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Florida shark hunter Mark 'The Shark' Quartiano last of a dying breed of big game guides 10



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The Shark Hunter

IMAGE: 12 OF 12



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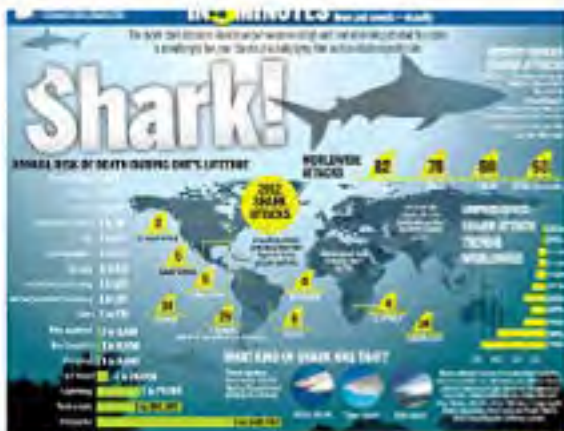
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The maverick shark hunter is nervous of going past his waist in water.

It's another Instagram-worthy day in Miami, and Mark "The Shark" Quartiano is heading out on his 46-foot Hatteras.

He'll move above familiar warm currents, but doesn't dare venture below them.

"I'm a big believer in karma," he explains.

"I might splash around up to my knees, but not put a mask on."

He's a wise man. If the shark community ever had a modern personality they'd like to get their teeth into, it's Mark.

Even on land, there are those who are out for his blood, with one YouTube poster issuing an expletive-rich rant titled: "May Mark 'The Shark' Quartiano be torn apart by sharks a billion times over in Hell".

WARNING: GRAPHIC LANGUAGE



Perhaps the last — and likely now the best-known — old-school charter boat shark angler in the world, he's seen predators try to leap into his boat and bite off sections of the hull as they fight a braided line that stands between the depths below and their jaws on a trophy wall.

For well over three decades, the larger-than-life American sportsman — his late mother and her family are from Toronto — has promised clients a chance to land the sea monster of their murky dreams.

Even his credit card reads "Mark The Shark" and he rarely uses his last name.

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The likes of Robert De Niro and Will Smith have apparently ridden the waves with him, though not necessarily to cast a line for sharks.

Against criticism from conservationists and the tides of changing attitudes to protect dwindling shark numbers — one-fifth of nearly 550 species are threatened with extinction — the former Miami cop heads out on the water 450 times a year.

"To target me as a villain is ridiculous. I'm just killing a few sharks," he says.

Catch and release is not always practical because many fish die as a result of the fight on the line.

"Everyone has their opinion, but the bottom line is my clients decide what to do. If my customer wants to make a trophy, the customer is always right."

Some fishermen pay the \$1,200 US daily fee to go after high-flying sailfish, using lighter and more traditional fishing gear.

But where Mark has made his name is the possibility of facing off against killer sharks while strapped into a chair that hangs over the water.

Wrongly demonized since the crew needed a bigger boat in *Jaws*, sharks remain a harder sell than past campaigns to protect whales.

Two recent attacks in Hawaii and other high-profile deaths around the globe only add to the toothy legend.

"It's our nature — to conquer anything that stands in our way," Mark believes of man versus shark. "Sharks are a force to deal with."

He's sure the relatively small number caught on his boat's line is a drop in the bucket.

But Sharon Young, a former marine researcher and expert with the U.S. Humane Society — now campaigning against shark tournaments — says small sports charters can have a significant impact in places like the Gulf of Mexico.

Mark, she says, seems to offer up "a kill-anything mentality."

"He's bragging about how he wants to go out and kill things."

Society no longer praises the man who shoots a lion. The same should be true of the angler who brings in a shark, says Young.

Mark is unmoved by calls for him to stop hunting sharks. But he knows the days are numbered for his way of life.

While other outfits, including on Canada's East Coast, offer catch-and-release shark outings, Mark concedes of his maverick hang 'em high style: "I'm defiantly the last guy."

His son is seven years old, "and if he wants to take over what's left, it might not

be much."

Seeing dwindling numbers, and blaming commercial fishermen who plundered the depths of all kinds of fish, Mark laments: "No one left me any buffalo."

However, there are fish tales of a still-roaming megalodon out there somewhere — a 14-18-metre prehistoric throwback that would make the great white look a little guppy-like.

Mark would kill to have a client put a hook into one of those.

Not that he's willing to wade into the water to search for one himself below the surface.

RATING THE SHARKS

When you go up against some of the world's best heavyweight fighters, you learn a bit about their moves. Here, Mark "The Shark" Quartiano rates the real sharks he's come up against in more than 30 years.

Bull shark — The most aggressive shark near the boat. They've bit and rammed the boat during battle. They are fearless in close.

Thresher shark — The hardest pound-for-pound fighter. With their giant tail and fin, they act like airplanes in the water.

Hammerheads — Great runners, travelling 200 to 300 yards on their first run. A 1,000-pounder will use its big head and the currents to its advantage.

Mako — Very aggressive shark, and one of the few that can hump 15 or 20 feet out of the water. Many have come close to jumping into the boat.

Tiger — Another heavy-weight, it's one of the scariest to look at for Mark. Their mouths are large, and strong enough to snap the shells of sea turtles ... or bite a boat's hull.


Great white — He's never had one on the line because of the warm waters he runs in. But there have been rare sightings.

Megalodon — A long-gone prehistoric shark that would dwarf even great whites, it likely lives now only in the imagination of Discovery Channel executives, who produce such shows as *Megalodon: The Monster Shark Lives*. But Mark says if there is still a lone brute out there, that's the fish he'd like to put a hook in.

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