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Holland man lands 16 sailfish

Herb Eldean has once-in-a-lifetime fishing experience

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When the "Reel McCoy" pulled up to its dock after a seven-hour fishing trip in February, other captains and anglers turned their attention to the boat to find out who caught all of those sailfish.

SAIL AWAY: Herb Eldean (right) and the first mate of a charter boat hold up one of the 16 sailfish Eldean caught in February.

Contributed photo

There were 16 flags strung along the boat with each flag representing a sailfish that was caught and released.

Those same anglers were surprised to learn that one person -- Herb Eldean of Holland -- had caught all of them. By comparison, an entire fishing party on a different boat had the second-best performance of the day by landing 10 sailfish.

"That's like hitting 70 home runs in a (major league baseball) season," Eldean said of his rare fishing accomplishment. "It won't happen again."

Eldean, owner of Eldean Shipyard, a marina on the south shore of Lake Macatawa, made the trip to Florida for a marine equipment show. During a free day from the show, Eldean set up an appointment with a charter service out of Islamorada, Fla. that he had used before.

He ended up catching 16 sailfish, ranging from 40 to 80 pounds, and nine Atlantic bonita, a member of the tuna family.

"The thing about sailfish is the acrobatics," Eldean said of their ability to leap out of the water, spin and tailwalk. "(Catching a sailfish) is a phenomenal experience."

Eldean said he slept well that night after battling the hard-fighting fish.

"One of the reels was broken, I had two broken blisters, salt water got in the blisters," Eldean said. "You forgot about all that. It was so exciting."

Eldean, who was on the boat with the captain and first mate, used live pilcher, a small baitfish, and cigar minnows as bait. They caught the bait in the morning.

After being hooked, a sailfish can swim at speeds up to 65 mph for a few 100 yards. The captain puts his boat in reverse to chase the hooked fish.