



# VIDEO GAMES TO BIG GAME

Rain was bouncing off the top of our ground blind with a calming frequency—nature’s metronome setting the rhythm for the opening morning of late-season archery in Washington. On the heels of heavy storms and severe flooding in our county, it was wet and miserable. But that didn’t change my love for the anticipation of first light and the deer activity that would hopefully come during the magical hour.

I was excited for the last remaining blacktail deer hunts of 2021. Truth is, I’m always excited about hunting, but this year was special. This year would be my son’s first big game season since passing hunter education. For the first time, he’d be in the shooter’s seat instead of his gamer’s chair.

We started my son, Jordan, in the outdoors at a young age. Over the years, he’s come with me and my wife Sara on long hikes, trail camera checks, and a few family scouting trips gone awry. On our first elk scouting trip with him, I carried the weary five-year-old out the last half-mile because he couldn’t walk anymore.

As he’s gotten older, Jordan has become a great help

hauling gear and prepping hunting sites with us. More recently, he’s practiced and become proficient with the compound bow I bought him almost six years ago.

## **DON’T FORGET THE SNACKS**

It hasn’t always been easy going. Getting Jordan in on the action through short hunting trips hasn’t worked out well in the past. When he was seven years old, we took him on his first turkey hunt. He was excited to wear camo while walking around in the turkey woods. When it came time to plop down against a tree, sit still, and call in a bird, though, he wasn’t having it.

The situation only worsened when mom and dad forgot to bring enough snacks. Never

MY 13-YEAR-OLD SON LOVES VIDEO GAMES. HOW CAN I GET HIM TO HAVE THAT SAME PASSION ABOUT THE OUTDOORS? THE FIRST STEP SIMPLY IS TO TAKE HIM HUNTING.



From the cozy confines of the hunting blind, compromises have to be made.

underestimate the power that a grade-schooler's stomach has over them. Just one hour into the day, we had a bird coming in, spitting and drumming the whole way. This is exactly what I had hoped would happen.

Jordan couldn't have cared less. He stood up from his turkey lounger, choked up on a nearby stick like it was a Louisville slugger, and with all his might he swung it against the trunk of a nearby Gary oak. The impressive swing sent pieces of wood flying. Our would-be tom ran for thick cover. It was apparent that my efforts to get him hunting were still a bit too early.

### COMPROMISE

Fast-forward six years to our deer hunting blind on that rainy late-season day. After hiking the short distance to the blind, Jordan and I were settled in. Outfitted in black-clad face coverings and outerwear, I had conveyed the importance of blending in with the background of our blind. I sat there sipping my coffee, trying to warm up a bit in the near darkness of the early morning. The only light was coming from Jordan's smartphone.

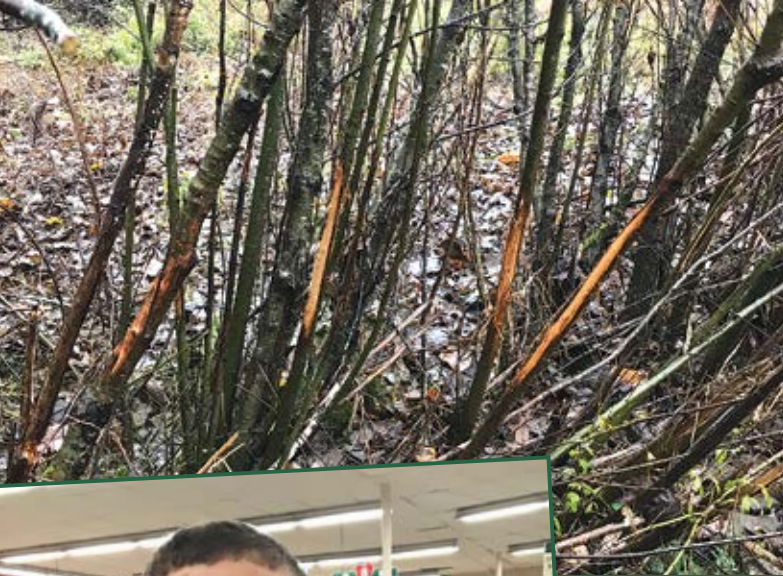
With his bow in his lap, Jordan was punching away ferociously on his phone, playing one of a dozen games he alternates between when he doesn't have anything else to do. He's been a student of video games since he was three years old.

As a parent, you can't help but compare your childhood to that of your own child's. We had Atari and those little hand-held electronic football games. I had Pac-Man fever as much as the next '80s kid, but there was a big difference. When I was his age, I was perfectly content to be in nature without having a gaming console glued to my face. Of course back then, you couldn't simply just put video games in your coat pocket either. When I was camping with the family or out fishing, I was absorbed in that.

The twenty-first century is such a different beast, and digital addiction is at an all-time high. Even as a hunting family that derives 90 percent of our meat from hunting, we are not immune. Not many of us can escape the trappings of today's technology and video games. And that's okay.



No time for video games when you're hiking down the trail.



**ABOVE:** Sign of good times along the trail. **LEFT:** This year would be Jordan's first big game season in the shooter's seat since passing hunter education.



Nothing wrong with a little practice.

My generation (Generation X) knew a time before everyone had a smartphone in their pocket, but many of our kids don't. Through years of frustration and irritation with Jordan's gaming, I've come to realize I have to meet him halfway—even if that means keeping him entertained with video games while trying to teach him how to fill the freezer.

Besides, if things are too serious or if I get too cranky, it isn't going to be a fun learning experience for either of us. The last thing I ever want to do is turn him off to hunting altogether. I do, though, stress the importance of paying attention to the primary task at hand—the hunt.

### KEEP IT COZY

When legal light finally showed, the rain picked up with a vengeance. The temperature was dropping, and I knew we needed to keep things tolerable. The warm orange glow of the Heater Buddy overtook the burner and seeped into our bones almost immediately.

I had a lot of faith in the area we had picked. There was heavy deer activity and a meaty 3x3 buck kept making an appearance along with several does. It was big-bodied with deep maroon branched antlers situated perfectly; this buck was awesome. In these parts, this is an excellent blacktail buck, and I hoped Jordan would be the one to put his tag on him.

A couple of days before opening day, we had made a family scouting trip to scour the site and get boots-on-the-ground intel. Sara has an excellent eye for sign, and we both went to work showing Jordan what to look for. It didn't take long to find multi-aged rubs, tracks, and super fresh scat.

The area looked great when we scouted, but by 8 a.m. on the day of our hunt, there was no sign of the gray ghost. A couple of blows on

the grunt tube and some flips of the bleat broke the hours of silence. By 10:30, we called it to go home and help with Thanksgiving dinner.

The next day was a rough one. We waited for our tryptophan comas and the driving rain to subside, which meant we didn't get into the blind until 10 that morning. With coffee and chocolate muffin breakfast, we were ready to get started with this hunt. After getting in the blind and giving the area a half-hour to settle, I started a rattling sequence while Jordan battled never-ending waves of bogeys on his phone. Eventually, I gave him the can, and we rounded out the rattling sequences with intermittent bleats and grunts. Nothing. After seven total hours of father and son bonding, we went home empty-handed once again.

To our credit, we both were back in the blind at 6 a.m. sharp the following morning. This would be our last hunt together for the year. The pounding rain was punctuated by periods of perfect drizzly blacktail hunting weather. We bleated. We grunted. We rattled. But the heavy 3x3 never showed despite our best attempts to entice him. I was bummed for Jordan but also proud. I know a few die-hard hunters that would agree to be cold and miserable for hours on end—but not many.

### THEY NEED SOME ACTION

A couple of weeks prior to our rainy ground blind bonding adventure, Jordan and I hunted the San Juan Islands where I had a draw-only antlerless deer permit. Of course, two nice bucks appeared 20 feet from our blind on the second morning. When they did, I quietly tapped Jordan on his leg and whispered, "We can't take him, but there's a buck, buddy."

He slowly looked up in time to see the second buck

walk up to join the first. *If only this were the general season*, I thought. The look in his eyes was priceless. He saw first-hand just how quickly the hunting game can turn around. Unfortunately, those were the only deer we saw that whole weekend on public land.

Looking back, I thought the season was a good introduction. It was just the right amount of reality mixed with creature comforts—and many laughs. I hunted alone during the remaining few days, and I missed his company.

It's hard to say what the future holds for Jordan's evolution as a hunter. Will he continue hunting after he's on his own? Like his buddies and many other kids his age, he's so entrenched in games, TikTok, and YouTube. Will he outgrow this stuff and embrace the North Cascade foothills where he lives?

Video games, and certainly technology, are not

going away anytime soon. My goal is to keep exposing Jordan to hunting, fishing, and other outdoor pursuits. Leading by example, I want to show him the importance of self-reliance and a field-to-table lifestyle. Fostering a sense of pride and the immeasurable lessons that accompany those pursuits are lessons worth teaching.

Sara and I won't know the impact we've had on Jordan's desire to be afield until much later down the road. He's part of an entire digital age of kids who will either continue the hunting heritage or find other interests. For the sake of hunting's future, I hope they come to know that indoor and outdoor lifestyles don't have to be mutually exclusive. We can lead the proverbial horse to water, and it is my hope they will gulp it down by the mouthfuls. Ultimately, though, it will be up to them whether they choose to drink. ■

Kids are great at making noise.  
Why not put them to work?

## DIY CHECKLIST:

- WASHINGTON RESIDENT DEER LICENSE: \$44.90
- YOUTH (UNDER 16) DEER LICENSE: \$21.80
- NON-RESIDENT DEER LICENSE: \$434.30

## GEAR:

- DIAMOND INFINITE PRO COMPOUND BOW
- CABELA'S STALKER EXTREME 500 7.3 GPI YOUTH ARROWS
- RAGE HYPODERMIC 100 GRAIN BROADHEADS
- AMERISTEP DOGHOUSE GROUND BLIND
- ALLEN COMPANY MOSSY OAK CAMO TARP 8'X 10' - BREAK-UP COUNTRY
- MR. HEATER BUDDY 4000-9000 BTU
- COLEMAN 16 OZ PROPANE CYLINDERS
- PRIMOS "THE ORIGINAL CAN"
- PRIMOS RATTLING ANTLERS
- KNIGHT AND HALE GRUNT CALL
- ANKER PORTABLE POWER BANK (CELL PHONE CHARGING)

**"WHEN SOME OF MY FRIENDS HAVE ASKED ME ANXIOUSLY ABOUT THEIR BOYS, WHETHER THEY SHOULD LET THEM HUNT, I HAVE ANSWERED YES - REMEMBERING THAT IT WAS ONE OF THE BEST PARTS OF MY EDUCATION - MAKE THEM HUNTERS."**

**- HENRY DAVID THOREAU**



**ADVENTURE  
AWAITS**

If you have any DIY hunts you would like to see featured in the column, please email Karlie Slayer, [Karlie@Boone-Crockett.org](mailto:Karlie@Boone-Crockett.org) for details.