

F2D News - May 2006

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Finally the 2006 combat season is underway in New England. The combat weather gods shined on us last weekend and provided beautiful weather for the Wingbusters Spring Kickoff in Middleboro, MA. Seven pilots showed up for Formula GX combat on Saturday, and seven more (a non-mutually exclusive group) showed up for F2D on Sunday.

One thing that I have to say about this contest is that I was very impressed with the level of flying all around. Although this was the first contest after a very long winter break, the quality of flying did not seem to suffer one bit. In fact, the quality of combat probably was even a little bit higher than where we left off at this very same field last October. Great job guys, keep it up!

At the same time as I deliver this praise, I can't skip mentioning some old habits that seem to die hard. In the past I have written about the proper way to enter the circle on launch. Fortunately this time around there was no rain or mud, but I noticed that a few pilots still had a bit sloppy technique. Occasionally this leads to some awkward situations. Taking off is probably the most simple thing you will do in a match, and a near-incident here might disrupt your concentration and leave you vulnerable at the start of combat.

If you've found yourself getting out of sorts on launch or while trying to meet up with the other pilot in the center circle, try this method: as the mechanic releases the model, take a step *radially inward* toward the center of the pilot's circle. Your first step should *not* be tangential (around the circumference). What I witnessed on a few occasions was pilots slowly spiralling in towards the center of the circle over more than an entire lap. I think this behavior is due to some habits formed in Formula GX combat where the slower models are more forgiving. Regardless of the origin, however, this is a very simple matter to correct, so next time I hope to see this go a little smoother.

As another public service announcement, I'll remind everyone that the penalty for unintentionally stepping out of the circle is 40 points, but the penalty for intentionally stepping out is actually a disqualification from the match. If you're not familiar with the event already, it's probably not obvious what constitutes "intention" of stepping out. Unintentionally stepping out is when, in the course of normal combat, one pilot may wander a bit too far and place his foot outside the circle. Intentional stepping out is interpreted to mean leaving the circle to gain an unfair advantage over one's opponent. By precedent, this includes leaving the circle if your engine flames out, or running backward out of the circle to regain line tension if the model comes slack. After years of flying combat in the US where the procedure is to leave the circle after your engine quits running, it can be difficult to remember that in F2D you absolutely must stay inside the circle. Difficult though it may be, you just have to use whatever tricks you can to get it permanently imprinted into your brain.

Today I had the fortune of receiving a visit from Göran Olsson, team manager of the Swedish C/L team and host of the world's premiere website for information about FAI control line competition (www.go-cl.se/cl.html). If you haven't seen this webpage, it's definitely worth a visit. Göran and a colleague were on their way to a meeting at the University of New Hampshire and took some time to stop by for a peak at the living conditions of a graduate student in the US and for some interesting discussions about shutoffs and various other aspects of the state of affairs in F2D today.

As Göran's area of expertise is electronics, I asked him what he thought about certain proposals for an electronically operated shutoff system. Some have suggested that it might be possible to design a shutoff that would be triggered remotely by a ground-based range-finder. In Göran's eyes, the range finding technology is not the technological hurdle to overcome in this sort of setup. A much more difficult problem to overcome is the design of the airborne actuator mechanism. He has done some research into this and found that such mechanisms do in fact exist, but are prohibitively expensive (more than \$100 per unit). Because of this, it seems that more research should be put into purely mechanical systems.

We discussed many other things, but I will leave you with one intriguing idea for the month. Göran suggested that most of the dangerous/dirty flying that goes on in F2D occurs in the situation where one pilot has cut off his opponent's entire streamer and feels desperate to cause some sort of mess to keep himself in the match. What if, he asked, the streamer had no string – i.e. the paper extended all the way to the

back of the model. In this case, a pilot would always have something to shoot for and would rarely feel much pressure to fly dangerously rather than go for additional cuts. Some may worry that having an active scoring zone right up to the back of the model would lead to many more crashes; as it is now, once one pilot takes the lot off his opponent he will often try to smash the other pilot's model anyway.

It's certainly an interesting idea to ponder. If you have any thoughts about it, I'd be happy to hear them. I need to think about it much more deeply before forming an opinion either way. One thing is clear however, and it is that we all need to take a serious look at the F2D rules and see where they might be cleaned up and adjusted to ensure a healthy future of our sport for years to come.