

FREE EVERY WEEK IN THE SUNDAY NEW YORK POST

# Page Six Magazine

AUGUST 31, 2008

EXCLUSIVE!  
MICHAEL  
STRAHAN  
on his next move:  
"I COULD BE THE  
NEW LENO"

**SUITE AND SPICY**  
Sexy staff shenanigans at  
NYC's poshest hotels

**FALL FORWARD**  
Six fabulous new looks  
and how to work them

**THE JAWS ARE OUT**  
Inside the bloody shark  
battle in Montauk

**SLICE OF HEAVEN**  
The hottest pies at  
the city's coolest  
pizza joints

ENTOURAGE STAR


# ADRIAN GRENIER

ON HANGING OUT WITH PARIS  
& HOOKING UP IN HOLLYWOOD

*Cadillac*

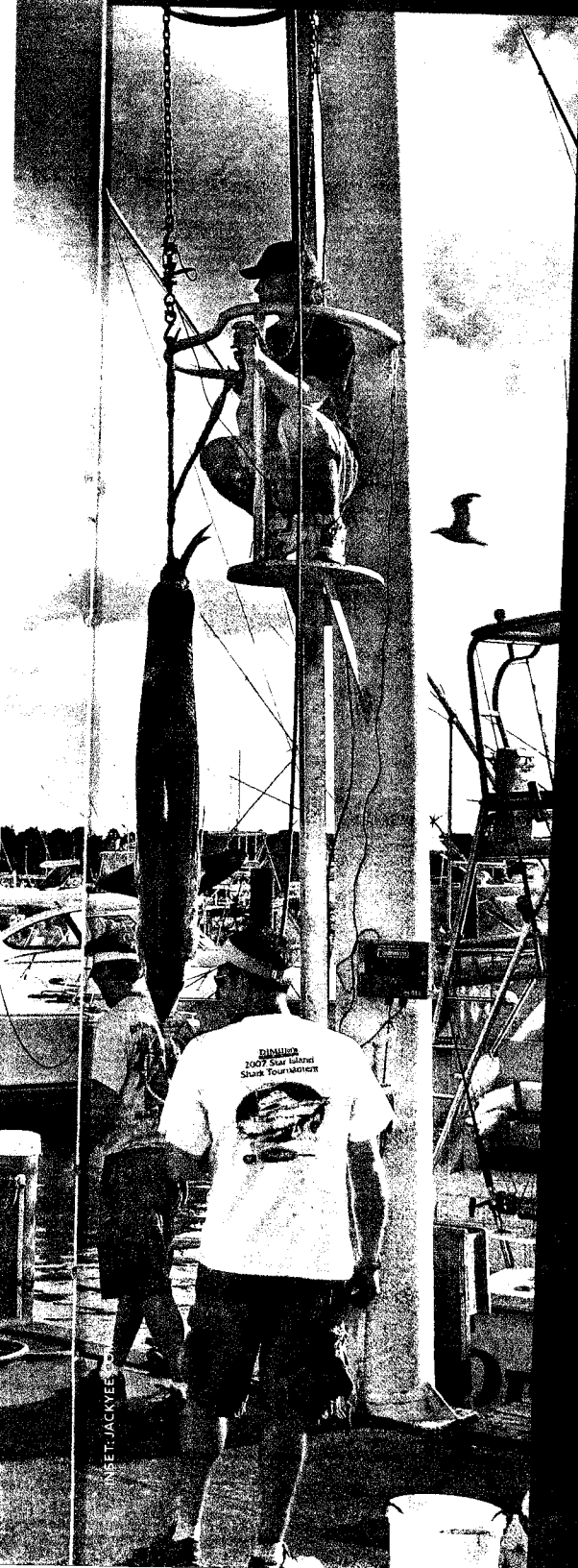
# SHA

Above: Contest entries look like a scene from *Jaws*. Right: Star Island displays a replica of a record-setting 3,427-pound catch.

 **STAR ISLAND YACHT CLUB**  
SPECIES WORLD'S LARGEST GREAT WHITE  
WEIGHT 3,427 LBS  
DATE August 6, 1986  
BOAT NAME CRICKET  
CAPTAIN FRANK MUNDUS

INSET: JACKYEE

# SHARK



*It's a bloody showdown in the Hamptons, as animal activists—including the man who inspired Jaws—battle a yacht club and big-game hunters over the macho, big-money sport of shark fishing. By Gabriel Cohen*

As protests go, this one is hardly earth-shaking—just nine men and women, two boys and one Labrador retriever, standing peaceably by a roadside on a beautiful August afternoon—but you have to give the nervy little troupe credit. They've come to Montauk, one of the premiere fishing capitals of the East Coast, in order to tell a horde of burly sportsmen how not to fish.

Just down the road, the Star Island Yacht Club's 16th Annual Mako and Thresher Mania Tournament is reaching its climax. The parking lots around the club's gray wood building are packed with family-friendly SUVs. A band churns out Top-40 hits as crowds throng a terrace bar. In back, dozens of deep-sea fishing boats line the piers, and others motor in from the ocean, packed with beefy anglers. On the main dock, a couple hundred beer-drinking spectators oooh and aah as a dead 348-pound thresher shark is hoisted above their heads. A front row of little kids gazes up wide-eyed at the bloody carcass, which, with its scythe-like tail and jagged rows of teeth, looks positively prehistoric.

The east end of Long Island is no stranger to public controversy—murderous millionaires, drunk-driving celebrities and bitter feuds between fabulously famous neighbors. But the latest conflict to hit the Hamptons is a heated battle

between those who see shark fishing as a high-stakes gamble that's as glorious as polo and those who look down on it as a barbaric, outdated evil that needs to be stopped. The 42 boat crews entered in today's competition are drawn not only by the excitement of the sport, but by the prize money: Though the official awards total some \$10,000, that booty is dwarfed by calcuttas, private side-betting pools that are promoted by the club and add up to \$150,000. At a larger, similarly protested June event at Star Island, the cash prizes reached almost a million dollars.

"I love the tournament—it's a thrill," says a stocky sport fisherman from Northport, Long Island. As for the protesters, well, he laughs before he answers. "Get a life! It's not like they're killing baby seals!"

Suddenly a buzzing fills the air and a trim, white-haired angler from Freeport, Long Island, stares up with a puzzled look. High in the sky, an airplane hired by the Humane Society of the United States tows a banner reading "End the Cruel Shark Tournament Now!" The HSUS hopes to put a stop to this and the other 20-plus such contests held across the country annually, including more than five on Long Island. Using ads, letters and aggressive targeting of tournament sponsors, the HSUS has succeeded in shutting down contests in Destin, Fla., and Marina del Rey, Calif. The organization has a team of attorneys examining the legality of calcuttas and other tournament activities.

The spectator shakes his head. "If a commercial fisherman puts a fish in his net, is he a bad guy too?"

Richard Janis, the yacht club's profoundly tan general manager, wears an annoyed squint and it's obvious that it isn't caused by today's bright sunlight alone. "It's not this mass slaughter [the protestors] make it out to be," he says. "The amount [of sharks] brought in during our tournaments is minute compared to commercial fishing." Each of the competing teams is allowed to enter only one shark in the contest each day—meaning they might catch and release several before finding their choice option—and in the end the two-day tourney yields just nine sharks that meet the official weight limits. (One captain said that he hooked six before finding one large enough to enter.)

John W. Grandy, the Humane Society's senior vice president for wildlife programs, concedes that the number of sharks caught in tournaments pales next to the commercial fishing industry's take. Estimates vary, but somewhere between 40 million and over 100 million sharks are killed globally by humans every year. Industrial ships haul in sharks that will end up on restaurant plates, and more perish in nets meant for other fish. The booming Asian market for fins (for shark fin soup, believed to have medicinal properties) has led to the widely condemned practice of finning, in which that prized part is cut off and the rest of the live shark is thrown back into the ocean, only to sink and die. The International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources estimates that 50 percent of shark species—in-

cluding makos and threshers, targets of the Star Island tournament—are "threatened with global extinction," and in the past 20 years, most species in the northwestern Atlantic declined by more than half.

Sharks may be hard to love, but as peak predators they keep ocean ecosystems in balance. Grandy's chief complaint is that tournaments add to the animal's bad rep. "They encourage the view that sharks are evil and deserve to be killed—that they don't matter," he says.

Back in the 1950s, the general public didn't think about the animals much at all. And in Montauk, where Frank Mundus pioneered the sport of shark fishing, other fishermen thought he was "nuts." Captain Mundus, a leathery, vigorous 82-year-old

Acapulco." Thus, a sport was born.

Then in 1974, along came a phenomenon called *Jaws*. The best-selling book by New York City native Peter Benchley was followed by the Steven Spielberg blockbuster movie the next year. Mundus, who claims that he was the model for the story's ornery, shark-obsessed Captain Quint, suddenly found himself with lots of competition. As the sharks turned into a symbol of big-game hunter machismo—not to mention a restaurant menu alternative to tuna and swordfish—"everybody with a boat became a shark fisherman." What's more, the success of *Jaws* fed a perception of the creatures as mindless killing machines. Even today, shark attacks make for sensational headlines. It's all too easy

## It's called sport fishing. But do anything to get that shark. It

who could give Popeye salty lessons, sits in the charter boat Cricket II, docked behind the Atlantis Marine World aquarium in Riverhead, and recalls a time when the creatures were seen by fishermen as a nuisance. "Catching sharks was considered to be picking up garbage." Mundus' shark-fishing career actually started by accident: He was casting for bluefish one day in 1951, and hooked a swimmer that put up a great fight. It turned out he'd caught a mako shark. "He ran and jumped like a marlin," Mundus says of the wildly vivid battle. "He put on a spectacular show—it was as much fun as catching a fancy fish in

to imagine that the oceans are teeming with sharks with a taste for human flesh.

But, according to the International Shark Attack File, maintained by the Florida Museum of Natural History, in 2007 just one human was killed in an unprovoked shark attack, in Melanesia, northeast of Australia. (The annual average for the past two decades is less than six.)

Back on the Star Island dock, the thresher has been lowered. Just yards from the watching children, a marine biologist slices its belly open, reaches in and yanks out the bloody heart and entrails, which she examines for scientific research. Later the

### The protestors





animal will be dumped into a wheelbarrow and carted to a filleting table, where it will be transformed into steaks for a Long Island food bank. First, though, a group of kids pokes and prods the 348-pound shark, which is nearly six feet long. The creature is the roughly the size of legendary Chicago Bears football player William "The Refrigerator" Perry.

"I want the eyeball," a boy announces.

"Ooh," says another. "Is that a bone sticking out?"

A girl punches the shark until her dad asks her to stop. "But it's dead!" she says.

He frowns. "Would you want someone punching you if you were dead?"

Proponents of the tournaments say that they give kids an opportunity to see

the tourneys. After all, a full-size replica of his world-record catch—a 3,427-pound great white—hangs above the dock at Star Island, and he's been shark fishing for almost six decades. He knows the adrenaline rush of watching a hooked, battling mako leap 15 feet out of the water. But he has never participated in a shark tournament and never will.

"It's called sport fishing," he says, "but it's murder." Mundus points out a big difference between tournaments and normal charters: They encourage fishermen to catch many more sharks, in order to come up with a potential winner. And he doesn't buy the catch-and-release argument, because most fishermen use J-shaped hooks. Mundus says that sharks

Speaking of cash, Mundus is also disturbed by what he sees as the contests' mercenary side. "Tournaments for money change the attitude of a lot of people," he grumbles. "It tears the sport right out of it—people will do anything to get that fish. It's a piece of gold."

It's 6 p.m. and this year's Star Island tournament is winding down—the last shark has been weighed and all of the blood has been sprayed off the docks. The 348-pound shark—caught by Robert Decker—turned out to be the winner in the thresher category, while Ken Seiferth's 256-pounder took the prize for makos. Despite the protests, this contest will likely be back next summer. But even if opponents fail to shut it down for good, commercial overfishing may do the trick instead.

In light of the controversy—and so many people jumping to the sharks' defense—would Peter Benchley still write *Jaws* today? It's too late to ask (he died in 2006), but his widow, Wendy, reached by phone, has an answer. "I don't think that Peter regretted *Jaws*, but he did say that he'd never write it now. He discovered that many of the behaviors he gave to the white shark were not valid."

This year, reports tell of a new worldwide trend stretching from the Cote d'Azur to the Great Barrier Reef: exploding populations of jellyfish. One reason for this severe ecological imbalance? The decline in the number of sharks.

Hmm, *Jellyfish*...It doesn't have quite the same ring as *Jaws*, but Steven Spielberg, are you listening?

ing. But it's murder. People will  
ark. It tears the sport right out of it."

wildlife up close. Richard Janis has been quoted as comparing it to "a petting zoo."

Bill Crain is not impressed. The mild-mannered 64-year-old is president of the East Hampton Group for Wildlife, the protest group down the road, and a professor of child psychology. "The kids see blood and guts," he says. "The main education here is the hardening of their hearts and natural empathy for animals."

Tournament proponents also contend that most of the caught fish are released alive. But this claim is disputed by a surprising source. You might guess that Frank Mundus would be an advocate of

tend to swallow bait whole; during their subsequent struggles, those hooks lodge in and tear apart their stomachs. "If a boat catches 12 sharks with J-hooks, 10 of them will die. Sure some of them swim off," he says disgustedly. "If I shot you through the belly you'd walk 10 feet! But then they go down. They're crabmeat." For years Mundus has been arguing for the use of circular hooks, which can slide out of the sharks' stomachs without doing harm and then snag on their jaws. He says that few fishermen use them. "The circular hooks cost more, and they don't want to go into their pocketbooks."

## The sportsmen

The winning shark at Star Island's contest weighed in at 348 pounds.

Argue that tournaments give kids a chance to view wildlife up close.

Though the tournaments' shark meat is offered to area food banks, some refuse the fillets as a vote of protest.

nypost.com/pages/...