

Nothing to Brag About

Getting back to your roots,
good for the angler's soul

All winter long my buddy has been trying to get me to come over to the public-use seawall adjacent to his apartment in St. Pete. He had been raving about the trout bite all winter, claiming that some nights they were catching fish on almost every cast. The ladyfish could get rather thick, he'd mention, but live shrimp free-lined or under a float were producing some banner nights on all tides. I was either too busy, or I just couldn't handle that cross-county rush-hour traffic, I'd tell him, turning down offer after offer all season long. This particular Monday though, with Monday Night Football done and nothing exciting going on at home, I gave in and headed over the bridge.

Equipped with four dozen shrimp, two spinning rods, a fly rod and a few pops, I figured I could make this fun, no-matter what the outcome might be. I was correct - "with a little help from my friends", as the Beatles would say.

At just around 5:30 p.m. the tide was already in, stagnant, and ready to make its move back out. So, I had missed the big incoming that to me promised the best possible bite. No worries though, I would just set up, wait for the water to start moving and hope for the best. My good friends and locals there, Jon and Teresa, turned the corner with libations and rods in hand, wearing big smiles since I had finally made it over.

Jon was right, the ladyfish were everywhere and maybe crowding out the trout. You simply couldn't keep your shrimp in the water for more than a minute before those feisty little fish would grab your bait. Quality table fare, they are not. Rod-benders, well, if you only care about action, they can't be beat.

It was at this point in the night that I broke out my 8-weight fly rod and began to play with them, trying for a bigger and bigger fish. Then it finally happened. I hooked up with a pretty 16" trout on my beat up fly. It would be the only trout of the night but I didn't even care. It wasn't really about the quantity or the quality of fish - but more of getting in touch with the local roots or fishing. We all don't start out catching 20-pound snook on a new 24-foot *Pathfinder*, now do we.

Night had set in and the outgoing

for a wonderful, unforgettable gathering. Some folks began to feed their ladyfish catches to large, lingering blue herons. Others, like Teresa, took to reading fishing magazines. It was a community feeling that is mostly absent in my North Tampa neighborhood.

And then my line came tight again. This time a beautiful, healthy little schoolie redfish had eaten my bait and continued to up the species count. I was, of course, now wondering where that elusive snook might be and

thinking that this story would have a different theme. But no slam this time.

In all actuality we really caught nothing to talk about. But here it is. And I'm sure all you anglers have had trips like this. It feels good to get back to your roots - the pure fun - the humbling times. What a wonderful world it is at the seawall, whether in your own backyard, at the local park, or just along the side of the road somewhere. Heck, with all the focus on fishing from the boat these days, I had almost forgotten where it all started.

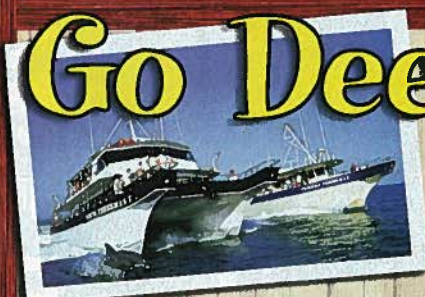


tide was beginning to rip. This, I had hoped, would bring a shift in action and maybe some "better" and bigger fish. It did, sort of. With legs dangled over the seawall edge and Jon and I now joined by his neighbor, "Pepper", we talked of the future and days gone by. Stories of trophy fish caught off this very seawall. Right then, my rod smacked down from its mangrove prop and the line came tight. Finally, I thought, a nice trout, red or snook has inhaled my shrimp.

It was nothing of the sort though. It could have, however, if the IGFA had a record for this category, be the single largest pinfish ever landed on Florida's west coast. As disappointed as I was that my catch turned out to be what is usually my grouper bait, I was shocked at the size of this fish - a pound if not more. There was more laughter from the growing group on the seawall.

Jon's brother showed up, followed by other residents enjoying the same nightly ritual. It truly no longer mattered what we caught as the perfect temperature, great company and constant tight lines made

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