

R U N N I N G W I T H KING MACKEREL

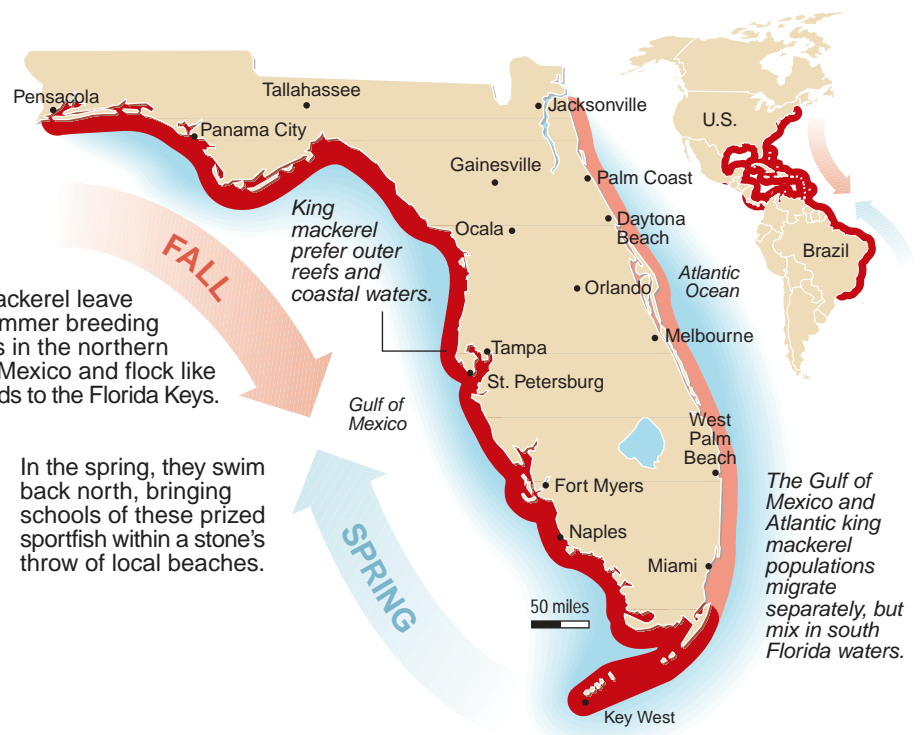
Anglers up and down the west coast of Florida have been waiting all winter for kingfish to return. The wait is over. Kingfish are swarming around the gulf coast, and anglers are finally getting their chance to go head-to-head with this great fighter.

GRAPHIC BY AMANDA RAYMOND

TEXT BY TERRY TOMALIN



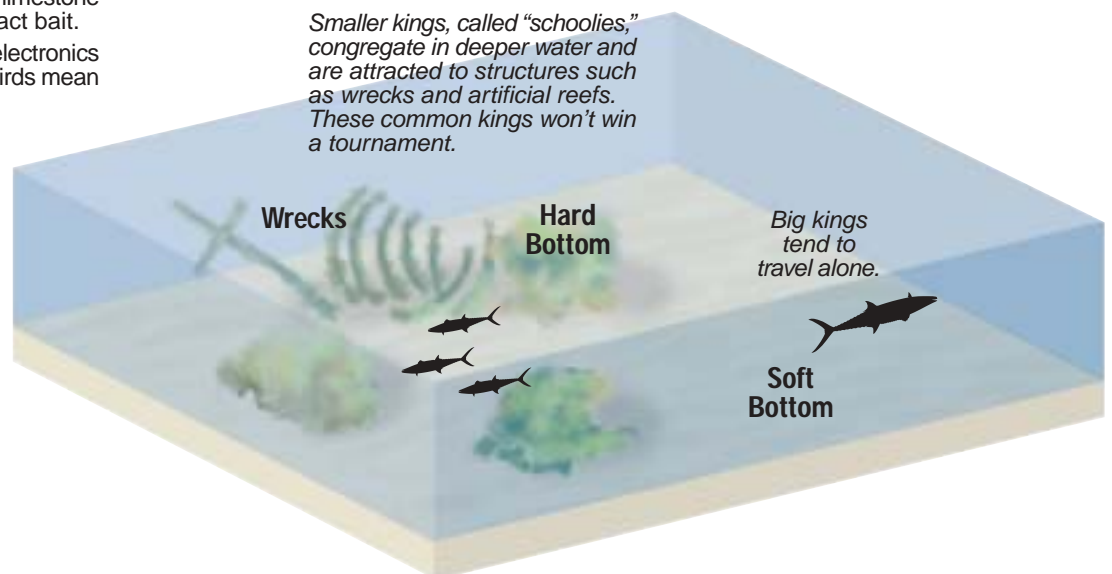
This graphic was compiled with the help of Capt. Jay Mastry. Mastry, a Pinellas County native, is a seasoned competitor and once caught a 51-pound King mackerel during a tournament. Mastry is also an avid tarpon fisherman and frequent competitor in the Suncoast Tarpon Roundup.



Where to look

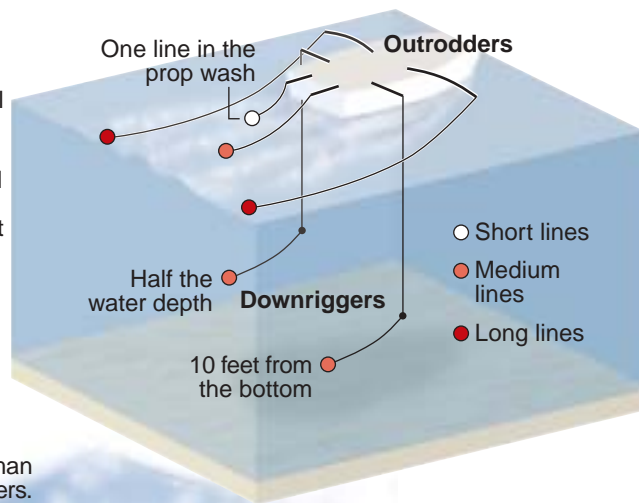
Anglers use depth recorders to mark patches of "hard bottom," large limestone outcroppings that tend to attract bait. One way to find kings without electronics is to look for diving sea birds. Birds mean bait, and bait means kings.

- Use a GPS to get the exact locations of bites.
- Keep a log to record bite locations.
- Keep a VHF and cell phone nearby to keep in touch with other anglers.



The battle plan

Most anglers prefer trolling live or artificial bait, but some like to anchor and get a chum slick going to attract the kings. When trolling live bait, keep your speed at 1 to 1 1/2 knots. Too much speed will cause the bait to "drag." Instead, you want it to swim naturally. If you're moving too fast, drop a few 5-gallon buckets behind the boat and let them drag. Many big kings have been caught when boats were idling.



The crew
A driver, two anglers, a gaff man and two castnetters.

Trolling pattern

To cover the entire water column, run six lines off the stern of the boat. Rig four flat lines: two long, one medium and one short. Rig two downriggers, one at half depth and the other 10 feet from bottom.

King mackerels can be found in depths between 15 and 150 feet.

Equipment

- Serious anglers carry 10 rods, including two spares. Here's a list of recommended tackle:
- Two downriggers, two outriggers.
 - 8 rods with 20-pound test and 2 reserve rods with 16-pound test. Change the lines every spring and fall.
 - 500 yards on a Shimano TLD 20/40.
 - 300 yards on a Shimano TLD 15.30 for reserve reels.
 - 12-foot length of fluorocarbon leader, attached to standard mono for stinger rigs.
 - Two 12-foot, 1-inch mesh nets.
 - One 12-foot, 3/8-inch mesh net.
 - 20 Gold hook Sabiki rigs for bait.
 - 100 stinger rigs (per tournament).
 - 12-foot gaff, 8-foot backup gaff.
 - Chum bucket and chum bag, with several blocks of chum.

Tying your stinger rigs

Start tying them before the season starts. Carry at least 100 per tournament, and check them each time you change bait. To rig your line:

- Use a nail knot from fluorocarbon leader to a 50-pound SPRO #8 swivel.
- Use two feet of 31-pound test #3 stainless steel coffee wire.
- Attach a 2/0 Eagle Claw Laser Sharp Live Bait Hook.
- Add a 6-inch length of 40-pound test #4 wire.
- Finish with a #64 Eagle Claw Laser Sharp 4X Strong Bronze treble hook.



Chum bucket

Keep a 5-gallon bucket of fresh dead shad for the Clearwater hard bottom, with a bag of balloons. Bait that hits the floor instead of the live well should go into the chum bucket.

Schoolie, smoker or tournament winner?

<p>24 inches long</p>	<p>"Schoolies" 8- to 15-pounders are called "schoolies" and tend to congregate in deeper water. Kingfish must be 24 inches long, and anglers may keep two a day.</p>	<p>40 pounds</p>	<p>"Smokers" Big kingfish are called "smokers" because they burn up the drag on a fishing reel. These kings weigh 30 pounds or more and take the top prizes. They are often found close to land, sometimes within reach of the beach. Last fall, three winning fish were caught inside Egmont Key.</p>	<p>93 pounds, about 6 feet</p>
				<p>World record Scomberomus Rus Cavalla caught a 93-pound king mackerel in San Juan, Puerto Rico on April 18, 1999.</p>

Live Bait

Successful tournament anglers often fish exclusively with live bait. Here are some of the most popular bait fish:

