

FEEDING FRENZY

Looking for sharks?

Capt. Mark Quartiano "knows where they are."

continued from cover

That may be true, but Quartiano also offers day swordfishing trips and catches dolphin and sailfish, too. "It's what the customer wants," he says.

No shark kept goes to waste, Quartiano says. The sharks are either eaten, mounted or given to research labs. Quartiano and O'Hare work closely with Jose Castro, a marine scientist who specializes in shark research.

Quartiano is aware that shark fishing is not exactly appealing to everyone, but he doesn't make any excuses for it either.

"People write me e-mails and make comments, but you know what? These are the same people that go out and eat a grouper sandwich," he says.

Yet, Striker-1 typically runs more than 500 charter trips each year fishing for monster fish with most, if not all, customers blown away by their experience.

Mark "The Shark" is world renowned for his fishing skills and has had several television shows taped aboard his boats in the past. Celebrities such as Robert DeNiro, Shaquille O'Neal and Will Smith have gone out on Quartiano's boat as well.

But it's not just Hollywood big shots who enjoy their trips with Quartiano.

"I love to fish with Mark," said 11-year-old Ivan Feraldo of Miami, who was aboard the Striker-1 with me on this particular day. "It's my favorite thing to do. We catch huge fish every time out."

Eleven-year-old Robert Reyes, of Miami, was on board as well, and was first to climb in the chair as O'Hare and Quartiano gave him guidance for catching his first shark. After an extensive fight, they gaff the big fish and bring it on board.

"Sandbar, about seven feet!" the Captain yells while high-fiving Reyes. "Good work."

Once the shark is subdued, Quartiano climbs back up the ladder to his controls. Looking at me with a gleaming smile he says "you're next."

O'Hare casts out the bait and we wait, once again, for any sudden movement from any of the four lines we have out in the water. About 20 minutes later, as I am admiring the shorelines of Miami from a mile-and-a-half offshore, Quartiano yells: "Whoa! Whoa! Whoa!"

While sitting in the Lee Chair, I listen carefull as O'Hare gives me some quick directions. "Don't do anything until he stops taking the line. Only then do you start reeling. You got that?"

I waited patiently for the line to stop rolling out. Suddenly, it stopped. Show time!

Cranking the reel, you can feel the pure power of the shark as it fights back on the other end — several hundred feet away. After about 15 minutes of fighting, I saw the shark below me for the first time. The shark turned on its side and I could see the large tail swooping side to side as it tried to get to deeper water.

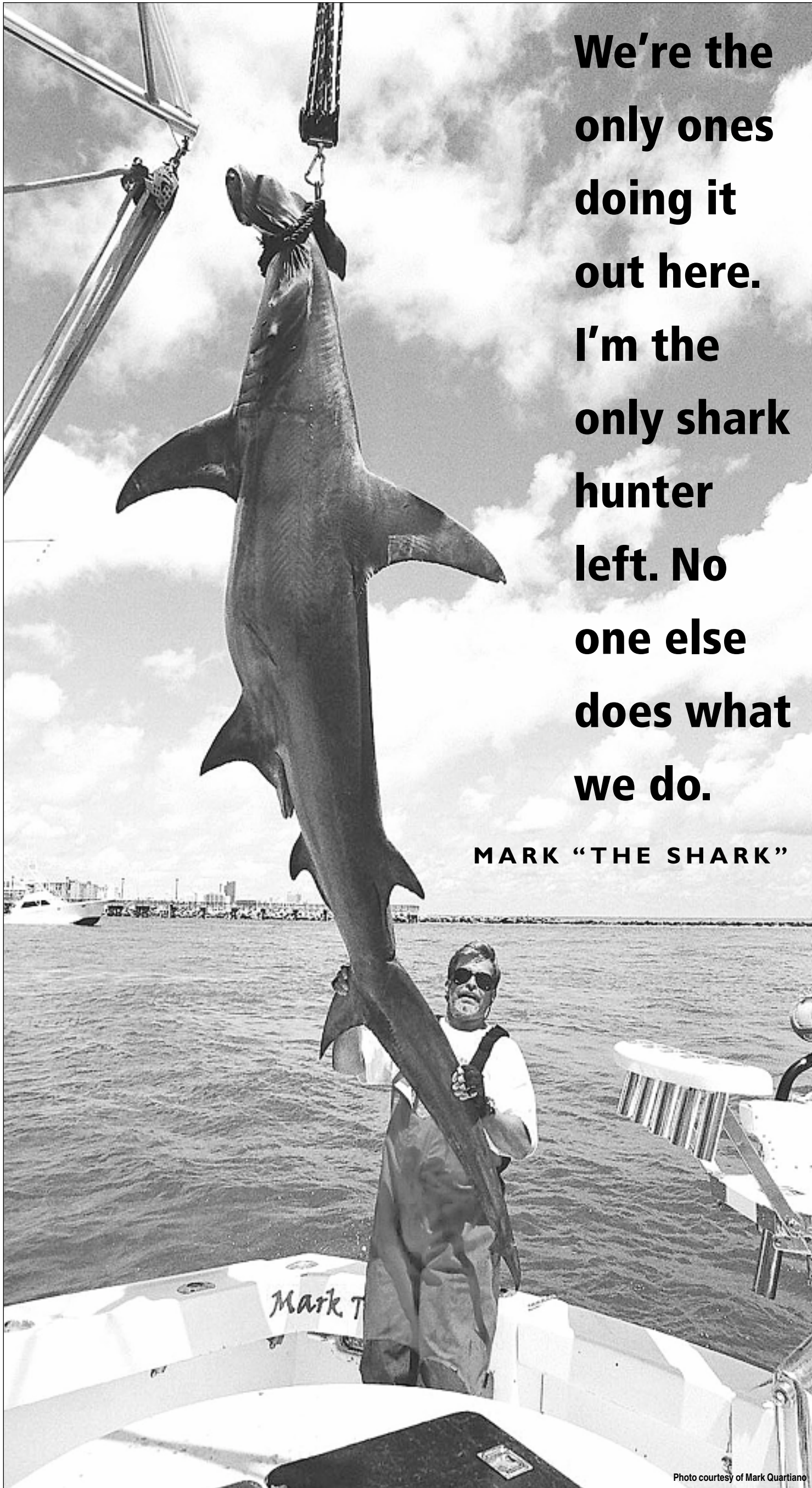
Finally the shark surfaced and we eventually got it into the boat, where you really gain an appreciation for its pure strength.

"Seven-foot sandbar shark," Quartiano says. "It's not huge, but at least you got one."

The truth is, Striker-1 is known to catch 10- to 12-foot sharks on a regular basis.

Sure, my shirt is soaked with sweat and my arm is practically numb from the fight, but good luck trying to get the big smile off my face. It was definitely worth it!

For more information about monster fishing, or to reserve a trip with Mark "The Shark" Quartiano, visit www.marktheshark.com or call (305) 759-5297.



We're the only ones doing it out here. I'm the only shark hunter left. No one else does what we do.

MARK "THE SHARK"

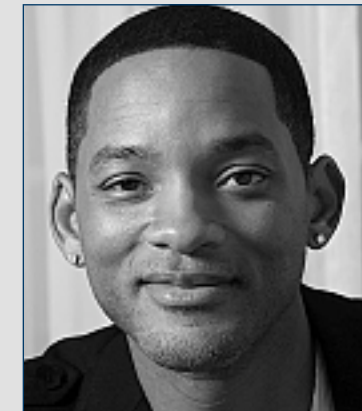
Mark "The Shark" Quartiano with a large hammerhead shark caught recently in Biscayne Bay.



Robert DeNiro



Shaquille O'Neal



Will Smith



Ched Chase with the two seven-foot sandbar sharks caught on his fishing trip with Mark "The Shark."



Photo courtesy of Ched Chase

Quartiano's boat is equipped with a Lee's Fighting Chair, which extends out over the back end of the boat.