

A Christmas Combat Tale



Mike Whillance

är en 58-årig engelsk combatflygare och han har bland annat vunnit EM i F2D två gånger samt British Nats 10 gånger. Han bor i Manchester, är ingenjör och jobbar med lyftkranar ("Gå aldrig under en lyftkran i England" är hans råd) samt är gift och har två utflugna döttrar.

Förutom att flyga combat har han en förmåga att uttrycka sig verbalt vilket inte minst Linas läsare fått uppleva tidigare. Som en julsaga förmedlar han här sina funderingar kring combat.

F2D COMBAT....GOOD SPORT?

To be successful in any of the control classes requires a high degree of skill and a lot of dedication, and that is certainly true for combat. But combat is slightly different from the other 3 classes because it has a much more aggressive side to its nature. The pilots are attacking or defending, chasing all over the sky, and sometimes crashing into each other or the floor. It's this aggressive part of combat that perhaps tends to attract a certain type of person that is prepared to push the boundaries in an effort to win. It is in F2D combat that we can most easily see some stark differences in attitudes as to what some view as good sporting behaviour, and what others would say is poor sportsmanship or even downright cheating!

So, at one end of the spectrum we have pilots that believe combat should be an enjoyable competition with friendly, sporting, long lasting bouts, which are good fun and highly skilful. Just two people having a lot of fun in a friendly and good sporting way.

At the opposite end of this spectrum we have people who see combat more as a boxing match but with models. Two pilots who will dog-fight to the death, each determined to win and be the victor.

What is a good sportsman?

Even this simple term can be seen in different ways.

We often hear the term "he is a good sport" or "that is highly sporting of him" which tends to indicate that this particular person has a high standard of morals and is very fair to his opponent, and would even help his opponent if necessary. So to some people, a "good sportsman" is someone who tries to be fair at all times.



But then we also hear the term "that is sportsmanship" when someone tries to deliberately get their opponent penalised or put them off in some way. We often see top footballers deliberately diving in the penalty area. Is this cheating? Or is it sportsmanship? In formula one racing we see drivers deliberately going slowly to hold up an opponent from a rival team. Is this cheating or sportsmanship? A golfer coughs as his opponent putts - is this unfair or just sportsmanship?

Perhaps what some people would call "sportsmanship" others would call "unsporting", or even cheating.

To be the best in any sport is always going to be difficult, so to most people, a top sportsman is a person that will try extremely hard to win and will push everything to the limit to achieve that win. That includes training hard, practicing hard, perfecting and improving all equipment, and also making sure that they understand and get the very most out of all the rules. I suspect that most of our sporting greats are like this, but I am not so sure that trying extremely hard to win goes hand in hand with always being "a very good sport".



Rules

Different people from different countries have their own views on what is sporting, what is fair, what should be allowed, and what should be penalised in combat. But we cannot fly each competition differently, for example to fly as the Dutch might like one day, then the next competition to fly as the Danes might like, or the Ukrainians or the Brits....all to slightly different rules.

So, we all have to fly to a single set of rules. And we have those already. They are the FAI F2D rules. They are very good rules and we are lucky that we have very good judges to interpret and enforce these rules.

To win at combat it is important to get the best out of all aspects of the sport:

- The models have to be very good, previously tested and trimmed to suit
- The motors have to go as fast as possible
- All the equipment has to work faultlessly and the pit crew have to be perfect
- We have to fly the best tactics to give ourselves any advantage over our opponents
- And we also have to understand the rules and push them to the limit to get the most out of them

It is my view that a top sportsman will assess all the aspects of his sport, and then push everything to the limit, and that includes getting the best out of the rules and the judges.



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And the majority of pilots do most of this already:

- We all have motors that are 2.49cc - we would not consider turning up to a comp with motors of only 2.0cc
- We all try to use the very best equipment we can make or buy
- If our opponent has a sensitive model then we tend to fly low inverted so it is difficult for him to follow us, i.e. we use flying tactics that will give us the best chance of winning
- If we see an opponents pit man jump over some lines we shout for a DQ



So we all tend to go to the limit on most of these issues and on some of the rules. It's just that some people will push some of the other rules further than others.

The rules...the limit... line tangles etc

Some people would maintain that we have a set of rules. They are all there in black and white so all we have to do is stick to them religiously. But I think it is more complicated than that because there are some grey areas as well.

Take for example the speed limit on roads.....Lets say the limit is 30. How many of us have broken that limit, that rule, only this week? And we are not even in a

competition. I for example, know that I will only get prosecuted by the police if I am found to exceed 40 and so I regularly travel at 30 - 38. I know that I have exceeded the written rule, but that the police will accept my behaviour and not penalise me in anyway. Am I still breaking the law if the lawman permits it? And should we do this in competitions where we are trying to get the most out of the situation?

The F2D judges interpret and enforce our rules....they are our police. Some of the rules are enforced to the letter of the law, but others are not. For example, sometimes the pilot is permitted to put a foot out of the circle and only receive a verbal warning the first time. There's a rule that says deliberate line tangling is not permitted, but when has any pilot been penalised for doing a deliberate line tangle? It has been a standard tactic in combat for at least 30 years and we all see it a lot at every competition. We also have a rule that says flying aggressively is not permitted, but it is still a fairly common occurrence.

So if the judges, who are our policemen, have always permitted line tangling and aggressive

flying, should we not, as top sportsmen, get the most out of that situation...or is it unsporting?

Landing

We have no FAI F2D rule on landing a model prior to the end of the 4 minute flying time. So according to the rules, it is permitted. But a lot of pilots do not like this tactic, they think it is against some form of "fair moral code" and feel it is "unsporting".

At a recent European Champs I watched a bout that highlighted the differences of opinions:

Chornyy was flying a bout. He was ahead on points and deliberately landed early. A pilot who was watching (who would consider themselves as the "sporting type") was outraged and started shouting and booing Chornyy. They felt that Chornyy was being very unsporting and that it was their right to let him know and boo accordingly.

Now I should point out that I personally am not a big fan of this particular "deliberate landing" tactic and I would prefer it if we had a rule that said "Deliberate landing is not allowed". But until that happens we have to fly to the current set of rules - as top sportsmen that's part of our jobs. And if this tactic is against some people's moral code of what is right and wrong, they should take it up with the technical people at the FAI, or go to the judges and ask them if they will consider changing the rules. But if you ask me, it is actually "unsporting" to boo a competitor that is just flying to the rules.

But of course, this is just my opinion and perhaps some people think that we should actually fly to a form of personal moral code rather than to the actual rules.



Breaking the rules

There are 4 basic ways to break the rules.

1) Ignorance

There is no real excuse for this, so read the rules, talk about the rules and understand the rules.

2) By accident

This is by far the most common way that rules get broken. The pilots have to watch and fly the model, watch the opponent's model and react accordingly. They also have to be aware of the position of the opponent himself, think about tactics, assess the score and even look down occasionally to check

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where the circle is. So they sometimes go into a sort of “brain overload” and make daft mistakes.

The pitcrew are also under a lot of pressure to do their work as quickly as possible and that can also lead to mistakes. Bless them.

3) In the Heat of the Battle

The red mist can easily start to rise as both pilots often become increasingly determined to win.

Perhaps it starts when one pilot suspects the other of using an underhand trick, so then they retaliate by doing something nasty back....and it just escalates after that. A good example of this was a recent match in France which got steadily worse and finally ended up when Mike Wilcox grabbed Chorny's lines, wrapped them all around his own arm, and then lay down on the floor! It's an exciting sport, that is why we do it, and sometimes we get carried away a bit.



4) Deliberately

It is very rare that anyone sets out to deliberately cheat, like 3.5cc motors, or putting extra nitro in the fuel etc. There are also a few ways to cheat or do underhand tricks in the bout itself, and I have seen most of them over the years. But in general the vast majority of bouts are flown fairly and in good spirit. But this is still the category that the pilots tend to disagree on the most.

The “harder” type of pilots are prepared to do line tangles and fly aggressively if necessary, and they do not see this as “deliberate rule breaking” but just as “getting the most out of the rules”. Whereas the more “sporting” pilots do think this is rule breaking, and self monitor themselves not to do it.

But in general I think combat is a very fair sport with little cheating going on. That's partly due to the fact that we have such good rules, partly because we have such good judges and partly because we all watch the bouts so closely.

Morals?

F2D combat is an international sport that brings together people from all different countries, with different upbringings and different ideas on morals, right and wrong etc.

It therefore seems impossible to me that we can all fly to some form of “moral code” that is going to be universally accepted as “right” by everybody.

So we all have to fly to the FAI rules and that inevitably still leads to some degree of “unfairness”, as some pilots are prepared to push some rules to the limit, and they think that it is fair and right to do so. Yet other pilots will limit how far they will push the rules on their own moral grounds, and this therefore puts them at a disadvantage. So there is a slight imbalance here, and I see no easy way around it.

Should the “sporting” pilots push the judges to clamp down on the “harder” pilots in an effort to change combat into the softer form that they want it to be?

Or should those “sporting” pilots wake up to the fact that combat for the “harder” pilots, is an aggressive, knock out competition, flown to the limit of the rules, and not some form of personal moral code?



Merry Christmas
&
Happy New Year!
/Mike Whillance

