

BUCK OF A LIFETIME

The night of November 15, 2021, is one I will never forget. Throughout the hunting season, I had several bucks come in on the camera, and it seemed that the bachelor pad was in my spot. At one point, I had six bucks in one photo. I knew it would be a great season, but I speculated that I better tag my buck before the rut, or they might leave.

Of all the bucks I saw, three stood out. There was a nice nine-point that would probably score about 135 and a nice 150-inch 11-point. My hit-list buck (which I never thought I would have a chance at) was a big typical 10-point that I guessed was about 160 inches. In September, the bucks were coming in regularly. The buck I anticipated shooting was the big 11-point, for he had made himself the dominant buck in the area and was a regular. Things wouldn't work out quite as I planned.

I was hunting in a spot where I've been since I was 15 years old—right behind my parent's house on the family farm. In recent years, I retired my spot to my father so he could have easier access to hunting due to his health. I have other areas where I go and take my children as well. My son had a buck picked out at another location, and we were hunting him pretty hard.

My son is ten years old and has killed four other bucks, but they were all very young bucks. This year he said he would like to kill one that he could get mounted, so he picked out a nice nine-point, which was the largest in the area. He harvested that buck with a crossbow in late October. He scored 128 inches and made it into Buckmaster's.

In October 2020, my father, who taught me about the outdoors, passed away after a heart attack. Even though he was too young to pass at 63, my dad lived a good life. He was a devout Christian who loved Jesus and enjoyed farming and hunting. He was not afraid of dying and lived life to the fullest. One of the last things he got to do was deer hunt. He hunted in his treestand the night before he died. That season my brother and I did not hunt in my dad's spot. The following year in 2021, we started to gear up

and scout our spots for the season. I like to have a clubhouse or a double treestand where I hunt because if my kids aren't hunting they like to be with me. My dad only had a single stand in his spot, so I claimed my spot back that summer. My brother and I set up a nice clubhouse in the air beside my dad's stand. Now the journey was just beginning.

I noticed the bucks on camera coming in the morning, and I tried to hunt during those hours. It didn't work because I couldn't get into the stand without scaring them away. I had to limit this spot to hunting in the evening, but the bucks would only come in at dark or after.

Additionally, I faced an emotional dilemma. Each day as I would sit in the stand and look out the window, I would see my dad's stand and visualize him sitting there hunting. I remembered when he called me on the phone and



Eric was hopeful after seeing some big bucks on his trail cameras.

This column is dedicated to the system that supports the public hunting of public wildlife for all fair chase sportsmen, and the stories and trophies that are the result. Theodore Roosevelt strongly believed that self-reliance and pursuing the strenuous activities of hunting and wilderness exploration was the best way to keep man connected to nature. We score trophies, but every hunt is to some extent a way of measuring ourselves.

said, “Eric, I got up in the stand, and the ratchet strap broke. Where ya at?” I said, “Dad, I’m on my way to go hunting at my other spot, but I’ll swing by on my way.” I remember climbing up the stand, reaching behind my dad, and attaching a ratchet strap around the tree while he was still in it. I kissed him, and I was on my way. These are memories that I will never forget. It was hard hunting in my dad’s spot, but a few things kept me going. One, I would take my son with me to spend time together, and two, the pictures of a Boone and Crockett buck in the area.

As the season went on, my fear became a reality, and the rut began. Just as quickly as the rut started, my bucks were all gone. I would sit an entire night and not see a deer. This got old fast, and I got discouraged. I ventured out to a few other spots but kept tabs on my main spot with my scouting camera.

Soon after, my brother started to get pictures of my bucks at his spot about two miles away. He sent me a picture of a buck; sure enough, it was my big 10-point that I had been hunting. Then neighbors and other hunters started talking about the big 10-point, and I knew it was my buck. I said, “If this buck doesn’t quit running, he is going to get killed. He just needs to stay put and hide for a while.”

A few weeks later, my buck showed up on my camera again. I waited. The next day he was back. The next night I was in the stand, but he came in 10 minutes after legal shooting time.

Usually, my son would be with me, and I asked him if I could get out a little early the next day. He agreed I could go without him because he would still be at school. Sitting there that evening, I looked at past photos to try to pattern him. I had my



Eric (right) with his father. This deer and the hunt is dedicated to his dad, Thad White (left).



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crossbow on my lap. I finally decided to put my phone away because I already had him as patterned as much as possible. I put my phone in my pocket, and when I looked up at 4:40 pm, slightly to my right standing at 12 yards, was my big 10-point, just staring. It was surreal. I could hardly believe what I was seeing. As I sat there, I knew I could not move. With my fingers already in place, I took the safety off the bow. The buck took a few more steps and just kept staring at me. He was not on alert, but he knew something was off. He moved in to 10 yards. He was too close.

I blinked once when he looked at me, and I promised myself I wouldn't do that again. I knew I wanted to take a shot the first chance I got because it could end quickly at any moment. Directly in

front of me were two small trees. I decided that I would pull up for the shot when he came walking in front of me and put his head behind those trees. These trees were nowhere big enough to hide his head, but they were my best chance. He started walking, got behind the trees, and I pulled up my crossbow. I was looking through a magnified scope and saw nothing but brown. Finally, I saw his leg move, and I placed the crosshairs behind it. I let my bolt fly. He ran about 70 yards and stood there. I saw the wobble, and then he disappeared. I was starting to shake and called my son. He was so excited. The whole family was on their way so we could retrieve this one together. I called my brother and Dad's best friend, who always hunted with us. As we started through the woods, it wasn't

hard to find the blood. My buck was piled up right where I had last seen him. I told my wife and kids to get a hold of him and check him out. My brother then looked at me and said, "Well, you can officially quit hunting because you just accomplished what we were all trying to do. Congratulations!"

I've killed nice bucks in the past, but this one was

different. To harvest this kind of animal that God created was an amazing feeling I will never forget. My buck's final score comes in at 173-7/8 points and currently sits at the number four spot for typical whitetail in Belmont County, Ohio. I also honored him by entering him in Buckmaster's, Ohio Big Buck, and the Boone and Crockett Club records program. ■

"I want to thank my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, for blessing me with this great accomplishment. I want to thank my wife Bethany, my kids Keenan, Rosalie, Adelyn, and Brayden, my mom Marilyn, my brother T.J. White, and my dad's best friend Ed Cope. A special thanks to my dad for teaching me all about hunting."

Eric's son, Keenan, harvested a nice nine-point with a crossbow in late October. He scored 128 inches and made it into Buckmaster's.



Eric with his buck.