

Getting in the Game

— By Marlon Holden —



If you are anything like me, you spend quite a bit of time thinking about hunting, wondering about your next trip, or simply practicing at the range. Compared to the time we spend preparing for a hunt, the amount of time that any hunter actually spends stalking an animal each year is really trivial. I don't think it is because we are not good hunters or not hunting the right areas, this is just the nature of hunting... we spend all year preparing for the hunt and our success or failure hinges on the last moments of the hunt. Our intensity and focus have to reach new levels that we only achieve with the help of adrenaline. This is the last play of the game, the last hole of the tournament, the last tick of the clock; that is why I call the moment "getting in the game."

Think about it. You have applied for your tag, trained, practiced, packed up your gear, traveled many hours or days, and dreamed for months until the day you're sitting behind your glass and finally spot an animal that makes you say to yourself... that's the one! At that moment I consider myself in the game, and how I handle the next few moves will have a huge affect on the outcome. That is when I need to make some quick decisions about my approach and when I second-guess each idea until I make a decision. Once the stalk begins, everything changes and everything must be in the moment. There's no time for mistakes, self-doubt, anxiety, or buck fever. In that moment I have to pull my resources



Photo Caption

together and get in the game. Realistically, there is no way to duplicate the way I feel during that time and as a result no way to practice for it, I must live it!

If you think about it, you have been doing everything and anything possible readying yourself for that time. Once you have committed, there is no turning back, whether it's belly crawling through sparse cover for hours in the baking sun without water or sitting on your rolled up ankle uncomfortably for an extended period; it's all necessary. When all things are considered like wind, cover, and number of eyes, the situation will dictate the tempo and understanding what to do is the key to success.

I had failed at countless stalks before I finally realized what had been missing! I was going at it with the exact opposite frame of mind that got me to that point. Once I reached the last few yards of a stalk, I suddenly felt that it was important to rationalize every move I made. Instead of trusting the instincts that had successfully guided me that far, I was focused on me, to the neglect of everything else around me. Why was I stepping where I was or choosing one route over another? If you're thinking that I'm being overcritical, just put yourself back in the moment where you were stalking the biggest buck you had ever laid eyes on and remember the intensity that set in. You were in the zone!

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The internet and forums specifically, have become some of the best and fastest ways for hunters to connect. Internet forums are the easiest way to get the most information whether you are looking for the latest information on a new pack, opinions on an outfitter, or some smoking hot information about a monster bull that may have been killed last week. Unfortunately many of these sites have become breeding grounds for whiners and bickering causing many of us to quit looking at them. Thankfully Marlon and Alisha Holden from Gray Light Productions (graylightproductions.com) have launched their new website complete with a forum for all hunters. Their commitment to monitoring the site and keeping it upbeat, entertaining, and informative is refreshing. Of course the site is dominated by western hunting but being a boat captain by trade, Marlon has a section devoted with fishing with some fascinating information on the ocean fishing scene. Log on and check it out, you will be glad you did. — Chris Denham, Editor



Alisha and Marlon Holden

There's no denying it...the predator in you came alive and before you knew it, everything outside the moment didn't matter. You reach a point where you have to trust those instincts and react without over-analyzing.

Whether the outcome of your stalk is successful or not in terms of harvest, I implore you to find success in the outcome of the event either way. Take mental inventory of what worked and more importantly what didn't. Were your mistakes made because you did not trust your instincts or because you rushed in? Collect the information in a logbook and record what it took to get the job done and what to look out for on the next hunt. By reviewing your log, before long you will have a mental checklist of options and possibilities for stalk routes or ambush points. These small mental tasks will hone your abilities and hopefully aid you during your pursuits in the wild.

I for one love those moments. I feel like they define my progress as a hunter and



Photo Caption

create who I am. There's nothing better than being in the outdoors doing what you love with great friends or your family. Once you shake all of your off-season dust

bunnies away and train your most deadly asset (*your mind*) to be a skilled predator, you will be ready for the next chance you have to get in the game. 🐾

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