

Adam Hays is driven to kill big bucks — something he does with uncanny regularity.

■ by Gordy J. Krahn

**A**dam Hays III has a knack for finding and killing the biggest whitetail bucks in the neighborhood — any neighborhood. In fact, he has dozens of Pope and Young bucks to his credit, including 10 that surpassed the 170-inch mark and four monsters that broke the 200-inch barrier.

Like most hunters who target specific trophy-class bucks, he is driven by a passion to match wits with the most formidable adversaries in the woods — those reclusive veterans of several deer seasons that most hunters never see. And what sets him apart from more casual, less skilled hunters is his determination and methodical approach. His consistent success is the product of year-round scouting, proper land management and stand placement, and zeroing in on a specific buck only when the moment is perfect. Hays is a deer hunter's deer hunter.

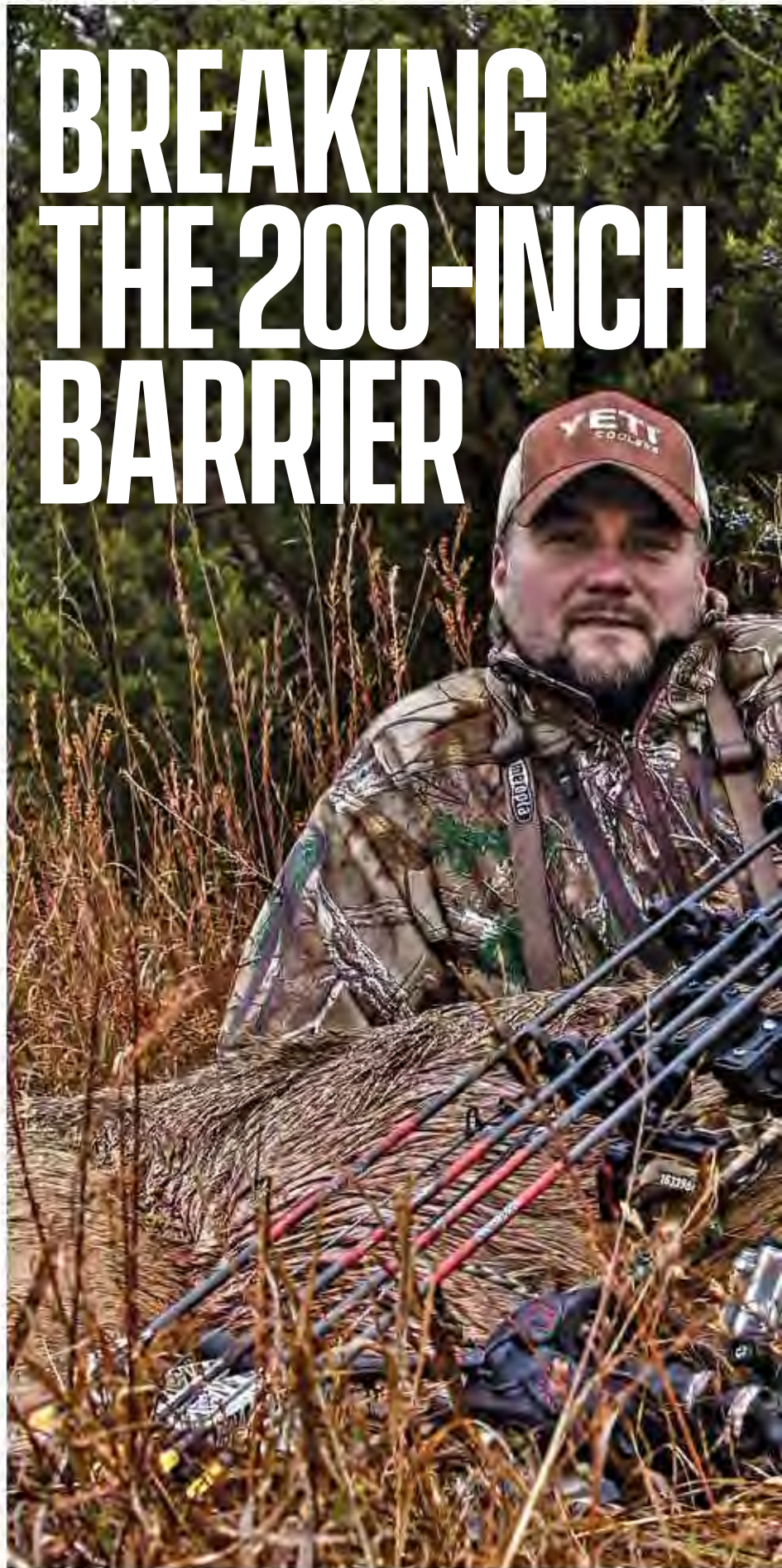
Hays owns and produces Team200 TV, which can be viewed on the Pursuit Channel and Waypoint TV. The object of the series is to educate hunters and give them the means to target and kill the most mature animals in their area— regardless of species — and to be successful season after season.

“The Team200 show was born from my own personal goal of hunting the biggest whitetails in North America,” Hays said. “I can honestly say that after chasing the most incredible animal in the woods for four decades now, the addiction is stronger than ever. The 200-inch buck is what dreams are made of. It is the benchmark of whitetail hunting.”

In addition to Team200 TV, Hays has also continued the work of the late Jeff Murray, who pioneered MoonGuide, a tool hunters can use to determine the best days, times and locations to encounter mature bucks on their feet during daylight months in advance. It's ideal for pre-season scouting, scheduling time off work or planning out-of-state hunts. After using the MoonGuide for almost two decades, Hays credits this lunar hunting tool for his success in zeroing in on giant whitetails.

We caught up with Hays as he was preparing for another hunting season and picked his brain about his recipe for success. It comes as no surprise that it's the product of hard work

# BREAKING THE 200-INCH BARRIER







and an in-depth knowledge of mature buck behavior. Targeting big bucks requires dedication and determination — and a well-thought-out game plan. His success speaks for itself.

**WI:** Can you tell us about your hunting background? How did you get into the whitetail game? Where are your home stomping grounds? Do you still spend a lot of time hunting there?

**Hays:** “My father was a bowhunter and had me shooting a bow when I was 4 years old, so it was meant to be. I just don’t think he ever thought I would turn it into a career. I was born and raised in central Ohio and got my start in the hill country of southeastern Ohio. But for the past 20 years, I’ve focused my efforts closer to home.”

**WI:** Talk about your involvement with Team200 and MoonGuide.

**Hays:** “I started Team200 10 years ago after producing shows for manufacturers for the past 20 years in the archery industry. I worked for Skyline Camo

and Lone Wolf Tree Stands, helped start and produce Whitetail Addictions and worked for Tom Miranda and help start [the TV series] Dominant Bucks. I’ve been using the MoonGuide for more than 20 years and bought the company close to 10 years ago after my good friend Jeff Murray, who was the inventor of MoonGuide, passed away.”

**WI:** It’s one thing to kill big bucks in your own backyard, but you have a knack of finding them wherever you hunt. How is that possible?

**Hays:** “Lots of year-round scouting, and I have hunted the same areas in Illinois and Kansas for almost 20 years. It helps having an intimate knowledge of the areas.”

**WI:** It’s been said that you live and die by the moon — that it’s the biggest influence on your success. How do the moon phases affect on the way you hunt?

**Hays:** “Correct. I believe the wind,

■ Adam Hays has dozens of Pope and Young whitetails to his credit, including 10 that scored more than 170 inches and four that topped the 200-inch mark.

moon and weather affect mature deer movement, in that order. It’s not really about the phase of the moon. It’s the gravitational pull of the moon and the handful of

days each month when it lines up with primetime.”

**WI:** Talk about your philosophy regarding property management and food plot, cover and hunting stands strategies. How does this mesh with the surrounding landscape — agriculture, big timber, neighbors — and how does this apply to your hunting strategy, especially when it comes to tagging mature whitetail bucks?

**Hays:** “I’m all about ultra-low impact — providing food in the right spots where I can capitalize on feeding patterns early and late, and staying out of the area until everything is on my side — even letting surrounding [hunting] pressure push deer into my spots. The hardest part of hunting big deer is not

hunting them until everything is just right.”

**WI:** How vital is proper land management and specific stand placement when targeting mature whitetail bucks?

**Hays:** “It’s vitally important. Deer have to eat, and providing what they need when they want and need it is crucial. The only thing that’s more important is your stand placement.”

**WI:** Talk about how Whitetail Institute products play a part in your food plot strategy.

**Hays:** “I’ve used Whitetail Institute products for 20 years and have never had a reason to change. They always perform, and I’ve witnessed firsthand what a deer’s antler potential can be using these products.”

**WI:** Do you have a favorite?

**Hays:** “Imperial Whitetail Clover is my favorite. It provides quality forage year-round for the deer in my area.”

**WI:** You travel a lot to hunt and see a lot of the various destinations and habitats where whitetails hang out. What have you noticed about other hunters’ and outfitters’ approach to food plots, good and bad?

**Hays:** “I think a lot of people over-manage their property — holding the 95 percent of the herd they do not want to kill, and the neighbors kill all the big bucks. I prefer more cover and less food. You have to have better cover than the neighbors if you want to hold the biggest bucks, but you have to have the best food plots as well. It’s a fine line.”

## IMPERIAL WHITETAIL CLOVER — DEER CANDY

Feed them and they will come. Give them everything they want and need, and they will stay. Food plots provide the deer candy that reinforces the premise that this is a great place to hang out — that it provides essentials for a good life.

On the micro level, placement of food plots determines the best locations for tree stands and ground blinds to ensure landowners and hunters get the greatest return for their efforts come hunting season. Those who want to maximize the attraction power of their food plots put considerable thought into the seeds they sow and how they care for the plants. The goal, of course, is a healthier deer herd and increased hunting opportunities. For Adam Hays III, Whitetail Institute’s Imperial Whitetail Clover is a critical ingredient in his deer management efforts. Containing the only clover that’s genetically designed for whitetail deer, this perennial food plot planting has an extremely high protein content — critical for antler, muscle and bone growth. It thrives in extreme cold as well as warm, dry climates, and deer love the taste and will travel long distances to feed on it. It’s coated with RainBond for enhanced seedling survivability and lasts up to five years from one planting.

For more information, visit [www.whitetailinstitute.com](http://www.whitetailinstitute.com).



**WI:** You have an impressive hit list of mega bucks to your credit — a handful that topped 200 inches. What accounts for your success when it comes to targeting huge bucks, and what drives you to seek out these monsters?

**Hays:** “I enjoy deer hunting, and I love hunting specific bucks. Matching wits with a smart old buck is a challenge that never gets old for me. There is nothing like it. I think my success comes mainly from extensive scouting, hunting winds good for the buck I’m after (giving him the wind to his advantage), and stacking the deck in my favor with the wind, moon and weather before I will go in and hunt. It’s hard for most guys to be that patient and not hunt until everything is perfect, but nine times out of 10, I get it done the first time I go in.”

**WI:** Do you target specific bucks? What does your scouting look like?

**Hays:** “That is all I do. It requires lots of post-season scouting and in-season, long-range observation.”

**WI:** You film your own hunts. How has this changed the way you hunt?

**Hays:** “It’s really made it more difficult — more gear, more movement, and it has cost me some giants over the years.”

**WI:** Is there a buck that stands out as your most memorable?

**Hays:** “The biggest buck I’ve ever seen in the wild was in Alberta, during early November. He followed a doe in at daylight and bedded down 45 yards away. I watched him for three hours before I finally got a shot — and I blew it. His sheds were 220s the year before, and we estimated him somewhere in the 230- to 240-inch range — all captured on video.”

**WI:** Do you have a favorite big buck destination?

**Hays:** “I love Ohio, Illinois and Kansas, but Alberta will always have a special meaning to me because of that giant buck that got away.”

**WI:** What’s on the horizon for you?

**Hays:** “No big changes; still chasing those elusive 200-inchers.”