

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.

BEYOND THE SCORE

Richard Block
Photo Courtesy of Author

DOUBLE CELEBRATION

It was Saturday, November 4, 2017—a humid, foggy opening morning of whitetail rifle season in Texas. It was also a morning of a super moon—the full moon going down as the sun was rising.

It was my 27th hunting season on this ranch, and there is a spring-fed river with large pecan trees in my hunting area. In all my years hunting on this ranch, I have taken 10 other bucks over 130 inches. My hunting lease borders two large ranches that practice the same hunting ethics as me—we shoot only mature old bucks or cull bucks to keep does under control, approximately a 1 to 1 ratio.

Other than a wheat field for cattle grazing on one adjoining side, there are no other food plots. I do not offer protein feed in the off-season or use game cameras or a guide. I hunt alone and spend all weekends in my travel trailer at camp.

My oldest daughter, who is 36 years old, is my only hunter partner. She lives 225 miles away, so she usually only gets to hunt two days all season. I was only going to get

to do the opening morning hunt as we were to be at a grandson's birthday party that afternoon, 95 miles away that day.

The temperature was about 60 degrees as I settled into one of my favorite ground-blinds on my 420-acre hunting lease. My Leupold binos and scope would fog up because of the weather and combined with the low light made it difficult to see when I looked through them. In Texas, we are allowed to use bait for deer hunts. I have a corn feeder I was watching 110 yards away. About 10 minutes before the feeder was to go off, I could make out large antlers on a buck, but I could not count the points.

When the feeder went off, the buck spooked from the noise. But to my surprise he came back about 10 minutes later. It was another 10 to 15 minutes before I was able count 10 points and evaluate him.

Two shots from my favorite pre-64 Model 70 Winchester Super Grade .257 Roberts, and he was mine. He “grew” when I got to him.

I didn't know this buck existed in this form. I believe

I saw him one time the previous season chasing a doe, but I didn't get to judge him or get a shot in 2016.

I decided I needed pictures of this deer and me together, so I called my wife and asked her to bring my Canon digital camera and my other truck. We live 40 miles from the hunting base, and she got there about an hour later and took the photos. She

has never taken photos like this before.

Remembering the birthday party what was scheduled for 3 p.m. we had to hurry to get him to a taxidermist for caping and meat storage. Luckily we made it in time to get the deer taken care of and celebrate my grandson's 4th birthday. The buck was aged at 5-1/2 years and scored 169-4/8 points. ■

Richard took this typical whitetail deer on a solo hunt in Tom Green County, Texas, in 2017.

