

# IFA Championship Winning Pattern Gatlin and Franklin Relied on Single School for Win Wednesday, November 07, 2007

*(Editor's note: This is the first part of a 2-parter on Wayne Gatlin and Branden Franklin winning last weekend's IFA Redfish Tour Championship out of Panama City, Fla.)*

For a solid month it seems every major redfish tournament held on the Gulf Coast has been hampered by strong winds, rough seas and tornado-spawning thunderstorms.

The teams fishing the IFA Redfish Tour Championship in Panama City last weekend got a pleasant surprise in the form of light winds, great water clarity and lots of sun – a sight-fisherman's paradise.

Wayne Gatlin and Branden Franklin took advantage of the favorable conditions and fished a shallow-water school pattern both days. They followed up their hefty 15.27-pound bag from day 1 with a solid weight of 12.20 pounds on day 2 to get the win. Here's how they did it.

## **Practice: The Waiting Game**

Gatlin is a firefighter in his hometown of Brandon, Fla. and Franklin, a Tampa resident, works for Power-Pole. Their schedules only allowed for 2 days of solid practice.

They fished this venue last year and had plans to check on some areas they were familiar with. But before making a long run and looking for fish in far-off places, Gatlin decided to make a quick stop near the launch and explore an area that stuck out in his mind from the year before.

They eased along the shoreline of a horseshoe-shaped cove and "weren't expecting to see much," Gatlin said. What they found surprised them.

Franklin: "We ran into that cove and that school of reds was just sitting there waiting on us. There were easily 600 fish in that school. Probably more."

They tossed a soft-plastic jerkbait into the school just to see how the fish would react and immediately pulled out "two perfect redfish."

"We knew we shouldn't beat up that school," Franklin said. "So we just sat there and started watching them."

Gatlin noted: "We found that school first thing in the morning on our first day of pre-fishing. At that point, all we could do was just sit there and watch them, and hope they didn't move."

On their second day of sitting they realized they would have some company on tournament day.

"There were at least six or seven other boats in there," Gatlin said. "We knew we weren't going to be alone on that school so we just hoped that everyone would work together and it wouldn't get too crowded."

*(Editor's note: Last year's IFA Championship-winning team – which include AC Lockyer, who competed again this year – also won by fishing a massive school near the ramp.)*

Gatlin and Franklin knew the school held quality fish, but Gatlin was still wary heading into the first day of competition.



Photo: IFA Redfish Tour/Mike Lott

**On the final day, Wayne Gatlin (left) and Branden Franklin boated two fish by the skin of their teeth.**

"Those schools can be so finicky," he said. "We had some good fish in this same tournament last year and then the conditions changed on tournament day and we didn't catch a single fish. We were just hoping everything would stay the same."

Franklin noted that typically "13 or 14 pounds is enough to win (a 1-dayer in Panama City). We knew that school had winning fish in it, so we felt pretty good."

### **Competition: School's In**

> Day 1: 2, 15.27 (2nd)

Gatlin's anticipation was growing by the minute as the sun crept up over Panama City on day 1 of competition.

"That first morning, nothing changed," Gatlin said. "The conditions had been holding steady for about a week, and that first day everything was exactly the same. When I saw that, I knew we had a good chance to catch them and I started getting pretty excited."

They drew launch number 23 and were out of the gate fairly early. But despite launching near the front of the pack, they arrived to their spot to see several boats already working the school.

"We got to the school and there were already four or five boats sitting there catching them," Gatlin said. "We pulled in right beside them and we weren't there 5 minutes and it just started going off. We were catching them almost every cast.

"I can't even tell you how many we caught. I lost track at 10."

Gatlin and Franklin worked with their fellow competitors to corral the school between the boats.

"Eight boats were in there the first day, and we formed a crescent shape around the school and pushed it up against the bank," Gatlin said. "Everybody was catching them. It was really just a matter of who would get lucky and get the two biggest fish."

After culling up several times they eventually settled on what they thought was a 15-pound sack. "We figured that would be plenty enough to get us in the Top 5," Gatlin said.

They were right. Their 15.27-pound total put them in 2nd place and just 0.04 behind the day 1 leaders Phil Rizzo and Mike Futch.

### **Day 2: 3 bites + 2 fish = 1st place**

> Day 2: 2, 12.20 (4, 27.47)



Photo: IFA Redfish Tour/Mike Lott

Here are Gatlin and Franklin on the morning of day 2 in their Power-Pole boat.

You'd think after the redfish slugfest they experienced on the first day they would feel pretty good about their chances on day 2. Gatlin said otherwise: "I was a nervous wreck."

He had concerns about how well the school bite would hold up after being pressured so heavily the day before. The boats also launched in reverse order, so they knew they'd be one of the last boats to get to the school.

They idled into the spot on day 2 to find their biggest fear had become a reality.

"My mouth just dropped open and all I could say was, 'Oh my god,'" Gatlin said. "I think we counted 23 boats sitting on that one school."

They squeezed into the crowd and quickly put their first redfish in the boat. Shortly after, Gatlin broke off another solid fish just as the morning bite was shutting down. They sat there for the next 2 hours hoping the school would get active again, but their nerves got the best of them.

"We just kept sitting there – waiting and waiting," Gatlin said. "Finally, we couldn't take it anymore and we went to another spot."

That was a move they would eventually regret. They fished their B spot and didn't even get a bite, so they decided to return and check on the school.

"As soon as we pulled back on the school everybody was yelling at us, 'You just missed it. As soon as you guys left they went crazy!' I couldn't believe it," Franklin said.

They probed the area hoping to entice one last bite, but the spot seemed to have lost its life. "Everything went dead," Gatlin said. "The water slicked off, mullet stopped jumping, the fish stopped biting. It was dead."

With just one fish in the boat at about 12:30, their desperation was mounting when out of nowhere, the school showed a flurry of action on the opposite corner of the flat from where Gatlin and Franklin were fishing.

"Guys started flying over there with their trolling motors on high," Gatlin said. "We just stayed where we were and waited. They ended up scaring the school right to us. The fish swam right in front of our boat, and that's when we got our second fish.

"We thought we had about 13 pounds and we knew the fishing had been tough on day 2 so we were feeling pretty good, but we didn't want to get our hopes up."

They overestimated their weight by nearly a pound, but it didn't matter. Their 12.20-pound sack gave them right at 27 1/2 pounds for both days. That was enough to bump them up one spot and secure the win.

# IFA Championship Winning Pattern

## Gatlin and Franklin Went From Zeros to Heroes

**Friday, November 09, 2007**

*(Editor's note: This is the second part of a 2-parter on Wayne Gatlin and Branden Franklin winning last weekend's IFA Redfish Tour Championship out of Panama City, Fla.)*

In 2006, Wayne Gatlin and Branden Franklin failed to weigh in a single redfish in the IFA Redfish Tour Championship, which also was held in Panama City. Determined not to repeat their dismal performance from last year, they came into this tournament looking for redemption.

How does it feel to get the win?

"This feels real good," Gatlin said. "I really can't even explain it. It's like it hasn't really sunk in yet."

Franklin said it was "awesome. This is a once-in-a-lifetime feeling, that's for sure. From not weighing a fish here last year to coming out and winning it this year – we definitely went from zeros to heroes. That feels good."

Here's how they caught their fish.

### Winning Presentation

They didn't have to travel very far to find their fish. In fact, they probably could have paddled to their destination if they had to. They were making a short 3-mile run to an area just south of the launch.

"We were using my Ranger Banshee Extreme so we wanted to find something close and shallow," Franklin said. "We knew we weren't going to be making any 100-mile runs."

Franklin described the area they were fishing as "a horseshoe-shaped lagoon with a shallow sandbar on the outside." The bottom was soft with "a little bit of grass, but not much."

He noted that a deeper trough, "about 4 or 5 feet deep," ran parallel to the shoreline. "That deeper trough sloped up toward the shoreline and got shallow right on the bank. That school was moving back and forth right on that transition," he said.

Gatlin: "The water was a little off-color because a lot of mullet were in the area stirring it up. We weren't actually sight fishing, but we were watching for those (redfish) to wake and push water when they moved. When that school came up, it looked like a giant red circle."

Gatlin and Franklin threw white Mister Twister Exude RT Slugs on 1/8- and 1/4-ounce Mission Fishin jigheads.

"All you had to do was put it in front of them," Gatlin said. "That school wasn't spooky at all. On that first day there were probably more than 200 fish caught out of that single school, and it really didn't seem to bother them much. I was amazed."

When the school was moving, they would throw their baits into the school and work them back with a fast retrieve to draw strikes. During the down times, when the school wasn't actively feeding, they slowly hopped the RT Slug along the bottom around the outer edges of the school.



Photo: IFA Redfish Tour/Mike Lott

**When the fish weren't actively feeding, Wayne Gatlin (left) and Branden Franklin slowly hopped the RT Slug on the outer edges of the school.**

## Winning Gear

Gatlin and Franklin used the same gear.

- > Rod – 7' 6" Kistler Helium spinning rod, medium-heavy.
- > Reels – Daiwa Tierra 2500
- > Line – 15-pound braided line
- > Leader – 3 feet of 25-pound fluorocarbon
- > Terminal Tackle – 1/8- and 1/4-ounce Mission Fishin jigheads (unpainted)
- > Bait – Mister Twister Exude RT Slug in white

Why white? "We throw white baits in all sorts of conditions," Gatlin said. "Anytime it's sunny I think white is a good choice. The water was a little dirty where we were, but that white plastic still showed up pretty well. I have a lot of confidence in that color."

## Winning Rig

- > Boat – Ranger Banshee Extreme
- > Motor – 60hp Evinrude E-TEC
- > Trolling Motor – [Minn Kota](#)
- > Electronics – none
- > Other – Power-Pole
- > Wrap – Power-Pole

## Main Factor In Their Success

- > Gatlin – "Believing in that spot and sticking with it. When we went in there and saw all those boats, we were tempted to try something else. But we stuck with that school and it paid off for us."
- > Franklin – "Determination. We had some rough tournaments this year, and after getting skunked in Panama City last year, we were determined to do well in this tournament. Our first day of pre-fishing it was raining and cold, but we stayed out there and watched those fish. We wanted to win this one."

## Performance Edge

- > Gatlin – "Branden's Ranger Banshee. Our spot was protected by a shallow sandbar, and a lot of boats got stuck trying to get in and out of there. We never had to worry about the tide going out or anything like that. We fished it as long as we wanted and made it out fine every time."
- > Franklin – "Definitely the Power-Pole. When you're fishing a school like that, you absolutely can't use an anchor. The first day, there were eight boats on the school, and they were all Ranger boats and they all had Power-Poles."

## Notable

- > Gatlin won the 2005 Titusville, Fla. IFA event with a different partner.
- > Franklin is the warranty and tech support manager for Power-Pole. "If you've ever had an issue with your Power-Pole, you probably talked to me," he said.
- > Gatlin and Franklin also fish the FLW Redfish Series.