



# The Miami Herald

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## FISHING

### Mark 'the Shark:' hero or butcher?

■ Criticism has not tempered a self-described and unrepentant 'fish mercenary,' who recently enraged detractors with his capture of a federally protected shark.

BY CARA BUCKLEY  
cbuckley@herald.com

Mark "the Shark" Quartiano is back from a long day's work, weary but sated, bloodied but triumphant, a Cheshire cat grin bisecting his sun-blasted face.

Perched on a pedestal at the rear of his 43-foot fishing boat, the Striker-1, a large, lifeless shark dripped steady crimson streams. By the time Quartiano's boat brushed the dock at the foot of Miami's Venetian Causeway, a small crowd had formed, hoisting camcorders and murmuring in awe at the visceral display of man conquering beast.

But in many local fishing circles, Quartiano, a charter boat captain, is not seen as a hero but rather a butcher of the sea.

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AL DIAZ/HERALD STAFF

CATCH OF THE DAY: Mark 'the Shark' Quartiano holds a 400-pound Mako shark on his charter boat Striker-1.

\*TURN TO CAPTAIN, 2A

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Criticism has not tempered a self-described and unrepentant 'fish mercenary,' who recently enraged detractors with his capture of a federally protected shark.

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[cbuckley@herald.com](mailto:cbuckley@herald.com)

Mark "the Shark" Quartiano is back from a long day's work, weary but sated, bloodied but triumphant, a Cheshire cat grin bisecting his sun-blasted face. Perched on a pedestal at the rear of his 50-foot fishing boat, the Striker-1, a large, lifeless shark dripped steady crimson streams. By the time MARK THE SHARK'S boat brushed the dock at the foot of Miami's Venetian Causeway, a small crowd had formed, hoisting camcorders and murmuring in awe at the visceral display of man conquering beast. But in many local fishing circles, MARK THE SHARK a charter boat captain, is not seen as a hero but rather a butcher of the sea.

From his motto, "Filet and Release," to his unabashedly lusty pursuit and capture of what he calls "monster fish," Quartiano, critics say, unnecessarily kills fish -- the antithesis of the catch-and-release approach that sports fishermen increasingly embrace.

"We've got a conservation ethic that charter fleets and recreational anglers follow in South Florida that we're very proud of. And we have one guy who will massacre any fish he can stick a hook into," said Dan Kipnis, a Miami area captain and fishing conservationist who runs tournaments. "If we all did what he did, there wouldn't be any fish left. The guy is a killing machine."

MARK THE SHARK is not universally loathed. Hundreds of pictures on the Mark the Shark website depict beaming -- and often well-known -- clients. Billy Strudwick, a longtime captain, said MARK THE SHARK'S critics envy his ability to locate prized sharks and are disingenuous because catch-and-release anglers still kill baitfish. Even detractors concede MARK THE SHARK is a highly skilled captain, with an uncanny ability to consistently track down the biggest quarry.



### FISH KILL:

Controversial charter boat captain Mark 'the Shark' poses with one of his catches, a blue marlin that he says was too big to weigh.

### CATCH OF THE DAY:

Mark 'the Shark' holds a 400 pound Mako Shark on his charter boat Striker-1.

But furor over Quartiano's fishing practices has brewed for years and recently crested with his release of a photo showing him splayed across three dead sharks, grinning salaciously. One fish was a big-eyed thresher shark, a protected species that is illegal to catch in federal waters. Critics, including Miami New Times, wondered whether Quartiano had finally gone too far. It is illegal to have three sharks aboard one boat, but Quartiano often Photoshops marketing photos.

Law enforcement agencies, for their part, are aware of Quartiano's practices but refuse to say whether there is an ongoing investigation.

"This situation has been brought to our attention, more so in light of recent photos," said Mark Oswell, law enforcement spokesman for the National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration's Fisheries Services. But MARK THE SHARK who revels in his bad boy image and relishes publicity, insists the sharks -- and all his catches -- were legally caught in state waters, which extend three miles from land.

He is unapologetic about how many fish he kills, having built a prosperous career out of chartering for a coterie of big-name clients, including Clint Eastwood, Robert De Niro, Aerosmith's Joe Perry and The Herald's Dave Barry.

No fish he catches goes to waste, he says. Instead, they are mounted, eaten or given to research labs. And he insists his impact on the fish population is negligible compared to commercial fishing operations, which affix hooks by the thousands to lines that stretch for tens of miles.

"My customers are the ones that want to kill fish, and I'm getting paid major money," said Quartiano, who is tall, barrel-chested, mustachioed and wild-eyed -- befitting, perhaps, of a man who describes himself as a "fish mercenary."

MARK THE SHARK moved to Florida from Long Island in the 1960s and taught himself how to fish. He runs Striker-1 from the dock by the Miami Marriott Biscayne Bay, where he also keeps an underground, bunker-like office. The office smells briny and, with hundreds of shark jaws crowding shelves and dangling from the ceiling, is literally lined with teeth.

Criticism began mounting against Quartiano in the late 1980s. More charter captains had begun releasing fish and directing their clients to instead buy replica fiberglass mounts, but Quartiano evidently ignored the trend.

In the early 1990s, he caught and hung 49 sailfish to garner publicity for West Africa's Bom Bom Island Resort. Quartiano said all the fish were eaten by grateful locals. But photos of the catch, a seemingly endless line of glittering, dead fish, horrified many, said Mike Leech, former president of the International Game Fish Association.

MARK THE SHARK insists released fish often die. (Tim Goeman, a Department of Natural Resources regional fisheries manager based in Brainerd, Minn., said about 10 percent of released fish die, a figure that climbs to between 30 percent and 90 percent in tournaments).

David Weintraub, a freelance captain, also feels that "many Quartiano critics are hypocritical, though his own feelings are mixed.

"If they see the opportunity arise, they seem to quickly forget their thoughts on resources," said Weintraub. "He goes out and kills a large number of animals, and he's quite good at it. [But] I wish he would let more of them go."

Yet Quartiano remains unrepentant, shrugging off criticism as well as contentions that he gives fellow charter captains a black eye.

"I'm not the monster some guys make me out to be, or a maniac out there, killing indiscriminately," he said.

"It's not like that, **I've got a client that wants to kill a fish and we go.** As long as it's legal, I'm going to do



it."

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