

"Where did he come from?" That thought quickly raced through the mind of Jason Terry on November 1, 2019. A normal afternoon of hunting in Kentucky immediately transformed when THAT deer walked out. The buck he heard stories about. The buck rarely photographed over the past 3 years. The buck of a lifetime. Having already stood as a doe had previously come through, his legs started to wobble but he drew his Mathews Triax bow. He had dreamed about and practiced for this very scenario and, now, at full draw, he was ready.



At full draw.

Every bowhunter has been there and faced its struggles – pulse pounding, rapid breathing, stomach churning, nerves firing. These moments are what we live and prepare for as hunters. Most of the time, we do the preparation work for ourselves; however, Jason experienced something else. He was on a hunt hosted by Ironman Outdoors (IO) where things are done differently.

Patrick Tyndall, the Executive Director for IO, shares a little bit about the organization: "IO is not an outfitter focused on killing deer but a men's ministry focused on glorifying God. Our goal is to connect men to Christ in the outdoors." The organization has one paid employee – an accountant – and the rest are volunteers, located in 14 states. It was from that group that 23 men gave up a weekend in July to prepare the KY properties; and bear in mind, that most of these men would never hunt those lands. Imagine the selfless work in that summer heat that included sweating while hanging stands, trimming the right shooting lanes, placing the Covert trail cameras, and contracting poison ivy or chiggers.



Three years ago, a young buck showed up trail camera with a solid rack. He received quite a bit of attention and was given the name "Brutus." Unfortunately, he disappeared; and Team IO believed this deer was our version of Bigfoot or the Loch Ness Monster. His name was mentioned a lot but rarely did he show up on camera. In fact, only 6 pictures were taken in a three-year span.

Ever smart, this deer evaded hunters until a foggy morning in 2018. An IO staffer saw what he described as a monster deer moving across the field at 100 yards. The buck kept working his way toward him but his intelligence showed as he halted in his tracks, changed direction, and slipped away into the fog. A cell phone picture confirmed this "Brutus" sighting. Although that hunter's heart was left racing, "Brutus" had another season to grow and for IO to plot his demise.

"A couple more steps. Keep following that doe. No, don't stop there!" Jason changed his focus by looking at what he could do. After a quick scan of the terrain and a mental calculation, he made his decision – "If he steps right there, he'll be at 24 yards, and this arrow will fly."



Major hunting decisions are often made in seemingly minor moments, but not this time. Months before Jason's hunt, Chris Taylor, an IO volunteer, had a hunch. He was tired of intermittently seeing this deer on camera, so he gave up more personal time to scout more than in the past. He found an ideal location but it was risky – right beside public land. On the aforementioned workday, Chris and another volunteer carried a stand nearly 1000 yards through the bean fields to place it in that ideal spot. Yes, IO has a Polaris but could not risk damage the farmer's crops to reach this honey hole.

The stand had its back to a river with bedding to the right and food off to the left. The area looked like a microburst had hit it with trees down and overgrowth brush everywhere. Within that 40 yards of mess, some clear shooting lanes had been cut and everything else was left undisturbed. Chris said, "We were uncertain as to the exact location in this plateau but the prevailing winds came from the bedding area. We placed the stand based upon that wind pattern and left with hope in our hearts."

Interestingly, with several IO retreats during the fall, not one hunter sat in that Millennium ladder stand. Jason's major moment came as the final decision in a long stretch of minor choices.

"How long can I hold this bow?" Every experienced bowhunter encounters this situation as deer are unpredictable in their gait. With thick brush around and Brutus hiding his vitals behind a small tree, Jason was about to answer his own question.

This last hunt in Kentucky started off as a frustrating one for Jason. As he put it, "The hunting had been tough – rainouts, 20+ mph winds, freezing temps, and a lack of seeing any deer." On the way to the stand, his disappointment escalated as he bumped 2 bucks, so he resigned himself to seeing nothing.

Climbing into his stand, he thought, “I remembered why I was here. My time in the woods is quite time that I can spend talking with Jesus. My joy was restored as the sun poked through the trees onto the forest floor and I relaxed in my stand.”

As he sat there, he heard a grunt to his right and saw a doe coming out. She turned full broadside and Jason ranged her at 24 yards. He did not want to go home empty handed and here was a perfect opportunity to put meat in the freezer. He readily admitted that “he’s bad about shooting does” instead of waiting to see what else may be around, and his patience paid off.

He saw movement again from his right and a small 3 point buck showed himself. The buck was pushing the doe and she disappeared – only to re-appear where she first emerged from the thicket. She followed the same path again and stopped at 24 yards. Jason then heard a loud crunch and looked to his right. All he saw was a dark rack and a huge body. He had no idea of the size of the rack but knew it was a shooter.

With him entering the scene, that small buck bolted; and Brutus continued toward that doe. She moved off a bit, and he followed her. As he passed a tree, Jason drew and then Brutus halted with his nose to the ground. For the first time, Jason got a decent look at the size of this deer. Brutus stood in same spot that doe had been in twice, so he immediately knew the distance.

He checked the level of his bow and simply waited.

Finally, Brutus made a mistake.

“He dropped. He dropped right there!” Now, the real shaking began.

Jason processed that moment over and over and over. The shot was not perfect but the NAP Bloodrunner did its job perfectly. Brutus fell within sight but he was behind some brush. As excitement built, he panicked a bit when the buck tried to stand. The buck rested behind brush making a shot from the stand impossible; so, as calmly, quickly, quietly as possible, Jason lowered his bow and crawled to within 15 yards of the deer who has been thrashing. After a struggle, the deer stood, and Jason put a second arrow in him. Brutus fell for the final time.

Jason stood on the back part of this property trying to get ahold of family to share the great news. As word spread among hunters on the IO retreat, they all wanted to see this big deer. Jason described the scene this way: “Before you know it, there’s 13 guys standing deep in the woods with headlights – all celebrating being together.” As he stood and watched these strangers bond together, this thought came to mind, *“Ironman Outdoors truly is special.”*

What makes IO special? These men, who did not kill the deer, collectively decided not to drag him. They wanted to preserve the antlers and hide as much as possible, so with a little ingenuity, they rigged up a strap system and “carried him out of the woods like a king.”

And a king he was.

The taxidermist scored him at 202 1/8. We are still awaiting to see where this fits in the Kentucky record books.

These men, who he had never met before, bonded together on property scouted, prepared, and prayed over by unknown volunteers. The hunters have memories and stories that they will share the rest of their lives. Jason said his success was not what everyone would believe: "At the end of the day, it's really not about the deer. The focus of where you make your decisions is more important. If you base your decisions on Jesus Christ, then you will experience joy in life that is much greater than harvesting a big deer like Brutus. My success comes from a relationship with Jesus."

While the incredible harvest of Brutus may bring some notoriety to IO, our primary goal remains to glorify God by challenging men to become better fathers, better husbands, and, ultimately, living as godly men. Whether Jason's arrow ever hit Brutus or not, he connected with Christ in the outdoors.

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