

FULTON COUNTY



Fantasy

BY TROY SPOONER

Ryan Elenbaas of Zeeland, Michigan, travelled to Illinois in hopes of meeting up with one of that state's trophy whitetails. In early November, it all came together when Ryan arrowed this impressive whitetail. With good tine length and mass, the Illinois buck crossed 194 7/8 inches.

What do two guys, one farm and three corners have in common? The answer is that they have all combined two years in a row to produce a whopper of a whitetail. The two guys are Ryan Elenbaas and Mike Baumann, the one farm is in Fulton County, Illinois, and the three corners are where the best treestand in the lower 48 states is located (at least in one man's opinion). To put it in perspective, the odds of a single tree producing a Boone and Crockett buck for hunters in consecutive years are astronomically low. I wouldn't even guess what those odds are, probably somewhere

around a million to one. You may have a better chance of getting struck by lightning twice in a row in some Midwestern counties, according to statistics. Well, for these two happy hunters, they pay no attention to odds or statistics and sometimes leave chance to the "toss of a coin."

On the afternoon of November 4, 2005, Ryan Elenbaas pulled a coin from his pocket, and he and Mike Baumann decided to "flip" for the rights to sit a favourite stand on their farm. It had been an unseasonably warm fall and deer sightings were way below the norm. The men were hoping



Ryan Elenbaas and Mike Baumann admire the trophy buck.

that a change in stand sites might change their luck. The stand site they were flipping for was a favourite of both men due to the high number of mature bucks sighted there every season and the history it carried since producing a B&C candidate for Mike in 2004 (see summer 2005 edition of *Big Buck*). Little did Mike know that Ryan had stacked the odds in his favour by planning ahead and carrying a dummy coin that was "heads" on both sides. After winning three coin tosses in a row, Ryan fessed up and admitted to the "trick-coin" and gave Mike the opportunity to hunt the stand. Being

the modest gentleman he is, Mike decided that Ryan should be the lucky hunter to occupy that position for the evening's hunt.

Ryan gathered up his things and made preparations to head out for the evening sit. He donned his favourite Scent-Blocker attire and liberally applied scent killer spray to try to avoid any detection by the deer that travelled the corridor he was intending to hunt in. Knowing that you only get one chance at a mature buck, he wanted to be extra cautious and not spook any deer during the evening hunt.

After climbing into his stand, a check of his watch revealed the time to be 2:30 in the afternoon, plenty of time for any disturbance he may have created to settle down. The warm temperature had him scratching his head in wonder as to whether or not the deer would even be moving before the cover of darkness fell. At 3:15, his questions were answered as a small eight-point ambled into view and started to feed at the bottom of the ridge funnel he was located in. The fall mast crop was dropping acorns like raindrops, and the deer were almost

through the bottom on its way to feed on the acorns.

Just as Ryan thought he would use his video camera to obtain some good footage of the buck, his ears captured the sounds of an additional deer moving in his direction. The right main beam was the first thing Ryan was able to see as the approaching buck made its way to the stand. Ryan could tell right away it was a shooter but decided not to stare too long at the antlers and instead readied himself should a shot present itself. As the buck made a beeline for the base of the tree Ryan was occupying, the anxious hunter tried desperately to remain calm, cool and collected. He had no idea that a buck hung up at 12 yards for three minutes could rattle a hunter so badly. He just kept reminding himself to concentrate on a spot and be ready.

After what seemed like hours, but was in reality only minutes, the big buck stepped clear of the brush that obscured his vitals, and Ryan sent an arrow on its way. The Matthews bow he was using performed flawlessly and the arrow punctured the brute exactly where it had been aimed. The buck bolted immediately and was out of sight before Ryan thought he heard a crash.

Ryan waited a few minutes, then decided to retrieve his arrow and head back to camp for help in tracking and dragging. Since the arrow was covered in bright red blood and the buck was leaving a good blood trail, Ryan assumed that he wasn't too far away.

The party returned later that night with their lights and lanterns and headed right to the spot where Ryan had last heard the buck. As the lamplight illuminated the huge deer, a joyous celebration erupted among the group. The grown men suddenly turned into boys and hugged each other, slapping hands and shouting expletives.

After the jubilation subsided, Ryan sat and admired his buck. He couldn't believe the body size of the beast, and the ivory crown it wore atop its head was truly a sight to behold. The rack carried seven points on the left main beam and nine points on the right for a grand total of 16 scorable points! The inside spread

stretched the tape out to 20 2/8 inches and the circumferences at the bases measured over six inches. The buck's total gross score was 194 7/8 inches, an impressive sight indeed.

As for next season, Ryan intends to get more aggressive with his tactics and rig Mike's alarm clock so that it keeps Mike in bed long enough for Ryan to claim the "Three Corners Stand." Besides, Ryan doubts Mike will ever flip a coin again to settle anything else in life as long as he lives. Best of luck, Ryan! 🍀



This whitetail spent a lot of time rubbing his antlers. He was a dominant buck, and his body and neck were huge.

all but avoiding the crop fields in favour of the sweet oaks that peppered the forest floor. The young buck wasted no time in devouring all he could handle before wandering off. A spike buck later moved in to take his place and also fill his belly.

As the afternoon progressed, the bucks not only got bigger, but the winds died and the sounds of approaching critters became easier to discern. The staccato rhythm of a deer heading his way brought Ryan to full attention. As he peered around his stand, he was greeted by the sight of a nice seven-point moving