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Winners declared in Guy Harvey Ultimate Shark Challenge

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by [Staff Report](#)



Robert Moore, Sean Paxton, Zac Gerzeny, Dr. Robert Huerter Wayne Paxton

Photo: Mote Marine

The Guy Harvey Ultimate Shark Challenge wrapped up Sunday at Mote Marine Laboratory and Aquarium with the presentation of a \$10,000 grand prize check to team Pole Dancer.

The team's anglers - Wayne Nichols and Zac Gerzeny - won the Challenge by collecting the most points for the types and sizes of the sharks they caught and released Saturday and Sunday during the final round of the Challenge. The first round took place April 30-May 2 from Burnt Store Marina in Charlotte Harbor.

Gerzeny, who boosted his team's score by catching his first great hammerhead shark, said "This is my dream, ever since I can remember."

But the real winners in this all-release shark fishing tournament were the sharks, said the organizers, scientists, anglers and conservationists who came together to create a successful event. The Guy Harvey Ultimate Shark Challenge was designed to be a "next generation" model for shark fishing competitions that supported shark protection while still providing spectators and anglers a thrilling event.

"I love the idea of catch and release," said co-winner Nichols. "There's no sense in hanging up a dead shark if you don't have to. With Mote and Guy Harvey it's a winning combination all around."

During the Challenge, anglers competed by catching, tagging and releasing sharks. Mote scientists also tagged four of the sharks caught by the anglers with electronic tracking devices so the sharks' movements could be followed long after their releases.

Sharks satellite-tagged during the finale:

- 7-foot, 6-inch female great hammerhead shark
- 7-foot, 2-inch female great hammerhead shark
- 6-foot, 6-inch male bull shark

Sharks satellite-tagged during the qualifying round:

- 8-foot, 2-inch female bull shark



Jack Morris, Bob Hueter and John Tyminski tag a hammerhead shark.

The tournament was the brainchild of organizers Brooks and Sean Paxton. Nicknamed "The Shark Brothers," the Paxtons have long been supporters of shark conservation. "This tournament has been a belief and a passion for a lot of people," Sean Paxton said. "We're really excited to launch the next generation shark release tournament by combining sport, science and conservation - and doing it effectively and collaboratively."

Congratulations to all teams that fished in the Grand Championship Finale!

- First place: Team Pole Dancer
- Second place: Team Redzone
- Third Place: Team Peter's Restaurant
- Fourth place: Team Chubby'z
- Fifth place: Team Liquid Assets

Throughout the two-day event, [live video](#) from the water was beamed periodically into Mote Aquarium's Immersion Cinema. In the theater, shark scientist Jayne Gardiner explained what was happening. On Saturday, dozens of spectators watched as Dr. Robert Hueter, director of Mote's renowned Center for Shark Research, Senior Scientist Jack Morris and Adjunct Scientist John Tyminski attached a satellite tag to the dorsal fin of a 7-foot, six-inch great hammerhead. After the great fish was measured and determined to be a female, she was released.

"In the 30 years I've been a shark researcher, the landscape has changed for sharks," Hueter said. "We used to attend kill tournaments and use them as an opportunity to gather scientific samples. But today, so many species are depleted that I've been concerned about kill tournaments for a long time. I really welcomed the opportunity to work with the organizers of the Guy Harvey Ultimate Shark Challenge on a new model that would involve releasing sharks during a fishing tournament."

For shark tournaments, the Guy Harvey Ultimate Shark Challenge bucks the tradition of having shark carcasses on a dock for spectators to marvel at. Instead, spectators can follow the tagged fish over the next few months as they transmit their movements back to Mote.

Wendy Benchley, widow of [Jaws author, Peter Benchley](#), was at Mote for the tournament. "It's a much more exhilarating feeling to have a live animal to tag and release -- so I have to say bravo to everyone who has made this tournament happen," she said. "I think this is the wave of the future."

In addition to Mote, the Paxtons and event co-chair Capt. Robert Moore, the Ultimate Shark Challenge was endorsed by the Guy Harvey Ocean Foundation, the Humane Society of the United States, Shark Free Marinas and Fishpond USA fishing products.

"I'm proud and honored on behalf of the Humane Society of the United States and our 11 million members to endorse the Guy Harvey Ultimate Shark Challenge," said John Grandy, HSUS vice president.

Steve Stock, president of the [Guy Harvey Ocean Foundation](#), was also thrilled with the event's success. "There's no need to kill sharks in today's world," he said. "We're conservationists, not preservationists and we need to act more responsibly on the water by supporting catch and release shark fishing events like this."