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ADAM'S
BIG BUCK

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THE VETERAN

ADAM LAROCHE • MULE DEER

I once thought that when I retired from playing baseball, I would finally have the time to hunt like I'd always wanted to. Without the encumbrances of an eight month season, I would at last be able to travel the country, the world even, chasing each of the elusive game animals this green earth has to offer. Retirement finally came; in the most unsuspecting manner, and three years into it, I've recognized that my priorities have aligned much differently than I had previously imagined. With two kids now in high school and their time at home fleeting, my days in the field have been quite scarce. I've realized that my life is measured, much more significantly, by the impact I can have for the Kingdom and on those around me.

Make no mistake about it, my passion for hunting has not faded. In fact, I spend more time planning and preparing for the opportunities I get, so I can maximize my experiences in the field.

Over the years, I've been fortunate to chase some really nice whitetails and harvest my fair share of them. I will always love the thrill and challenge of bowhunting whitetails, but my next challenge has become mule deer. Chasing mule deer has eluded me for so many years, mainly because the baseball season and crazy offseason schedule always seemed to get in the way. The last couple of years, my goal has been to get out west and hunt them.



To date, quite a few footprints of mine have been left in the hills and mountains of Montana, Colorado, Nevada and Utah. If I've learned anything about bow hunting mule deer, it's this: it's hard—and that is exactly why I love it. Those that know me well, know that I like to chase those deer that are seemingly impossible to get.

Recently, I've come to learn that not many people know mule deer better than Jeremy Fiscus and the Sandy Hills Hunting Co. crew. They have quite the reputation for finding some of the best mule deer that Colorado has to offer, which is exactly what I was looking for. After a good bit of research and a discussion with Jeremy, I knew we had to make this hunt happen. We booked the hunt for the second week of November. This week is widely recognized as one of the greatest weeks to hunt whitetails in the Midwest—it's the crescendo of the rut—the week we work all year

long, planting, scouting and working so that we might have that one chance at a mature giant. On most any year, you would find me at home, on my ranch, in a stand during most lighted hours, hoping for that chance—but, not this year.

This year, I would be in Colorado. Joining me on this hunt was my good friend, Bryan Offutt, as well as my longtime cameraman, Mikey Miller. The first morning, Jeremy told us we were going to drive by a farm where they had spotted a “nice” buck over the summer and earlier that season. As hoped, there he was, standing out in a field along with a handful of does. I quickly learned that Jeremy's version of “nice” is the average man's version of “HUGE”. Unfortunately, I was then informed that we didn't have access to that piece of property and the buck would need to move a 1/2 mile if we were going to be able to hunt him.

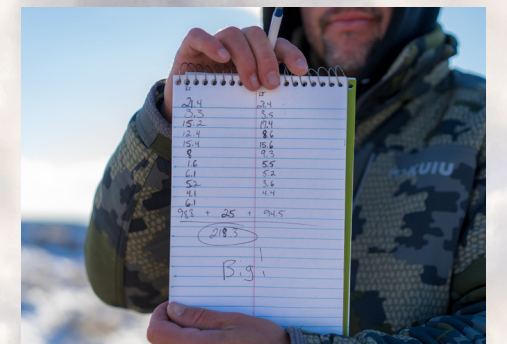


Not able to let it go, I mentioned the buck again to Jeremy, who informed me that the buck was no stranger to being hunted. Apparently, several local bowhunters had been chasing him for weeks on the ground we didn't have permission. Of course, I persisted, with the notion that we should find a way to get access to the property, but Jeremy said he had tried several times before with no luck. The landowner hunted with a couple friends and wasn't interested in giving us a shot.

Later that day, we made a play on several really nice deer that Jeremy had scouted earlier in the week. Bryan was able to make a stalk on a quality buck, but that didn't pan out. All the while, I couldn't shake the mental images of the buck we had glassed that morning. I continued my quest

to gather more information on this deer and learned that he was actually a local legend. In fact, many hunters already had him mentally mounted on their wall. Two such hunters had even sent arrows at him, one connecting, but hitting him high in the back. The buck had been carrying his arrow for nearly 5 weeks now. The buck was a veteran to the game - and so, that's what we named him - The Veteran

Finally, if only to humor me, Jeremy agreed to make the request to the landowner for permission to hunt where this buck was hanging out, taunting us. I'm pretty sure he obliged, mainly so that I'd stop acting like a spoiled child who didn't get his way and we could get back to focusing on the other deer we had already engaged. Jeremy must have been persuasive because the landowner



said he would consider it since they were having no luck. After being hit, the buck became extremely jumpy and nearly impossible to stalk according to the landowner.

Locating the buck seemed to be the easiest part of the entire hunt. Making a play on him proved altogether more difficult. You can imagine that a buck of this quality didn't get this way by wielding ignorance. Our initial stalk proved futile, and even though we worked to move in and get a shot inside of forty yards, the beast would have none of our petty efforts. Stalk two ended the same way. By the third stalk I thought for sure we had him; yet again, his instincts and sixth-sense saved him.

Fast forward to the final day of my hunt, we fully understood that if we did locate him again that morning, my hunt was in jeopardy. In all honesty, I never would have imagined that I'd have the opportunity to put more than one, maybe two, good stalks on a deer like this but—there he was—and it looked like we would get a fourth. As in the previous stalks, the wind was in our favor, but not the wind speed. The wind had gone from a pretty consistent 10-15 mph down to next-to-nothing and mother nature decided to dump a few inches of snow over night. If you've been on many stalks of bedded animals, well—no wind and snow ain't good!

A full-page photograph of a hunter with a beard and camouflage gear kneeling next to a large buck in a snowy field. The hunter is smiling and looking at the camera. The buck has large, light-colored antlers and is lying on the snow. The background is a bright blue sky with scattered white clouds. The number '218' is overlaid in the top right corner in a white, distressed font.

218

We chose what looked like the best route to get in range and started our 1,000 yard approach. Halfway there, we put the glass on him and learned that not only was he bedded with a whole herd of does, he was surrounded by them. Not to be deterred, our mission was still a go! “We’ll figure it out as we get closer.” Jeremy told me. Afraid that their afternoon siesta might soon end, we moved quickly, yet carefully. The last hundred yards on the snow covered ground was an army-style crawl until we reached 58 yards.

Other than three or four does that seemed to be sound asleep, the only thing between The Veteran and us was some very sparse clumps of bluestem grass. Jeremy insisted that we not push any further. The buck was dead asleep and Jeremy told me to draw and take my shot. I rose to one knee and drew. Upon releasing my arrow, I had a good feeling that everything had aligned. The arrow hit home, and the monster ran about the same distance as the shot and folded.

To put my hands on this buck was truly special. Not only because of how big he was or because of all the work our team put in to make this happen, but because of something much bigger. The day before was Veterans Day and this week had been dedicated to them. Bryan and I had both carried small American flags for the 5 day hunt with the goal of honoring the men and women who sacrificially give us the freedoms we enjoy in this country—hunting included.

If I can shed light on anything as a result of this hunt, it would be on these heroes—my heroes. Over the last few years, through the E3 Foundation, my family and I have had the opportunity to host many of our combat vets on our ranch in southeast Kansas. This has proven to be the most exciting and impactful time of our year. Whether it be a deer hunt, turkey hunt, predator hunt or just a summer shooting and fishing competition, we are thankful for this incredible platform that God has given us to serve those who have spent their lives serving us.

I have no doubt that our veterans make our hunts, like this muley, possible.

