

Wheelchair no handicap for hunter

The selected deer stand was the Broken Arrow. The name did not describe 18-year-old Scott Stokes' attitude. He was definitely not broken by the learning disability he had been battling since birth.

Nine-year-old Troy LeGear approached the deer stand with grand hopes of bagging a wall hanger. His legs were strengthened by excitement and his guide, Lamar Boswell. He was not even considering the difficulty he faced just get to the stand.

Troy and Scott were two of five youths selected to hunt at the first Great Southern Outdoors Handicapped Youth Hunt in Union Springs, Ala.

Jamie Self, an 18 year old, and guide Lee Watson positioned her wheelchair in the Off Limits blind. In like hunts, she had already bagged nine deer. Her desire to hunt with her dad, Jimmy, and special rifle mount on her wheelchair overcame the cerebral palsy that would keep most people indoors.

Will Gather's tumors had been removed and the chemotherapy completed. He and outdoor writer Richard Scott headed for the Gun



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Smoke stand. Scott, while a seasoned sports journalist, was new to the outdoors. But, he was teamed with a veteran. Will had been hunting since age 9. Even during

those years he could not walk to the stand, his dad, Tommy, had somehow gotten him there. It was in this stand that roles became reversed. While many deer were seen by Will and Scott, none were the trophy Will was looking for. Out of the tree line an abnormal buck appeared. The 170-pound deer only had a 1-inch nub for antlers. It was certainly not the gene-based deer desired on a



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Nine-year-old Troy LaGear and Jamie Self discuss the success of their deer hunt at the Great Southern Outdoors Hunting Plantation recently.

Additionally, a lifetime friendship was formed.

Kyman Donavon and his guide Jason Montgomery took their position in the Rub Broken stand. Sixteen-year-old Kyman, like Will, was already an experienced hunter. The way the young outdoorsman handled himself and his deer rifle would quickly make you feel that this was no handicapped youth. But, a closer inspection revealed no hand at the end of his left arm. His dad is quick to brag about Kyman's abilities with a bow. A special prostheses and Kyman's attitude overcame that problem.

All of these youths are members of Wheelin' Sportsman NWTF, a Montgomery, Ala. based association for disabled sportsmen. Pam Morgan, Regional coordinator, brought a new insight to the guides, guests, and media that attended the event. All gathered were proud that they could provide this opportunity for the handicapped youths.

During the opening orientation and safety briefing, Morgan tilted the scales when she said, "Not only are these type events for the handicapped, they also educate the able bodied individuals about the disabled. People learn that

took his first deer, a big doe. Jamie passed up several does and a spike. Scott brought a doe to the hunting camp. Kyman passed up a big doe. Will passed off his gun to an able-bodied hunter.

That evening in the activities center of the Great Southern Outdoors Hunting Plantation, each hunt was relived. At that time, all individuals were in camouflage. It was not even noticed that some were in wheel chairs, walking with canes or shyly answering questions. All were outdoorsmen who had enjoyed a dynamic day of deer hunting.

I should take a paragraph or two lauding Rex Pritchett and Wayne Green of the Great Southern Outdoors Hunting Plantation.

And, I should brag on the Wheelin' Sportsman organization and Kirk Thomas who founded it to offer the handicapped outdoorsmen an avenue back into the outdoors. But, even their magnificent contributions were dwarfed by the sparkle in 9-year-old Troy's eyes as he sat in the back of a pickup and showed off his first deer. The radiance and honesty of Jamie's smile easily overshadowed the effort to put the event together.