

F2D News - November 2005

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As part of this month's column I'd like to provide a bit of follow-up on the issues discussed in last month's column. For those who don't remember, last month I focused on the importance of constant reflection and self-evaluation. Most of that article was fairly abstract and filled with generalities, so this month I'd like to add something more concrete to demonstrate those ideas more clearly.

One often overlooked or underemphasized aspect of the sport is "groundwork," i.e. pre-match preparation and pitting. Although you certainly won't win if you don't fly around and get some cuts, you also won't win if you don't get off the ground. Not getting into the air is an extreme and relatively uncommon example of what can go wrong when not enough attention is paid to equipment and preparation, but it illustrates the point.

In some situations, lack of preparation may not directly cost you anything in terms of penalties or lost airtime, but it may still take a toll on your state of mind. Flying combat is a difficult task that requires full concentration and attention. If by the time you pick up the handle at the start of the match you are not 100% confident that your equipment is ready and will perform without a hitch, then you are already behind the game. It may not be present in your conscious thoughts, but somewhere in your subconscious these issues will nag at you and detract from your ability to concentrate on the task at hand.

What can be done to avoid falling into this detrimental state of mind? One practice of which I have long been in favor is "the routine." The point of "the routine" is to come up with a set plan of things to do in preparation for each match, and to execute this plan identically before each and every match. What should be a part of your routine? You may include whatever you like, but it should include obvious essentials such as fueling the model and donning your helmet, as well as other important activities like running out your lines and checking that all your engine bolts are tight.

Once you design and begin to regularly carry out a working routine, you should find that a) it becomes automatic, and b) last second mishaps like failing to get the engine started on time become less frequent. No routine is perfect, however, and inevitably something will go wrong at some point. When this happens, it is time to re-evaluate your routine. What was the cause of the mishap? Could it have been prevented by changing the routine? If the answer is yes, you should try to make whatever changes are necessary as soon as possible and see if things go better in the future. By taking an active role in designing and refining your routine, you will steadily zero in on a winning strategy.

In other news, Steve Stewart and company held their first big F2D meet in Phoenix, Arizona last weekend. Overall I'd say they did a great job, and I think all 16 pilots who showed up were very happy with how things went and very thankful to the organizers for putting on this contest. There was talk of turning this into an annual event, and I hope that if they put it on again next year many more people will show up. It's a great site in a great location, so don't miss out!