

Jimmy Johnson's Atlantic City "Quest for the Ring" Championship Fishing Week with Jimmy Johnson and Tod Roy

Transcript

J: Hello and welcome to Meet AC's newest podcast series, Atlantic City Voices. I'm Jessica Kasunich, communications manager, with Meet AC.

K: And I'm Karina Anthony, marketing director with Meet AC. And we are your official podcast hosts for Atlantic City Voices.

J: Throughout our monthly series of Atlantic City Voices, we will be interviewing various voices of Atlantic City who are important leaders in our community and destination.

K: The topics we discuss will vary, but will mainly focus on important conversations around regenerative tourism and redevelopment and investment throughout Atlantic City.

JK: We'd like to welcome and introduce our very special guests, Jimmie Johnson and Tod Roy.

K: Yes, you heard that right. Newly inducted Pro Football Hall of Fame coach Coach Jimmy Johnson, along with his partner in crime, Tod Roy, president of Fish Head Events.

J: Hi, Jimmy and Tod, welcome.

JJ: It's great to be here, We had such a success last year with the fishing tournament there in Atlantic City. And the everybody was such a great host. Atlantic City Sports Commission, Golden Nugget, The Hard Rock, it really was a fun time. We're looking forward to it there in July.

T: Yeah, no I agree. I mean, we got a little taste of of of South Jersey, of the Jersey Shore. You know, it was great to see that marina alive again. You know, I've been there a few times, and it was in the winter. And it's, you know, obviously it's not a boating season in the winter up in New Jersey, but that marina was full and it was active and there was a lot of energy. And we were proud to do it to bring this event up there. But, you know, but the whole city did a great job of hosting it. It was really a total success.

J: Absolutely. It was a great citywide event and we were so excited to have you here.

JJ: Tod, the thing that I liked is, you know, when they brought the fish in, I mean I mean, first of all, what was it a 679 pound blue marlin and?

T: Yeah, that's exactly what it weighted. Yeah.

J: That was my favorite photo of you, Jimmy.

JJ: Oh, I mean, and all those big eyed tuna. And I know Tod. You know the fishing tournament. We donated a lot of that fish to the various charities around Atlantic City. So a lot of people were eating great tuna. And even, you know, Michael Jordan, of course, he's going to be back there again this year. Yeah, he caught a 40 pound white marlin. So everybody was excited.

T: Exactly. And that brings the energy, you know. And Jimmy was there and he was, you know, shaking hands. And he did. He did a little, little meet and greet there at the Golden Nugget. And all of a sudden this boat called in their catch and it was like, wow, there's a big one coming in. And it was perfect timing. And Jimmy was right there. And that is that's still that picture. Still my favorite of the whole week. But that picture is going to last us for the next ten years. We might not ever catch anything like that again, but that'll be our lead picture.

J: That was a big one.

JJ: Hey Tod the only thing is, you talked about that meet and greet all the Philadelphia Eagles fans. They were giving me all kinds of heck, I started telling them I love the Philadelphia Eagles. Jeffrey Lurie, the owner and I are good friends. And in fact, I came real close to taking the Eagle job back many years ago. So, you know, people were saying, hey, the Philadelphia Eagles when Buddy Ryan was there and you were the Cowboys. I said, wait, don't get on to me. I like the Eagles.

T: Oh, yeah. I mean, that that place is definitely Eagle country, you know? And so that's a little bit of an enemy territory. But by the end, they were all you know, they all figured out that Jimmy, it was very close to being an Eagle himself. And it was a that was it was a fun little hour of banter.

J: So let's dive in. We're obviously here to talk fishing and the Atlantic City Sports Commission is thrilled to partner with Jimmie Johnson's Atlantic City Quest for the Ring Championship Fishing Week for its second year, Atlantic City, New Jersey, which will commence July tenth through the sixteenth at the Frank S. Farley State Marina at the Golden Nugget Casino Hotel and Marina we are less than a month out from the tournament. Is everyone excited to return to Atlantic City?

JJ: I can't wait to see those fish they pull in every day.

T: Yeah. I mean, listen, we had such a successful first year that it's it's already going to be a great second year. But the the problem, if there is a problem, is the fuel prices are crazy, you know? And so, you know, everybody's excited, but there's a lot of teams that are struggling with the whole summer circuit. You know, they they fish the northeast waters and you have to go out so far, you know, to catch these big fish over there. They've got to go a hundred miles out every morning and 100 miles back. So other than the fuel issues, I mean, guys are excited. I mean, we set precedents last year with how we do it here in South Florida. You know, there's a fishing

world and then we bring the entertainment world to the fishing world. And that's how we had such success in South Florida. And that's what we've done up there. So you know, the fishermen aren't used to that. They fish in a lot of big tournaments and, you know, they get a bucket and some cruises and everyone gets a t shirt, maybe a couple of drink tickets for the after party. And that's what they get. They fish. But with us, everything's a party we have a kickoff party and an ending party. And we have a party every night in the middle. And the gifting, you know, Jimmy, you see the gifts?

JJ: Oh, I mean, I promise you the swag that the fishermen and the participants get in this tournament is better than what they get at the Oscars.

J: Yeah, I agree. I agree. I had the opportunity to be in that gifting experience room at Hard Rock and. Wow, it was a sight to see.

T: Yeah. And you know, one and listen, what you know, it's all about taking care of everybody. You know, at the end of the day, the teams are what they're the ones putting in the money for this. You know, they're putting in money to win a lot of money, but you have to give them something for it. You know, these guys, especially the anglers, you know, there's the captain and the owner. And so typically they'll get something from a regular tournament. But the anglers, they literally get thrown a t shirt. That's it. And this way with the way we do it, we literally outfit them from head to toe. There's always some sort of headgear and there's footwear and there's obviously shirts and jackets in hoodies and things like that. I mean, we always do Oakley has a line of these these Prism sunglasses that are made specifically for on the water. And everybody walks with a pair of those and all of the things in between. So the anglers for the first time, they walk away like it's Christmas, for God's sakes. And they're just like, Wow, this is you know, that they they get a little taste of what it's like to be treated well.

K: That's amazing that everyone is treated so well here. And, you know, I'm also interested in knowing if you can tell our listeners more about Fish Hard events and how your partnership began to create JJ Fish Week.

T: Well, honestly, you know, I was in the event business for many, many years and I did golf tournaments and, you know, all kinds of different stuff. And Jimmy has a place in the Keys and it's the Big Chill and it's a restaurant and it's on the water. And we started with some of some friends there and some friends of ours, and we just we started a tournament there and it just grew and blew up to be the biggest tournament and now with, with, with this series that we've created, it's the largest series in the world, but it started with just as a it just a little tournament. Heck, you know, we had two boats sign up the first year and we kind of wrangled another nine. We had 11 boats go out and we gave away \$5,000 but with Jimmy and the success he had with football and it was with the line we use, a tag line is, you know, it's all about the ring you know, and championships. And so we gave away these championship rings the first year. And Jimmy, you remember it was like that's what the guys want

JJ: Yeah. Let me just throw it in I was amazed, you know, here. Yeah, like for an Atlantic City, we got a guaranteed \$1 million payout in prize money. Those captains and those anglers, they want that championship ring. And it's a beautiful, beautiful ring. I mean, I've got Super Bowl rings that I can compare to them. And, you know, a really everybody that's in the championship series and been doing our tournaments both here in South Florida and Atlantic City, the thing that they talk about is getting that championship ring.

T: There was a year, I want to say, maybe four years ago here in South Florida, and there were two teams battling it out. And it's a different kind of fishing down here. It's catch and release and it's how many you catch and release. And that's how you get points so anyway, there's two teams that are going at it, and it came down to one. One team voted. I mean, released a fish, 26 seconds before the other one did. And that was a difference between first and second place. And the money was, I don't know, one guy won \$350,000 and the other guy won \$290,000. The money, they could have cared less about the difference. They were there still to this day so upset because that team they got second. They don't have a ring. The team that won it does and that's forever. And the team that took second they haven't been in the running ever since like this was their one shot and it still devastates them to this day because again, it was all about the ring.

J: Yeah, those rings are quite impressive now. Do they they prefer the ring over the money?

T: Well, let's not get carried away that money can buy a lot of rings, you know? You know.

J: That's very true.

JJ: Tod, why don't you talk a little bit to I mean, I was amazed how many like, big eyed tuna and many, you know, fish that we caught, you know, in the tournament that was donated to the community there in Atlantic City

T: We had we donated at one point, we had donated 6,000 pounds of tuna, OK? And, you know, to to various charities. You know, so a food bank. And then there was a.

J: I think the Atlantic City Boys and Girls Club, right?

T: Yes. The Boys and Girls Club. And they literally at one point by Thursday said, we can't take any more, you know, we can't do it.

J: Yeah. I heard the chef was making some tuna poke bowls for the kids.

T: Yeah. There they were. Kids eating tuna poke help for lunch, get dropped off for summer camp, you know, and we had we had on one of the homeless shelters that we've really fed. Well, now, this year, we have a chef coming. What's in your Steven Cookies? That's a restaurant right

K: Yes, yes it is.

T: So one of their chefs is coming with another guy and they're going to they're going to fillet it all as it comes in. Ok, so that now because these groups, we are giving them fish and they had to figure out how to fillet it and do all these things now we're going to be giving them every we're going to give it everyone bags of already full laid fish so we can probably if we have them, if the fishing's good again, we'll probably hit over 10,000 pounds this year.

K: That's incredible.

JJ: Well, Tod, let me put my marker in right now. I'm coming down with a big cooler one until your flight to the South Florida!

T: OK, yeah, that's a deal. That's a deal. And by the way, one of the guys, the guy that's taken the lead on on doing the filet, he is a lifelong Dolphin fan, and he loves to coach and he's just like, I will I will donate my time all week if I can. If I if I could if I can meet coach and I said, you, I will make sure you meet coach if you donate a week worth of filleting tuna. I said, I'll make sure that when coach gets here, we bring him over. But he's a big fan, Jimmy, so he's excited.

J: Ok, I look forward to it.

K: That's incredible because here at Meat AC and throughout the city, we're big proponents of giving back and corporate social responsibility. So knowing that, you know, you come into our city and you bring so many people from the surrounding area and you basically make our destination better than before you came, we live for that regenerative tourism.

T: Yeah. You know, what, we know how that works and stuff. And, you know, Jimmy's been around for a long time and doing community stuff. I mean, every football team he's ever coached is involved in the community. And Jimmy's been doing stuff for the community for, I'm going to say, 40 years, you know, that he's been doing stuff, so he understands it. He recognizes that we do too. It's it's part of our job. It's part of our business. And, you know, when we do these tournaments and any, any kind of thing, there is always a fundraising component. And with our South Florida tournament every year, we responsible that we give away over six figures. So every year there's \$100,000 going out to different aspects, different charities that we raise money for, and we're proud of it. You know, it makes us feel good and you know that. But that's all part of it. You know, if you're going to be doing something like this, and especially if you're going to another community like this, you've got to, you know, you've got to give back and make sure that you're doing the right thing.

JJ: Yeah Tod And then also, you know, I understand you know, how many football fans there are right there in that area. And so that's one reason why we have the meet and greet. That's one reason why I do various interviews you know, the whole time I'm there and and kind of meet with the community and meet with the people because I know they're football fans and they've got always got some great football questions.

T: Oh, definitely. Oh, well, first of all, these communities, you know, they're proud of their team. And that is like I said, that's Eagles Country and you know, they're they're going to come out and they want their they they want their Eagles to be recognized. So, you know, every time Jimmy's walking through a crowd, you're going, Eagles, you know. They are hooting and hollering.

J: They sure do. And we also are in a little bit of Giants territory as well with North Jersey.

T: Well, Jimmy went against the Giants quite often. Too. He's got some giant stories.

JJ: And then my buddy Michael Strahan course is you know, he is Mr. New York Giants. And so I tell plenty of stories about the Giants as well.

K: And we absolutely value our partnership for making our community such an important part of your strategy while you're here in Atlantic City and going back to the fishing, the fishermen have very important rules to follow or otherwise they will be disqualified. Can you talk about lines in and lines out and the rules they need to abide by?

T: Yeah, I mean, you know, honestly, I mean, that's very technical. And we have a tournament director that is oversees, all that. But, yeah, I mean, there are rules there's you know, you can't have lines in before it's time and you have to have your lines out after your time. And everything's got to be videoed, you know, so you have to have a videographer on your boat that has to video every catch and you're down here. It's all about catch and release in South Florida up there we have a catch and release division, which Michael Jordan's team won last year. He won that division, but it's mostly about weight. But we don't let them just catch a bunch of fish and bring them in and make it a as they call a kill tournament. You know, what we want to do is you can only boat a fish that's X amount of size, X amount of weight. And so that we really limit it because, you know, one of the one of the one of the organizations that we raised money for last year, we raised \$20,000 for them. And it's the you know, it's a conservation group, you know, and it's trying to make sure that we there's going to be fish in the ocean for many more years. So, yeah, there's different rules. There's different tess line. Like there's only a certain tess line that you can use, certain hooks you can use. So there are rules. And you know, last year there was a boat that we had to disqualify one of their catches and it wasn't their fault and they weren't trying to then we're trying to game the system. They just their rod broke and they still reeled in a 300 pound tuna.

J: It was a I was going to say, if I recall, it was a very big catch, right?

T: It was a 300 pound tuna and they fought it for two and a half hours. This guy did it with a broken rod. And unfortunately, a couple of times that rod, the rod rested on the back of the boat and in that end it was caught on video. And so we had to disqualify the fish. But this kid put on such a good fight. I mean, I felt horrible, you know,

JJ: I actually I actually ran into him last week. He was at Jimmy Johnson's Big Chill down here in the Keys.

T: Oh, he was.

JJ: Yeah. He said, coach, I was I was and got disqualified last year. I said, I'm so sorry. No, no, I'm excited. I'll be back up there again this year.

T: Oh, that's great. That's great. And the next day on Friday, when he came in, coach happened to be on on the at the way station when he came in and they weigh the tuna and it was a lot smaller. But I we gave him a big hug and he, you know, he but he was a good sport about it. But it was tough. I mean, that, that disqualification it cost him \$240,000.

JJ: Oh boy. Oh

T: Yeah. That was a, that was a big one. And that one hurt. It was painful. I mean we tried to do everything we, we try to do everything we can do to make every catch count because we know what these guys put into it. Number one, it's a lot of money for them to enter and to fish these tournaments, but they have their heart and soul in it. They have everything they can do. They're strategizing they there's all kinds of things you can't you don't just become a good fisherman because you go out in the boat once. You know, these guys have been doing it for their lot, that's their lives. And it's very painful to disqualify a catch. And this one was really painful because these were some young guys and in a smaller boat and they go against these these big teams in these big boats. And they finally had won. And it just it was a tough one. It was tough.

J: I remember at the weigh in station, they were how disappointed they were when they found out that they had been disqualified.

T: Yeah, there were a lot of tears. And there was a lot of you know, it gets a little bit heated because you're a little upset. They're very passionate. But the integrity of the tournament is what we've found through the years is that's our job. Our job is to make sure that everybody respects this tournament, because if not, then the the good fishermen aren't going to come back. And the union need those guys to come back. You know, the integrity, the rules, regardless of how slight they are. And maybe the infraction was a slight infraction you know, you've got to rule on it knowing that, you know, everyone's watching you and you and you and you can't just because these are nice guys. You know what? Let's look the other way. You can't do it. You can't do it.

J: Yeah. Integrity is what it's all about. I know we touched on this in the beginning just quickly, but it's a long day for these fishermen. It round trip. It's about 8 hours to get a good catch. Correct.

T: I don't know how they do it. Like I said, they leave at three. They leave at 3 a.m. and they go 100 miles some of their boats. It takes 4 hours. Some of the boats, it takes 3 hours to get to

where they got. Then they drop their lines in at 730. At 330 or 4. They pull them up and they've got that same trip back. I know you know, Jimmy, Jimmy lives on the water down here in South Florida, and he gets in his boat. And Jimmy, how far do you go before your first line is?

JJ: I've got my line and after about 10 minutes, it's good. But I promise you, those big boats going out there and going for 3 hours before they put the lines in. There are some people sleeping on that boat, that first line.

T: Oh, yeah. They they rotate, they take turns on who's crashin and who's got to be awake. And but yeah, it's a it's a grueling sport, you know, it really is. I mean, especially when those seas are rough. That's the North Atlantic up there, you know, and it gets pretty crazy.

JJ: Toof, you say this, though. You talk about it's a grueling sport and, you know, the fuel prices, how much they are. But I promise you, this, being a hard core fisherman, you get a six or 700 pound marlin or you catch a, you know, a 300 pound big eye tuna. Yeah, it's all worth it. Yeah. It's it's the excitement of getting a record fish and getting something that you never had before. I mean, it's exciting, and that's what makes it so worthwhile.

K: Jimmy and Tod, you guys are leading into this final question really well, as we wrap up, we normally like to ask our guests, what are your top three favorite restaurants to dine at in Atlantic City? But we thought we would switch this question up and ask each of you, what are your top three fishes to catch and why.

T: That's a question for Coach

JJ: Well, I love catching mahi mahi. They're plentiful there. The fastest growing fish in the ocean I like to see him jump, you know, to catch a big bull. Yeah, maybe I've caught them, you know, 50, 60 pound in the past. That's number one. And next would be a Wahoo, which I, I've called 60 and 70 pound Wahoo before. And then once Terry Bradshaw and I, well twice we went fishing at the oil rigs outside of Louisiana and got 175 pound yellowfin tuna. So that would be my three mahi mahi first, wahoo second and then tuna the third.

T: Coach. What does Terry Bradshaw know about fishing.

JJ: Yeah, you know, I'm pretty sure he's he comes down here quite often, but first time he came down, we got on the boat and we went offshore. He said, We're not going to go so far. We can't see land are we said, yes, he's used to fish in lakes and ponds, not oceans.

T: Yeah, that's what I figured. You know, he's a Louisiana boy, you know, the bayou.

JJ: Right?

J: That's great. Well, Coach and Tod, thank you so much for being our guests on Atlantic City Voices. We can't wait for JJ Fish Week AC to see who will bring home the coveted ring and the \$1 million purse money.

T: Hey, Jessica and Karina, thank you so much. And we really we really want to thank you guys. And the Sports Commission on Atlantic City and Meet AC and everybody because when we first went up there, you know, Hard Rock had asked us to go check it out. They had taken over that property up there and I did. And it was like, OK, this is great, but Gold Nugget is in charge of the marina. And so I'm trying to figure out how to make it all work and I went to you guys, and because of you guys with the city, you guys helped make it work. So it's a citywide event. And I want to thank you for that. It so it was really a nice way to lead in to get this thing off the ground.

J: Absolutely. As as the CVB and DMO of Atlantic City, where you're one stop shop. So we are here to help

K: And we're happy to make these connections for you. And, you know, we just encourage everyone to come and join the fun and watch the Wayne's nightly July 11th to the through the 15th from five to 9 p.m. at the deck at the Golden Nugget in Atlantic City.

JJ: Looking forward to coming up to Atlantic City in July thank you for everything.

K: Thank you for listening. And stay tuned for next month's podcast to find out who the next Atlantic City voice will be.