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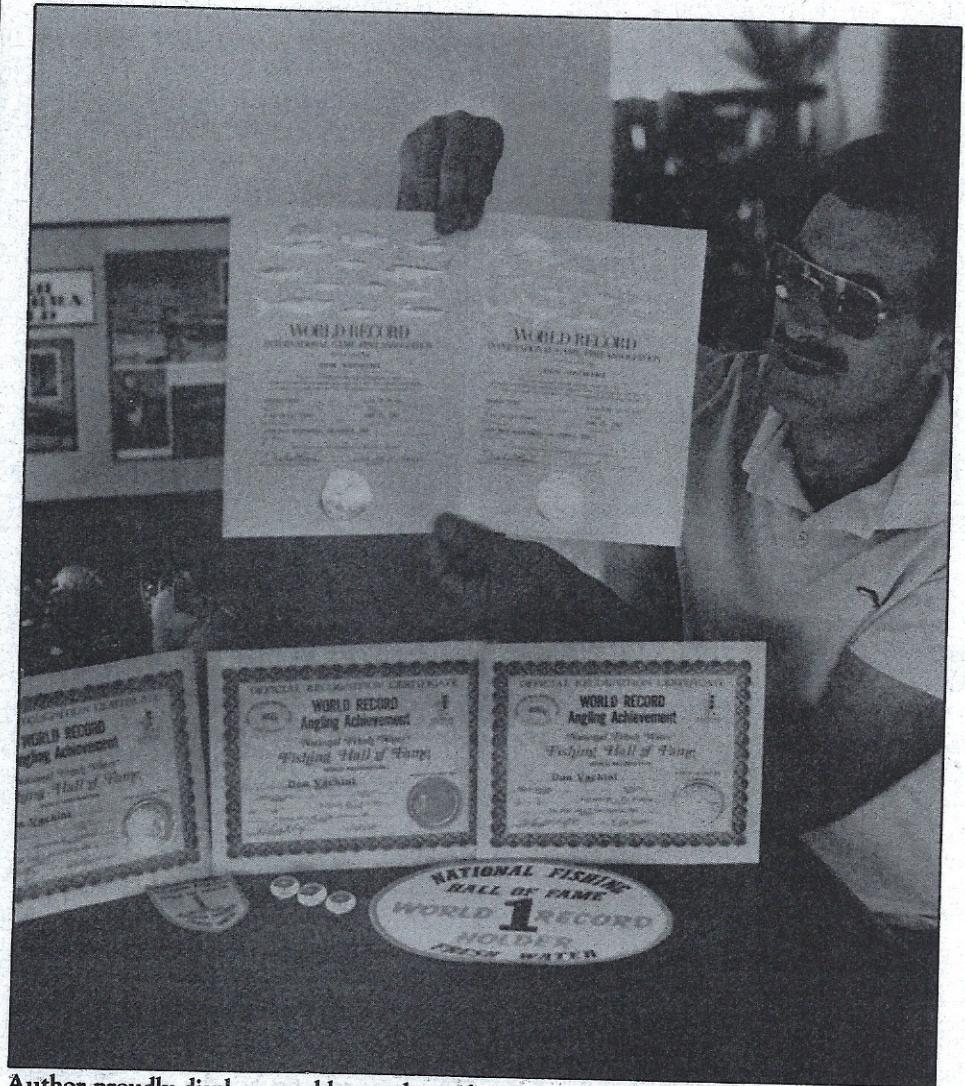
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Catch One For The Books

With planning and foresight, anglers can narrow the odds for world recognition

by Don Vachini



Author proudly displays world record certificates, pins and patches for both IGFA and HOF world records.

As soon as the fish smashed my lure I knew I'd struck it rich. Flashing its brilliant cadmium and flaming orange sides in the crystalline water, the hefty golden trout made several spirited runs, testing both tackle and nerves. Moments after netting, my hunch

proved prophetic as the girthy specimen tipped my hand held scale at one pound, ten ounces, eclipsing the old world record by five ounces. Exalting from the lake's shoreline near 12,000 feet, I was both literally and figuratively on top of the world!

Though it is more of an obsession with some than it is with others, we all dream of catching the big one—a fish capable of putting us among the elite in angling annals. Up until about four years ago, I thought that establishing a standard with either the International Game Fish Association (IGFA) or the National Freshwater Fishing Hall of Fame (HOF), two non-profit organizations which sanction world angling records, was a pie-in-the-sky type venture. However, as I found out firsthand, with a little extra time and effort, it was easier than I thought to achieve angling renown.

Awareness, or lack of it, has spelled defeat for many potential champions. While numerous record fish have been eaten, others simply have not been submitted. Though some anglers find it too much trouble to fill out the required applications, take the necessary photos and have it properly weighed, many just don't know how to go about submitting fish for record consideration.

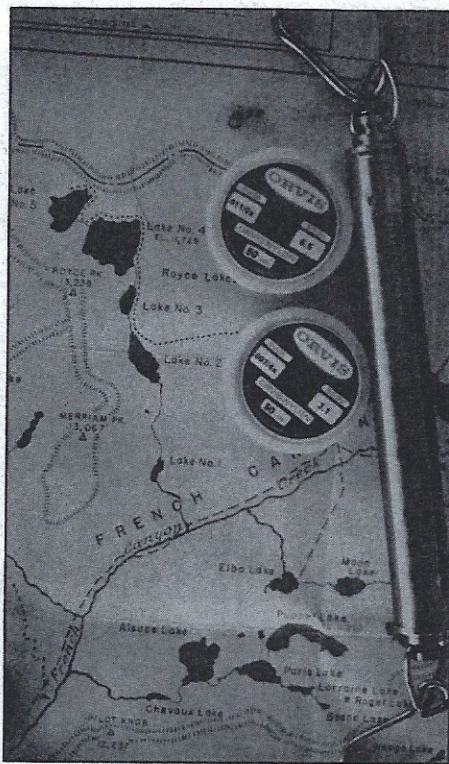
To have an authentic chance at these ultimate angling awards, one must use foresight and planning. The first step is obtaining and reviewing the rules and regulations for world record procedures *before* fishing. Both organizations have virtually the same guidelines but differ slightly in their application requirements. Become familiar with their regulations on rods, reels, lines, leaders, hooks and acceptable techniques. Their annual updates should also be consulted. *World Record Game Fish*, published by the IGFA and *Freshwater Angling Record*, by the HOF, list current standards for all game fish species. Free to members, they are available upon request for a small fee.

Upon reviewing the two books, it becomes obvious that there are actually three types of world records to shoot for. Besides the all-tackle category, which is for the biggest fish of a particular species, there are line and fly rod classes as well which recognize the largest species taken on various sized lines and tippets. These two probably offer the most genuine chance at entering the books.

Possibly the most common misconception is that record fish must be big. As a matter of fact, many line and tippet classes reveal either small weights holding down the position or vacancies. By selecting a species and then targeting a particular line or tippet class with beatable weights or vacancies, the choice is narrowed considerably and the odds for a record increase. True to form in my case, a quick glance at the golden trout section exposed weights between one and two pounds in the heavier lines and vacancies in the fly division so I set my sights on these. The books are dotted with patterns consistent with these findings (to fill a vacancy, the fish need only

weigh a minimum of one pound in most cases).

Once a particular line or fly rod class is pinpointed, the angler should carry a selection of line and/or tippets corresponding to that category. A line or leader should slightly *under* test the specific class you are trying for because any line *over* testing disqualifies the catch for that particular category. The lighter line leaves some room for error. When setting the IGFA 12-pound record, I used 10-pound tippet, for the 8-pound class, 6-pound tippet and for the 4-pound class, 3-pound tippet was my choice.



Pre-trip planning includes lining up a certified scale before the trip and proper lines to fit the targeted class.

Just before leaving on a trip, I phone both organizations to get an up to the minute report for the species I'm after.

Aside from hooking and landing a qualifier, the biggest obstacle is getting the fish weighed quickly on a certified scale. According to Mike Leech, Executive Committee Member of the IGFA, this factor alone disqualifies many potential records. "Beyond any doubt, the correct weight must be established for the record to be accepted," he emphasized.

Try to locate a business with a certified scale before you fish, preferably nearby where you're operating. Sporting goods stores, meat markets, post offices and marinas are good choices.

While finding a suitable scale is not that big a problem near civilization, it sure is for backcountry anglers fishing days away from the nearest humans. While California's vast John Muir Wilderness

contains some of the best golden trout angling in the world, I rarely see people in some of its more remote sections, which take the better part of two days to reach. In these cases, both organizations allow the use of portable scales, provided it is certified. I carry a Chatillon Model IN-12, the only hand held brand accepted by both groups. It is checked for accuracy both before and after each trip by the local Department of Weights and Measures. To date, my spring scale has successfully verified seven world records for my son, Jason, and me.

Photo skills also come into play, as the fish must be shown clearly in a variety of poses. For identification purposes, a clear, sharp closeup of the whole fish must be taken showing tips of fins and other notable features. The whole fish together with the scale and weight clearly showing must be included plus another snapshot depicting the angler, side view of the fish and rod and reel used to subdue the fish. "Without pictures, we cannot accept the application," informed Bob Kutz, Executive Officer of the HOF. "Good quality pictures not only help us to positively identify the species but speeds up the whole process," he added.

The application itself must be filled out clearly with all the proper signatures included plus any additional notes which help explain any circumstances out of the ordinary. When backpacking, for instance, I always have to explain the use of my scale, including certification papers, my specific location in the backcountry, members of my party, etc.

Required line samples must be included along with the application and photo packet. When all this is completed, the application must be notarized, signed and mailed within 60 days (the HOF allows 90 days) of the catch date.

Fishing for records has gained popularity in recent years, not just for the international notoriety but for the financial rewards as well. Berkley and Company of Spirit Lake, Iowa, which has spent well over \$1 million on its past world record program, now offers a \$10,000 incentive for any all-tackle IGFA record caught while using their Trilene line (the record must be from a special list of 40 gamefishes listed by the company).

For more information contact either: IGFA, 3000 East Las Olas Blvd. Fort Lauderdale, FL 33316; or National Freshwater Fishing Hall of Fame, Box 33, Hall of Fame Drive, Hayward, WI 54843.

Both fortunate and lucky to have landed six golden trout which established line and tippet global status, I feel the process, though time consuming, is worth it. I wear the pins, patches and display the certificates symbolizing world recognition with pride. By maintaining an awareness of the record books, pinpointing a target and formulating a plan, you too will increase your chances of catching one for the book. □