

OFF THE DOCK

WITH D. A. MANN

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~ The Fish Are Laughing ~

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You started planning for this day on the water yesterday morning checking the weather, the tides, your tackle, and your game plan. Up at five, off the lift at seven, and onsite a half hour later; you are right on target. An hour later you have nothing; not even a bump. At this point, you start noticing what a beautiful morning is unfolding around you. From the blue sky to flat water, you sense a slice of serenity. You start to philosophize about just being on the water; about just relaxing; and then, you go asleep at the reel.

Well, get over yourself. You are not out here to contemplate Mother Nature. You are not out here to just cast and jig with nothing to show for it. You are out here to *catch* fish not *fish* for fish. Don't kid yourself into believing that you are on the water to tune into Mother Nature. Not so, Grasshopper, you are out here to catch fish – pure and simple. So get the Mojo in gear and quit looking at the wide open spaces. It's time to concentrate on what's at the end of your cast, hook it, and get it onboard. Make it happen. When the fish start finding you amusing, find a way to get the last laugh.

Your drag starts screaming and a few minutes later your first Pompano is on ice. Within the next hour, you'll hook a big boy and lose him at the net because you weren't in position and tried to rush it. He broke you off. Your first instinct is to chuck you rig over the side. Thankfully, you come to your senses. Learn from it. There is always

something you can learn from a screw-up so that it doesn't happen again. Shake it off. Move out into the flats and tie on a new jig. You wanted to limit-out today and now that seems impossible.

Moving up the Intracoastal, you set up your drift using the wind and tide. The incoming is slowing down fixing to go slack. Your attitude is changing towards the "positive" side when you realize that you have time to pull this off. The very next cast renews your faith. The very next drift continues to encourage you. Now with three on ice, the tide slowly turns to outgoing. Nothing for another hour; but, then the bite is on with number four gracing your net. Several Sail Cats find your jigs tantalizing and you once again get broken off, slimed, and disgusted. Boat traffic is also picking up as early afternoon approaches making fishing the channel more challenging. Another pep talk and you're once again catching. Number six hits the ice right at the buzzer when it's time to head home. It took you all day; but, you did it.

On the ride home, the scenery comes back into focus. *Now* is the time to contemplate your surroundings and appreciate the fact that you had an opportunity to enjoy the beauty of the Bay. *Now* is the time you smile for you battled back from a bad attitude to a wonderful day. You should be proud of yourself. Today was more about *you* than about fishing. Getting to know oneself is comforting; getting to like yourself is the goal. Fishing is just a means of accomplishing your dreams.

Here's where they are:

Blackburn Bay on the west side of the Intracoastal.

Markers 16 through 19.

