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OUTDOORS | KAYAK FISHING

Kayak fisher lands quite a catch

■ A San Diego teacher and two others snagged and released five marlin in one day last month.

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It's one thing to catch a swordfish from a flats skiff, or an Atlantic sailfish from an inner tube raft. But catching and releasing five striped marlin among three kayakers in one day is — pun intended — another kettle of fish entirely.

San Diego school teacher Jon Schwartz, 38, and two companions were kayak fishing nearly 60 miles off Cabo San Lucas, Mexico, on Nov. 30, when they came upon pods of marlin attacking bait balls near the surface. The encounter wasn't entirely unexpected since they had arrived at the fishing grounds

aboard a larger boat run by Durance Lowendick, owner/operator of Marlin Masters Sportfishing, who had scouted the area days earlier.

After deploying three plastic, sit-on-top sea kayaks, Schwartz said they tried to anticipate the path of the marlins' attack and slow-trolled live mackerel on short stand-up rods with 20- and 30-pound line and 80-pound fluorocarbon leader.

"We slow-trolled by paddling around with baits," Schwartz said. "We had trouble keeping up with the marlin chasing schools of bait."

But the kayakers finally were able to get their trolled baits in front of the billfish, and all three hooked up. Schwartz released two striped marlin up to 150 pounds. His companions released three more.

The highlight of the trip for Schwartz was resuscitating a slow-moving marlin after removing the 8/0 circle hook from its bill.

"I jumped in, grabbed it with my gloved hands by the fins, and gently held it upright until the fish regained its strength and color and was able to swim away on its own accord," he wrote in an e-mail.

The encounter was taped, and Schwartz posted a clip on YouTube at www.youtube.com/watch?v=gtuKz2B-zRI.

An accomplished, seven-year veteran kayak fisher, Schwartz previously had caught amberjack and tuna from his paddlecraft. He plans to write a first-person account of his marlin adventure for Sport Fishing magazine.