

F2D News - September 2005

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The past month has been a busy one for F2D in the United States. The US Team Selection was held in Lubbock, TX over Labor Day weekend, September 3rd and 4th. This biennial event is by far the largest regular F2D event to take place in the United States, typically drawing between 30 and 40 pilots from all areas of the country.

According to the current form of the Team Selection Program, the Team Trials are run as a triple elimination tournament. At the end of the contest, the three highest placing contestants are offered spots on the US F2D Team to compete in the World Championships the following year. This year our team will consist of (in alphabetical order) Andrey Nadein, Chuck Rudner, and Mike Willcox. The three of them battled their way through a field dense with competent pilots to come out on top. This is a very strong lineup, and I'm sure they will represent us well in Spain next summer.

The Team Trials is many things, but above all some would describe it as an "ordeal." It is an ordeal for both the organizers and contestants alike. I think it would be safe to say that at the conclusion of a Team Trials weekend, there isn't a soul on the field who isn't exhausted.

For contest organizers, the Team Trials is an ordeal because of the large number of contestants, the manpower requirements to properly judge and run the contest, and the contest's notorious reputation for bringing out hot tempers and short fuses. With so much at stake, there is a lot of pressure on the contest management to ensure that the event is run smoothly and fairly. In this vein, I'd like to say that this year's team trials was one of the smoothest and best-run Team Trials in recent years. Everyone who pitched in to help, from the judges to the pit boss, to the indispensable Sheila Cranfill gave 100% for two days straight in the hot Lubbock sun. To everyone who helped out I'd like to extend my thanks as well as thanks on behalf of all the other contestants.

For contestants, the Team Trials is an ordeal because of the number of matches that are crammed into such a short period of time. Roughly 108 matches (neglecting reflies) are needed to complete a triple elimination contest with 36 contestants as we had this year. Using a reasonable estimate for the amount of time per match, this comes out to around 18 hours of combat in two days. To ensure a timely finish, we flew from 9am until dark (approximately 7:30 pm) on Saturday and started up again at 8am on Sunday morning. It was a grueling schedule, but as a result the contest was finished on time without spilling over to Monday.

Although 36 entries may not sound like a particularly large contest compared to those held in Europe and Russia, it should be noted that a 36 entry triple elimination contest requires the same number of matches as a 54 entry double elimination contest. It's still not quite the same, however, because with only 36 entries, each pilot generally has less time to prepare his equipment between flights. This adds a bit more pressure on pilots, and leads to more frequent delays in the competition.

On Saturday afternoon when it appeared that the contest was falling behind schedule, the organizers called a pilot's meeting and urged everyone to stay on top of the schedule and to be ready in the circle as quickly as possible. They suggested eliminating the 1 minute warm-up period (i.e. starting the countdown from one minute to launch), but were met with considerable resistance. While everyone was in favor of a timely finish, most pilots seemed reluctant to start "rushing" the contest as this could lead to unnecessary errors and problems.

Mack Henry suggested that perhaps the Team Selection Program should be changed to include an entry threshold above which the contest would be run as double-elimination. This is an interesting suggestion, and may be something to seriously consider. Right now, while everything that has gone on during this Team Selection cycle is still fresh, it is a good time to reflect on the Team Selection Program and start a discussion of how it might be improved for the future. I have written about this issue previously, but perhaps this is a good time to bring it up again. As a small homework assignment, I'd like to ask everyone who has been involved in the Team Trials to think about his/her experiences and observations. If you have any serious ideas about this, please contact me or your local Team Selection representative to help us try to update and improve the program.