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TRIAD ANGLER HOOKS WINNING MARLIN

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By LARRY KEECH, Staff Writer

GREENSBORO -- Here's a fish story, and this time it's really true. Tom Townes of Greensboro reeled in a 68.5-pound marlin -- and \$830,000.

By winning a 43-minute fight with the white marlin last week, Townes helped earn \$830,000 in prize money for his boat's 10-man crew in the 28th annual White Marlin Open fishing tournament. The event at Ocean City, Md., attracted 369 competing boats from all over the world.

What will he do with his share -- about \$103,000 -- of the winnings? "I'm going to take my wife and kids to Disney World," he said.

The outcome was a triumph for North Carolina -- the home of the boat and six of the crew.

The 3-year-old "Haphazard" is owned by Hap Royster, Townes' partner at Triad Commercial Properties in Greensboro. The 56-foot Custom Carolina sport fisherman model was built by Buddy Cannady and is moored at Oregon Inlet. It is captained by Daniel "Backlash" Davis of Wanchese, a coastal community near Manteo.

Jim Brady was a third Greensboro member of a crew that also included four business clients of Townes and Royster.

Townes, 38, a native of Danville, Va., has dabbled in deep-sea fishing most of his life. It was his experience that spurred his crewmates to designate him as the angler Thursday.

"It was the longest I've ever seen anyone fight a white marlin," Royster said. "It was as though that fish knew how much was at stake."

Townes, whose past catches include a 300-pound blue marlin and a 188-pound tuna, said last week's white marlin was easily the largest of that species he has fought.

"He must have jumped out of the water at least 30 times in those 43 minutes," Townes said. "In all my fishing experience, I've never felt as much pressure as I did during this fight."

The crew had paid a total of \$9,000 in entry fees for five different divisional competitions.

Townes' catch was no less of a thrill for Davis, who was still trying to establish his credentials as a captain. He's a native of Wanchese, a town with a population of about 1,000 on the southern tip of Roanoke Island, near Oregon Inlet and southeast of Manteo.

"The first time we saw the fish, we thought it might be big enough to qualify," Davis said. "The second time we saw him, we knew he was the one we were looking for. We were like, 'Oh, my God, it's him.' I was so shook up, it wasn't funny."

Next came a suspenseful, 81-mile, 3-1/2-hour return trip from the Atlantic canyon marlin beds back to Ocean City.

"When our fish qualified and they announced the prize money we stood to win, it was an awesome feeling," Davis said. "I'd never done anything like this."