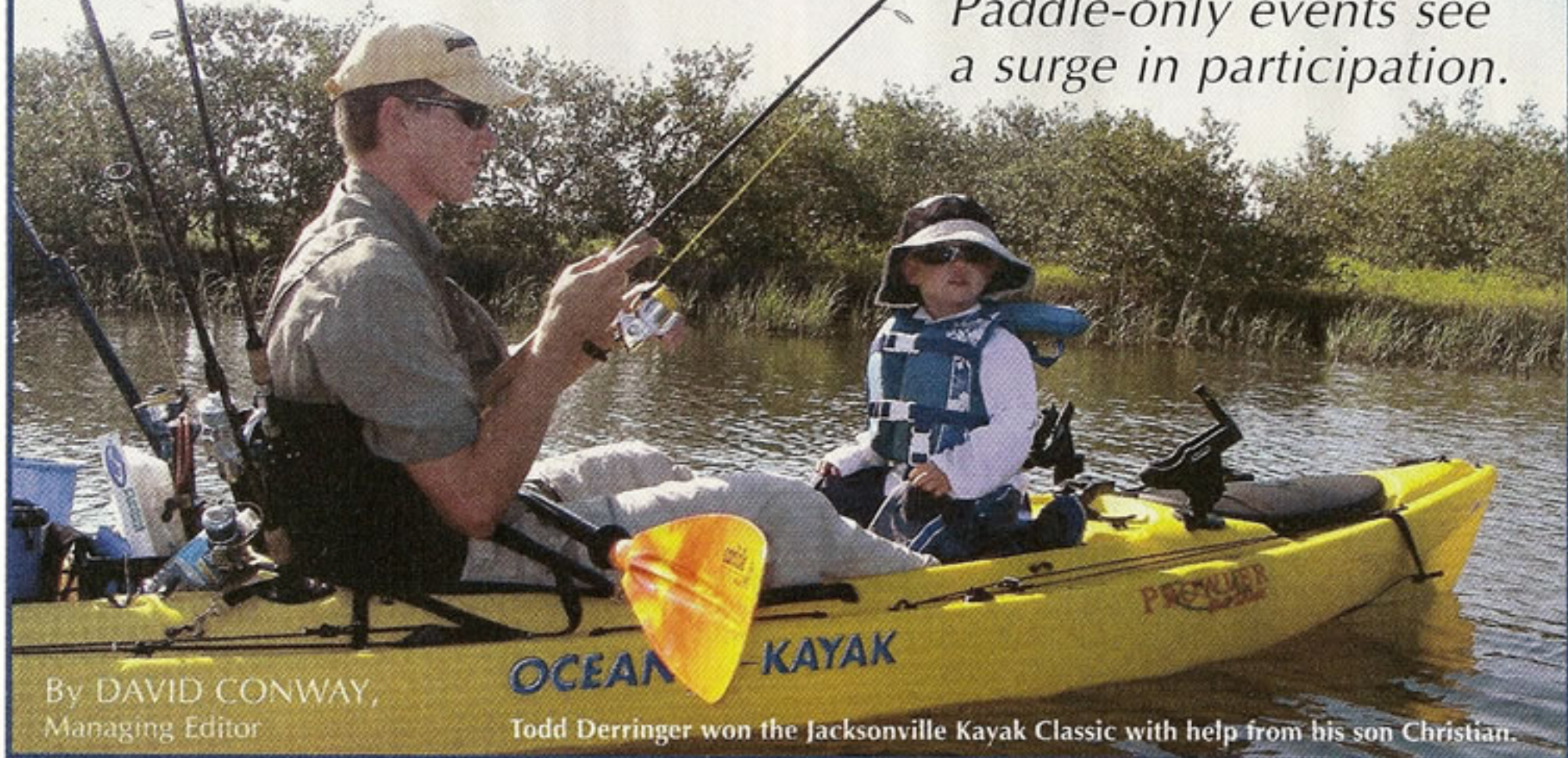


Blood, Sweat and Money

Paddle-only events see a surge in participation.



By DAVID CONWAY,
Managing Editor

Todd Derringer won the Jacksonville Kayak Classic with help from his son Christian.

On most waterways around the state, low profile kayaks are getting a lot higher profile lately. Kayaks are everywhere, from the skinniest water, to the surf, even out to the blue water, and tournaments are springing up around the state to host those anglers. It won't be long now before someone organizes a kayak tournament trail.

At the **D.O.A. Paddlers Only Kayak Tournament** in Stuart the first weekend of June, 88 anglers competed in windy, rainy weather in a slam-format, catch-and-release contest. Entrants were judged by the total length of fish caught among snook, redfish and trout, one from each species, and catches were verified by photographs taken by the anglers on the boat.

Jerry Rosen of D.O.A. Lures organized the event and capped participation at 85 anglers. It sold out early, and now they're considering starting a kayak tournament in Texas.

"In the three years we've had the tournament, it's grown by leaps and bounds. And that's because kayaking itself is the fastest growing sector of saltwater fishing," Rosen said, "because it's inexpensive, easy for families to manage, and because everyone can do it, including kids. And you can really catch fish on kayaks."

George Pinkerton of Jupiter won the

event and a new Ocean Kayak Prowler. Dillon Snyder of Palm City took the Junior Division and also took home an outfitted Ocean Kayak.

Over on the west coast, **The Kayak Fishing Classic** in Fort Myers, on the Great Calusa Blueway, had its second successful year. Event chair Bill Stewart said, "This year, we increased participation to 75 anglers from 45 in '06. We had youth division anglers as young as 12 years old. Participants could fish wherever they wished, as long as they returned to Lovers Key State Park by the deadline."

Jesse Ochoa won the slam category, and Jake Schuyler won the youth division. The tournament benefits the Southwest Florida Council of Boy Scouts of America.

Even the biggest kayak tournament in the world is right in our state, in Jacksonville. Organized by the founder of jaxkayakfishing.com, Mike Kogan, this year's Fourth Annual **Jacksonville Kayak Fishing Classic** in mid-May had over 100 sponsors, 280 paddlers, and gave away more than \$60,000 in prizes. The event raised over \$20,000 for Daniel-kids, Florida's oldest children's services organization. Their version of the slam replaces a snook with a flounder.

"I've watched our tournament grow and grow, and right now it's the biggest

kayak tournament anywhere in the world," said Kogan. "California has a couple big ones, and there's one up in Jamaica Bay, New York, but not like ours. The biggest Osprey event over in Sarasota had about 150 anglers, but when we got over 200, we left them behind."

Kogan has learned a lot from observing the other tournaments, and has taken the best aspects from many of them.

"There are several ideas how these events work best, and for us, the most fun are the most inclusive, the most family-oriented, for charity. We have plenty of prizes, but not cash prizes. The minute you have cash prizes, the cheat factor creeps in and you start to have real cut-throat competition. We had 17 kayaks to give away, and gifts worth more than \$60,000, so entrants definitely get rewarded, but not with cash.

"For us, it's got to be fun and for charity, and locally oriented with connections to local retailers and sponsors, and we do it in a clean, green conservation-aware format. That way, it's great for everyone who puts up the prizes, and the people who participate have a great time."

Kogan uses the catch-photo-release format popular with many other kayak tournaments. If you haven't ever fished on a kayak, it takes some measure of



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skill and calm to get a good photo of a live fish on your boat, especially when you also need to show it against a measuring board provided by the tournament. These anglers definitely have their hands full.

"We like to have the opportunity to score fish that are bigger than slot to fit with our catch-photo-release format, and this year we experimented with all digital cameras and it was a million times better. We give anglers a unique token that has to be in pictures to verify authenticity, and at the end of the day, we upload the pictures and the judges check them against what the anglers claim that they caught. The measuring boards are wide with huge marks every half inch, so you can see if a fish is in between," Kogan said.

In the competition, more than 12 anglers scored slams, and more than 14 overslot reds were photographed and released. First place in the slam category went to Todd Derringer of St. Augustine, who won a fully equipped Ocean Kayak. Charles Ganoe took second and Justin Loudermilk came in third.

Out in the blue water, 120 powerboat teams competed in the 9th Annual **Pompano Beach Saltwater Shootout** in May,

the first of three rounds of the **Gauntlet Elimination Series**. Smoky fog from the state's brushfires met competitors as they cleared Hillsboro Inlet, and strong winds met them on the seas. Cory McBride and his teammates on the *Conched Out* shook their previous years' rough luck in the tournament to take a well-rounded catch of four kings and four dolphin for first place and nearly \$20,000. Bryan Zascavage, on *Even Flow*, had the clutch catch of big fish of the day, a 49.2-pound cobia, good for about \$9,000. The Gauntlet elimination series continues with two more rounds this summer, **The Saltwater Slam** and **The Saltwater Showdown**, all out of Hillsboro Inlet in Pompano Beach.

Team Pork Chop won the **Wal-Mart Kingfish Series Gulf Coast Division Event** in Tierra Verde in late May. Captained by Robert Dawson, with Ray Szymanski and Dan Condron, all of St. Petersburg, the team had "one of the best kingfishing days I ever had," according to Dawson. "We caught about 20 kings in an hour on a textbook king spot, a submerged rockpile just north of the Boca Grande Pass. The place was covered up with bait and bonito were busting everywhere. I'm not sure why there