

Sailfish still biting and Vitamin Sea Too still leading

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KEY WEST — The boats just kept coming and coming, until the fleet surrounded Vitamin Sea Too out on the Atlantic Ocean on Thursday morning.

They played follow the leader on the second day of the World Sailfish Championship, as one crew member counted 72 boats in sight, roughly 20 to 25 miles west of Key West. Despite the claustrophobia, Vitamin Sea Too caught six more sailfish to extend its lead heading into Saturday's final.

"It was like the cavalry came," said Mike Reiser of the Pompano Beach team.

The crew woke up around 4:30 a.m. and ended the day still atop the leaderboard (unofficially) because of the critical early hours out on the flat waters. They caught five sailfish by 9:52 a.m. and then the long wait began under the hot sun.

"We found our own little spot," owner Tim Maddock said. "We knew it was coming."

Minimal winds passed through on another warm

day as Vitamin Sea Too returned to the general area where its crew landed six catches on Wednesday. The majority of the 110-boat field had the same idea and converged on a hot spot that welcomed approximately 30 teams the previous day.

Capt. Jonathan Roberts, scanning the scene from Mr. Casey, stopped counting after 78 or 80 boats.

"It was a Wal-Mart parking lot out there," said Roberts.

If so, then there's one more shopping day left. The rush on Thursday featured 153 catches, a jump from 130 a day earlier, all without the benefit of a decent wind.

"Phenomenal," Maddock said of his team's performance. "You had to fend everybody else."

Vitamin Sea Too, which also includes Jon Krieg, Bryan Schultz, Chris Zidar and Mike Dinnen, separated itself from the rest of the field after 15 hours of fishing. Sea Wolf finished the day in second place overall with nine catches, while Main Attraction I is running third, trailing in time with nine catches.

As the bite improved, five other teams registered six catches on Thursday: Counter Culture, Que

Mas, Catch 22, Sea Wolf and Main Attraction II.

Contender One placed 12th after the first day, raising three red flags to signal its total catches. The boat avoided the traffic jam on Thursday and wound up with two catches.

"Slick and calm," Wayne Savage said of the conditions. "It was killing us."

Rod Holder won the 2005 championship with 14 catches, a number likely to be topped by Saturday afternoon. A different crew came down from Coral Gables to Key West to defend the boat's title. Rod Holder entered Thursday near the top of the leaderboard in ninth place with three catches.

But after three hours on the water, the boat developed a mechanical problem, possibly with the exhaust valve. The tight squeeze of all those boats packed together made it difficult to maneuver, and Rod Holder headed back to the dock without a catch, making arrangements to use a spare boat the team brought down in case of emergency on Saturday.

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