

F2D News - March 2008

Mark Rudner
rudner@mit.edu

Let the games begin! F2D season is upon us. Are you ready?

Earlier this month the season was officially kicked-off with the running of the March Madness Triple Elimination F2D Meet in Phoenix, Arizona. Roughly speaking, this contest seems to have taken the place of the former Top Gun Fast Combat contest as the first big contest of the year in the US. The fact that the season opener is now F2D rather than Fast Combat exemplifies the transformation that has taken place in the US control line combat scene over the past several years.

This year I was unfortunately not able to attend the March Madness, but my sources tell me that it was a very nice contest. Attendance was pretty good, with 22 entries from the US and Mexico. I heard that several pilots were flying well, and the top 3 places went to George Cleveland (1st), Richard Stubblefield (2nd), and Alex Prokofiev (3rd).

This news is all very encouraging, but there is also something about this competition which has been bothering me. It's not my usual style to use this as a forum for ranting, but I feel pretty strongly about this and want to make a statement. This is a philosophical argument, and is **not** at all personal or directed at anyone. Although I was not present at the contest and because of that my opinion may be irrelevant to some (I can't disagree with that), I am making this statement as a competitor and as a representative of the F2D community in this country.

My concern is about the "buy-in" option which was implemented to allow pilots to pay money for new lives after losing for the third time. The buy-in price increased as rounds went on, and funds obtained this way I'm told will be donated to the US F2D Team Fund. While this is a noble cause and as a team member I appreciate the thought and effort, this completely destroys the spirit of the competition.

Are we sportsmen, or are we gamblers in a casino? I do not understand the concept of using money to buy one's way back into a competition that one has already lost. What is to be gained from this? There are many sides to combat – camaraderie, fun, friendship, and of course competition. While all of these aspects are important and have their times and places, competition time is the time to put one's skills to the test and to find out who is prepared to come out on top. By polluting the system with a financial alternative to proper training and development of skills, we lose the meaning of competition and also impair our mental training for international competitions where losses are final.

It's actually not clear to me what the argument is in favor of allowing buy-backs. However, my guess is that it has something to do with people wanting more flying time, etc. While I'm all about getting more flying time and feeling good, I don't believe that this is the right way of achieving it. If that's what people want, then maybe we should schedule a flying clinic where people come to fly and train together in the spirit of self-improvement. This could be a very fun event, but the key is to keep training and competition separate.

For many years, F2D in the US was more or less a joke to the rest of the world. Recently we have made a lot of progress and begun to gain the respect of our friends on other continents. However, if we lose our focus and start falling into these patterns, we may harm ourselves and fall into a new cycle of poor preparation and improper mental training for international competition.

This article is not meant to offend anyone or to criticize past decisions; the point is to get people to think a little harder about what we're doing here. Because I feel strongly about this issue, I have made a promise to myself and to the community that I will not fly in any contest that allows contestants to buy extra lives. As a sign of good faith, I will take whatever portion of this "buy-in" money comes my way and donate it to the Special Olympics. Peace out.