



# Up and Comers

A warm Texas howdy to you!

I saw your call for "Up and Comers" submissions in TPWD's Target Talk and figured I had a pretty good one for y'all.

My son Felix recently went on his first hunt Feb 5-7. It was a Texas Youth Hunt Program MLD hunt at Selah Bamberger Ranch in Johnson City, TX in cooperation with Texas Wildlife Association. When we left for the trip he was anxious but excited. I was optimistic that the trip would bring at least one or two good opportunities. The weather was warming up for the first time in a few weeks and forecasts were clear. The ranch had seen less human activity than normal after a year of COVID shutdowns. And perhaps most fortunate of all, our group was going to be smaller than the typical youth hunts on the ranch. To top it all off, Felix had two cousins also going on the trip; our family actually comprised half of the hunters on the hunt!

When we crawled into the dark, pre-dawn blind Felix took with him a brand-new rifle (my first centerfire) that I'd managed to purchase just prior to the hunt: a CZ527 that was due to soon be converted to a scout rifle. He was going to be the first to use a rifle that might well be in our family for generations, the first to try and harvest game with this generational rifle on his own first hunt.

Some early aoudad poked around the feeder, but stayed tight and didn't offer enough of an opening. Felix was extremely cautious and respectful of the animals, neither asking for clearance on iffy shots, nor leaving his finger near the trigger when searching for a clear opportunity. At last, a beautiful young aoudad strayed a little too far and Felix dropped it right where it stood. Soon, a stray trio of piglets wandered in to gobble their share of corn. We were surprised because there wasn't a mamma in sight. These little family-size, single-serving morsels were wandering the world without a care at a very young age. Already bitten by the bug, Felix waited for them to separate and provide a good shot and claimed his \*second\* harvest only ten minutes after his first! The remaining two piglets scurried off, barely in time to miss a young sow entering the target area. Without the piglets to complicate shots, he claimed his second hog and, as though drawn to check on the sow, too, the two piglets came back! Both were quickly and carefully taken by Felix. Within 90 minutes he'd taken five animals!

Felix was the only one to successfully claim a harvest on that first sit. While he and I focused on



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the aoudad (a very young ram, as it turned out, and not a ewe as we'd believed) and the sow, the piglets actually provided opportunities for all of the other hunters to get the experience of helping to dress game.

...but he wasn't done. On his second sit Felix successfully harvested an aoudad lamb, as well, which we'll share on Easter with the family. (Anyone who thinks aoudad is tough clearly hasn't thrown one in the crock pot for six hours. Delicious!) I actually had to spend quite a bit of time resetting his expectations of a hunt afterwards. He harvested more game than everyone else on the hunt combined! (No one went home empty-handed, but no one else went home with more than one, either.) I had to remind him how often I'd come home empty-handed, or with no more than a squirrel or two. Nevertheless, he's excited to go on his next hunt with me. If I nurture him right, we'll have another lifelong hunter in the family. One who can seem to actually take enough game to feed us, too! His total harvest was about 150 lbs of meat!

Attached are two pics (one with and one without me, depending on what y'all prefer) and a short video I took after we'd gathered his animals after the first sit, in case you're curious. When I asked him how he felt looking at his harvest he said he was "happy, grateful, and excited." I must be doing something right!

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