

# Running Out the Clock

## Last Minute Consolation

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I waited impatiently all winter and summer for a chance at redemption with a great buck that I missed out on during the 2004 season. I knew he was out there that year, but I got impatient after not seeing him for four weeks and took a heavy eight point in late October. During an early-November filming excursion, the buck I was after made an appearance, and I was only holding a video camera.

It was almost as if we were bitter rivals, and by the time the season came back around, I had myself convinced that it would be me versus him. The closest feeling I can recall is the feeling of running onto the football field for the first game of the season after spending months recalling all of the things you should have done differently the previous season. I knew the deer was still around because we bumped into each other one afternoon when I was retrieving my trail camera. Somehow he never showed up in any of the photos though.

The buck was a dandy to be sure. His biggest distinguishing features included split G-2's and a rack as white as snow. I figured him for a 10 point in 2004, and it looked like he added a couple more scoreable points over the summer. I was bound and determined to take this particular deer, or at least exhaust myself trying.

### Round Two

The early part of the season came and went, as many of mine seem to go. I took a nice adult doe about two weeks in, and saw and filmed numerous one- and two-and-a-half year old bucks while waiting for my opponent to show. As the season inched toward the end of October though, I still hadn't seen the buck, and with a trip to hunt for a week in Illinois imminent, I knew I would have only one week left to get a shot at him.

The Illinois trip came and went, and believe it or not, I was pretty anxious to get home and continue my obsessive quest for the big buck. I did a little late-season scouting and determined where I thought the buck was passing through in the mornings. I set a brand-new location for my hang-on stand on Sunday, in anticipation of the Monday morning hunt.

As luck would have it, the spot was a hot one. I saw four juvenile bucks early in the morning, and several does. If nothing else, I was entertained enough to stick it out a little longer than usual. Just as I was thinking about getting down, I saw movement to my left. Within seconds, I knew this was the buck I was after, and I could feel my heart pounding. Still, it looked as if he was going to pass out of range, so I tried a few grunts, but it was no use. I could only watch in amazement as he continued on his way. Because it was only Monday, I still had high hopes of getting another look, so I wasn't totally disappointed.

As if someone had flipped a switch, the weather turned bad with high winds and cold showers, and deer movement decreased significantly. For three straight days the weather was unfavorable, and I was beginning to realize that my week had just turned into three days. For the next three days I



Trail camera monitoring of a primary scrape near my stand location revealed that several bucks were passing through under the cover of darkness. The big buck never appeared in any of the photos.

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gave it all I had, only to see the buck one more time bouncing through the goldenrod field near where I parked my truck. It was nice to see him again, but it was as if I knew this would be goodbye for the year. I hunted him all day on Thursday, Friday, and again on Saturday morning, but to no avail.

### Last-Minute Decision

The last evening hunt of the season was before me, and I was faced with the decision to give the big buck one more try, or sit out the remaining hours in an area where I had taken two nice bucks in previous years. I chose the latter because I wanted a change of scenery, and if I was going to be disappointed, it might as well be in a place where I at least had some fond memories. I wouldn't exactly call it giving up though, because I knew there were other good bucks in the area, and anything can happen on the last day.

As I ascended the hill leading to what I call "the knob," I remembered why I wasn't putting in as much time in this area as in the past. It was exceptionally warm for the second week of November, and the sweat was beading up on my forehead. By the time I got my climber into position, I was damp with perspiration. Luckily, I didn't overdress and only wore a t-shirt, which I was easily able to change once I got situated on stand. I thoroughly sprayed myself with Apparition Phantom Hunter to kill the scent-causing bacteria on my skin. To round out my set-up, I used Apparition Nosy White-

tail curiosity scent directly on the ground in three shooting lanes around my stand. Because the rut really wasn't in full gear, I opted not to use a stronger rutting scent.

It was a beautiful evening, and I was enjoying the time on stand, recalling the 2001 season when I took my first Pope and Young buck from the same tree. A nice six-point came by early in the evening and entertained me by making a small scrape next to one of my Nosy Whitetail spots. I couldn't help but think about what he may look like next season. About an hour before dark, I caught movement on the knob to my left. I could tell it was a big deer, but wasn't certain that it was a buck.

The deer finally stepped into view and right away I knew it was a shooter. I could see that it had nice mass, and a better than average spread. As luck would have it, he was taking the same path that I've seen so many other bucks take while I was hunting this location. I thought to myself, "just a few more steps, and he'll hit my Nosy Whitetail spots in the shooting lane." As if he was being led on a leash, he stepped directly into the shooting lane, and immediately began investigating the scent.

"Pick a spot. Just pick a spot," I kept telling myself as I drew the bow. A perfect 15-yard quartering-away shot was being offered, and I knew I had to take it. As I released the arrow, the deer bolted forward and came to a stop about 20 yards in front of me. I never heard the usual "thwack" associated with a good hit, and looking at the deer, I wasn't sure if I hit him or not. There was no visible wound, but I did notice that his mouth was opened, and he was somewhat bewildered. I made the quick decision to attempt another shot, which ended up clipping a small maple tree and missing the mark. At the sound, the buck bolted down over the hill, and out of sight.

It was starting to get dark, so I climbed down immediately to inspect the results of my first shot. I started to panic when I couldn't find my arrow, or any blood. Finally, I walked over to where the buck was standing for my second shot, and I could see a large amount of pink-toned blood on the ground. This was a great sign, but not knowing for sure where the hit was, I made the decision to let the deer go overnight, and come back in the morning to pick up the trail.



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**Being aware of a heavy trail and well-used scrape near my stand location helped make the last-second decision a little easier.**

I was back at the scene of the crime by daylight the next morning, and immediately picked up the blood trail. As it turned out, the first shot was a good one because I found my downed 10-point about 75 yards from where I made the shot. He had good mass, with six points on his left beam, and four

on the right. He wasn't the buck I was seeking, but I was proud nonetheless.

### **Conclusion**

As I look back on the 2005 season, I'm not sure I would change a lot about what I did, or how it turned out. I got to spend a lot of time focusing on the giant buck I was after since the previous season, and was still able to fill my tag with a quality buck on the last evening of the season. To top it all off, I got to hunt for the entire season, and up to the very last minute. Now, I can't wait to begin round three with my rival this season. Hopefully I'll be writing about him next year.



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**The author with his 2005 last day 10-point. It had a 17.5" spread.**