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ADVENTURES

ART OF THE STALK: GUY'S PLAYBOOK

FREEDOM'S BUNT



"FREEDOM IS
BUNT
AS A TEAM"

As part of my love for this country and the freedoms we enjoy, I served as a Black Hawk helicopter pilot in the U.S. Army for many years. I served proudly and I'd do it again. Unfortunately, as with many of my military brothers, my career was cut short with an injury in Iraq. However, I'm fortunate to be home, enjoying life and raising my cute family of five little daughters, including twins. Similar to the freedoms I enjoyed when I was a kid, I still relish fast cars, rock n' roll and apple pie. Life is good!

It was nothing short of spectacular when I arrived at camp – wall tents equipped with beds, wood floors and stoves for heat, corrals stocked with fresh horses and a cabin nearby to cook and eat in. These guys didn't cut any corners. They were serious about red carpet service and they were serious about hunting big bucks. They were so dedicated to making sure I had the experience of a lifetime that they were hunting 3 to 1 – three guides to one hunter, me.

First was Tim Trefren Jr. who was representing his name on the camp as Trefren Outfitters. Next was Greg Kriese who has guided alongside Tim for years. Then Tim told me he had a surprise for me, just as Guy Eastman rolled into camp to film the hunt.

I quickly connected generations of hunting with each of these guys as we sat around the campfire to kickoff this adventure with stories from past. Their fond memories reminded me of my own memorable hunting trips with my dad and I recognized the same father-son bonds with each of the other guys. Greg talked about his dad whom would be coming up in a couple weeks to hunt with him in the same area. Guy's family history of hunting fills publications and books, but it all came together for me as the central theme to the stories was based around a man who wasn't there that night. We were missing Tim Sr.

The planning of this very hunt had started earlier that spring, with a father and son who wanted to take something that they love and do

well and share it with someone else. Only Tim Sr. passed away a short time later and wouldn't see it through.

I realized I had been invited into a circle of friends who had countless stories from years past from this very camp – stories filled with big bucks, majestic elk and the hunters in pursuit. Tim Sr. had left his mark and was a legend in his own right. His influence helped shape the guys I was with and the hunters they had become. Now, this was their first time back in camp without him. It was a monumental step forward and I was a part of it.

Early morning came, horses were saddled and we headed up a dark trail that wound through the trees and up the mountain. With a full crew in tow, I felt like I was hunting with a full entourage – my posse if you will.

As the sun came up we overlooked a drainage, listening to the elk bugle. We had spotted a couple small bucks and continued to ride on when we suddenly jumped a large buck and doe that were bedded below us. I no sooner jumped off my horse and pulled my rifle out of the scabbard when they had already bounded out of sight. This mature buck was still in full velvet, and we estimated him about 28" wide. Wow, this was an exciting start!

We continued to another area where we glassed the mountain above us. There we spotted a couple small bucks working along the hillside and another nice buck, maybe 25" wide and he bedded down in a small patch of trees. We watched him for a couple hours as the morning excitement slowed down. It was at this point when my posse pulled out their hammocks and air pads to take midday naps. As I tried to nap on the hard ground, I had realized I was in the presence of true experience that I could learn yet another lesson from. I committed in that moment that if my story was ever published that the hammocks would be mentioned.

That afternoon we rode the rest of the way up the mountain and along a ridge back to camp to give us a different view of some areas we hadn't seen yet. While riding through the junipers we jumped another big buck that evaded us once again before I could get off my saddle. With only a quick glimpse, we estimated this buck to be close to 28-30" wide. While I had a hard time leaving this spot, Tim suggested we continue moving down the mountain before it got dark. He wanted to check a spring, a favorite watering hole where the local bucks like to hang out and tell stories.

Along the way we stopped a couple times to glass various deer and elk, all of which was fun but it slowed us down so it was dark when arrived at the spring. True to Tim's plan, when we arrived at the spring in the dark we spooked a couple deer. Tim pulled up his binoculars then promptly kicked up a foot full of dirt.

"What's up?" I had asked. "Did you see them?"

"That was the buck we want, right there," Tim said.

With the faint light that he gathered with his binoculars, Tim observed two big bucks, both pushing the limits on 30" wide but the sun was down, the day was over, and we had to head back to camp. I was on cloud 9! What a great first day. I knew we were in the right area and it would only be a matter of time until an opportunity presented itself if we kept doing what we were doing.

The second morning came quick. Once again we saddled the horses and headed up the dark trail through the trees. Tim rode in the lead with me following right behind. The air was brisk and the trees were silent. Just as I was wondering what events lay in store for the day, Tim leaned back on his horse and said, "Hey, Nic – Happy Birthday!"

With all the excitement going on early in the morning, I forgot it was my birthday, September 11, which coincidentally is also Patriot Day. I smiled and thought how cool it would be to tag a trophy on this day and how perfect the meaning of it would be for so many people on various levels.

We spotted very few deer that morning. It was quite uneventful compared to the previous day. We spotted a bear that was interesting to watch as he slowly moved around, grazing. The morning was slow, the sun was up and I felt as if the morning hunt was over. About the time I expected these guys to bust out their hammocks, Greg spotted a buck up the hill behind us. No sooner had I pulled up my binoculars when all three of my guides simultaneously announced, "He's a shooter!"

Say no more. I didn't even see him yet but if these three guys like him, I'm not wasting time. So I switched modes from spotting to shooting. Quickly, I grabbed a backpack to use as a rest and as I set up, I discovered the weeds were too tall to see over. Just as quickly, Greg handed me the shooting sticks and I leaned into a steady position. Just as I found the buck in my scope, Tim said, "Don't look at his rack."

I thought this is guide-code for "Big Rack." I avoided escalating my buck fever by heeding his council and focused on targeting that sweet spot near the shoulder.

Tim ranged the distance for me at 356 yards but corrected to 300 yards because of the steep uphill angle. I found my mark and once steady, I made the shot. Guy Eastman got his shot, too, with his video camera.

The bullet found its mark and the buck stiffened his legs and hunched his back.

"Nailed him!" said Tim. "Hit him again."

The quick follow-up shot rolled him over backwards and down the hill.

"Did you see that cheater?" Tim asked.

"I think the cheater has a fork," Greg replied.

"Well, I didn't see it yet. I was busy NOT looking at it!" was all I said at that moment.

After some celebratory high fives and man hugs, we made our way up the hill to the buck. We all knew he was big but at this point I didn't think anyone knew just HOW BIG he really was. Fortunately for me, this was one of those bucks that grew the closer we got to him. He was enormous. He had it all – height, width, mass, cheaters and trash.

Once back at camp, Guy set down his video camera and picked up his official score kit. We excitedly started measuring and counting points.

We ended up with 30.5" wide, 10x15 scorable non-typical points, and right at 200 for an overall score.

But wait!! That's not the end. This isn't just another hunting story. It's not just a story about me and the best birthday present ever from my posse. This magnificent 200" buck symbolizes a much bigger trophy – common beliefs in freedom.

I've come to realize that freedom is a group effort. There are the soldiers fighting on the front lines. At home, we have police, EMS and firefighters keeping our communities safe. Thank you!

But freedom isn't only preserved by those who protect and fight. Freedom is demonstrated by those who share their happiness, their passions, their abilities and their zest for life with others around them. Freedom isn't just something we enjoy; it's something we do.

It's something we build. It's something we share. Freedom is enjoyed when fathers and sons – or daddies and their little girls hunt together, when family bonds are created and happiness is shared. Freedom is shared when the Tim Trefrens of the world take their skills and talents and share it with a group of life-long friends or war veteran they just met, or when organizations like Hunting with Heroes help find ways to facilitate happiness through a tremendous hunting experience.

This trophy and all it means to me was earned as a team. Freedom is built as a team. The essence of freedom is that we all work together to enjoy life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

So, now it is up to you to figure out what to do with your freedom. I say, go enjoy life! And, help someone else along the way enjoy it too!



Nic's Equipment:

Firearm: Custom 280 AI
Scope: Nightforce
Ammo: Handloaded Berger Bullets
Binoculars: Meopta
Camo: Kryptek
Other clothing: Sitka
Boots: Danner
Pack: Badlands
Rangefinder: Leupold
Raingear: Sitka



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Nic Transtrum is a former Black Hawk pilot from the U.S. Army and lives in southeastern Idaho with his family of five girls who all love the outdoors.

