

PONDERING

I question whether age or experience tends to make us think more philosophically. Maybe it's a combination of both. I know I've been thinking a lot recently about my many decades as an avid bowhunter. I've come to the conclusion I've truly been blessed with this life.

Regardless whether your hunting techniques mirror those of a canine, feline or raptor, we are basically all predators. I'm big on analogies and got to thinking how each of our hunting techniques and/or philosophies relates to sports. As youngsters we all have the opportunity to participate. We usually favor the sport or recreational activity we tend to be best at. We have team sports and we have individual athletes. Frankly, most team sports are dated. I mean, I genuinely feel sorry for kids who LOVE team sports. There's absolutely nothing wrong with them but it's somewhat depressing to know you have to give up certain sport activities when you are still relatively young. Because of physical limitations and changes most people can't continue to participate as an athlete in many of the physical sports.

Just using round figures, say our lifespan is 80 years old. A kid that LOVES football usually goes from sandlot ball; to high school; to college, and if they are really outstanding (love aside), they may even play in the NFL. But the cold hard fact remains by the time they are age forty (and often much sooner) they are done as an active participant. How would we like it if our love of hunting suddenly came to an end when we turned 35 or 40, forcing us to only watch hunting on TV, reading about it, or maybe being camp cook? My point is we as hunters are so fortunate and unique in the respect that as long as we can get around we can still participate. Sure, we can't tear up the mountains like we could in our youth. We have to adapt, slow down, apply using our heads more so than youthful brawn. But the fact is we still mostly can remain in the game as participants. We may have to slow our pace; hunt with a

“walking stick” (never call it a cane); limit ourselves to ground blinds and/or still hunting/stalking rather than elevated stands; lower the draw weight of our bows; and maybe limit our hunts closer to home.

But we’re still out there hunting, thinking, absorbing and participating.

We need to come to the realization we will likely not be able to hunt sheep when we’re eighty. And accept the fact we can no longer hike into the Rocky Mountains with a 70 lb. pack on our backs BUT, we can maybe hire a guide to help us some. We can adapt a little and hunt elk on less vertical terrain. Or sit a treestand over a waterhole and still hear the scream of the bull at first light. We must adapt but we’re still in the game.

Additionally, I look at bowhunting as an individual endeavor versus a team sport. Recently I’ve seen bowhunters referred to as athletes. I don’t know, maybe as an individual but not as a team. I never thought of bowhunting as a team really. I mean, just because you drive a Chevy doesn’t mean you’re the Heartbeat of America.

There’s a big difference between being on a team and going it alone. I want to make it clear there’s nothing wrong with team sports. Being on the winning team is fine, but I must say they don’t have the same pressures as an individual athlete. My niece’s father-in-law won a Gold Medal at the Tokyo Olympics back in the ‘60s. He was part of the four-man relay team that took the gold for America that year. I tease him saying, “well, YOU actually didn’t win the gold, your team did. I mean, if you won the 100 meter sprint yourself or something I’d be impressed.” Ha. He still likes me because he knows I’m kidding.

Bowhunting is mostly an individual sport. When I was younger I used to make hunting videos. You can get the best footage by having a cameraman film you. The set up includes a cameraman filming/taping over your shoulder. Twice the scent, twice the bulk; twice the noise; twice the work is involved. But the cameraman can pan and follow the deer as it moves, zoom in and out, center the

picture, making sure everything is in focus. Filming yourself is really tough. We've always said either you're a cameraman or the hunter. Trying to be both is really difficult. Occasionally it'll all work out, but not very often. That was the main reason I stopped making videos for years. We plan the entire scenario, set up the situation realizing you are dealing with wild animals here and will likely only get one opportunity. Here he comes... finally! Two more steps and he'll be broadside at 15 yards. And all of a sudden the cameraman sneezes. I can handle it if I mess up but I can't handle it when someone else messes me up. You get my drift. Therefore, in more recent years I tend to concentrate on trying to film myself. If I get the scene... great. But if I don't, so be it. I'm a hunter first and cameraman second. Not to mention if you should happen to miss on film/tape when alone you can erase it and no one knows the difference. I haven't missed since I dropped the cameraman deal.

Bowhunting has the unique attribute of being both an individual and a team sport. Frankly, I prefer to hunt alone. If I want to sit all day I can. If I want to go home and take a nap I can. If I should screw up no one knows about it. That happened once but I don't want to talk about it.

But frankly, hunting with a partner is more fun. Not only will you be an inspiration for each other i.e., "hey... we need to sit longer this morning", but two heads are better than one. When we talk over a situation it's mentally gratifying to hear someone else's opinion either as another option or to justify your own thinking.

Not to even mention the safety factor involved. Accidents do happen. When you deal with the elements in nature you always have to consider hypothermia. Almost everyone I know has fallen. I've had to crawl out of the woods twice myself. Hunting with a friend or two won't guarantee your safety but it will guarantee someone knows exactly where you are. If I should happen to be hunting alone I ALWAYS leave a note on the table at home saying the time/date

and what stand I'm hunting. I also have designated plans to call someone (wife, relative, or neighbor) at a specific time after dark so they know I got out of the woods okay. If I fail to call someone knows where to start looking. Laying out hurt all night in freezing temperatures is deadly. We owe it to our families to be responsible.

Often when I hunt I start as a "team" (one or two other guys) then split up when we leave the vehicle each going our own separate ways. So it's a combination of team work and individualism. Half the fun is sharing the adventure with others. Not only do you get to hear their stories firsthand but you get to share your tales right away. How many times I can remember thinking I can't WAIT to tell someone about what just happened or what I just saw. In the last few years though I've noticed when my hunting partner picks me up after dark I now tend to say, "You first... I'm out of breath."

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