

A FEW THINGS I'VE LEARNED FROM FIGHTER KITE LINE-TOUCH COMPETITIONS

Occasionally I receive emails from fighter kite flyers asking about various aspects of competing in fighter kite flying competition such as line touch. The other day I received such an email that was specifically asking about how I deal with nervousness or the 'jitters' when competing.

I think the best way to avoid nervousness or jitters during a competition is to be well prepared. This usually means lots of practice flying and being able to control your kite(s) in virtually all situations. For me this means practice, practice, practice before the event so that controlling every move of my kite requires little conscious thought. So that controlling my kite becomes almost automatic.

One of my primary objectives in practicing is to become familiar enough with how my kite behaves so I'm never surprised by its actions. This allows me to more successfully predict how it will behave in a given situation.

Learn all you can about the kites you fly and how they behave in all conditions. This is important because then you won't be surprised when the kite does something out of the ordinary.....this gives you lots more time, confidence and control of what to do next when under the pressure of competition.

After practicing.....for me the most important aspects of flying in a competition are the following, not in any order:

1. select the correct kite for the wind conditions, based on personal preferences
2. be certain the selected kite is perfectly tuned to my liking
3. line touch competition is a very 'now' based activity; a successful competitor is typically totally focused on the moment at hand
4. I tend to focus my attention on my kite's position and flying attitude in relation to the opponent's kite
5. I don't 'worry' or think about 'what if' situations.....I only think about my kite's behavior in relation to the opponent's kite
6. so....how does one actually focus attention only on those issues and not be thinking about 'what if's' etc? For me it's a matter of my intention and/or purpose when at a competition
7. my intention at all competitions is first of all to have fun.....I fly because I love it.....in a competition I fly to have fun period....and yes the fun is increased if I win, but I also have tons of flying fun even when losing...and losing is usually a great teacher, so I'm learning all the time
8. when I'm there to have fun, I'm not concerned about winning, or losing, I'm there to fly the best I can and to learn
9. I've discovered that when I'm not worried about winning or losing, I can more easily focus on my kite's flight and how it relates to the opponent's kite's position and usually be reasonably competitive....and actually win a few matches
10. although winning is why all competitors compete, occupying my mind with thoughts of winning has never provided good results for me
my best results occur when I'm relaxed, having fun and paying attention to my kite's behavior relative to my opponent's kite
11. and no matter how dire an opponent makes a situation look for me, I never think it's over until a point is actually called....because you never know what can happen at the last instant before a

point is actually called

12. always respect the law of the ground....remember this fact....the ground earns more points in a line touch competition than any flyer does.....so keep your kite in the air longer than your opponent and you'll earn more points

Some if not all of the above may seem somewhat elusive and it may be. However, it is exactly how I approach every competition these days. Other competitive flyers may approach it differently and with better success, but this is my approach and it has served me well.

I haven't always approached competitive flying in this way. During my beginning years as a competition flyer, I was very eager to win and winning was what I dwelled on. And I would win very few points; most often lost all my matches.

One of the things that made me lose was my aggressive flying style. For some reason I equated winning with aggressive attacking. So....I always wanted to have the 'fastest' flying kites, and would always come off the start with a charge toward my opponent's flying line.....usually resulting in a grounding of my kite or a misjudgement of the distance my opponent's line was from me and then be in a very vulnerable position and would be scored upon.

It took me a year or two to realize why I lost so regularly. Once I figured it out, I began selecting kites that were more controllable and therefore slower. Flying more controllable kites that weren't the fastest kite in the competition forced me to change the way I approached the game. I began learning how to win points using defensive maneuvers also rather than relying exclusively on attacking ones.

And to this day I actually win an equal amount or more points using defensive methods, but of course I use both defensive and attacking styles based on the situation at the moment. And that's usually determined by what I think my best odds are for scoring. And in line touch a flyer who is being defensive, could in a blink be in a situation of being the attacker....that's one of the beauties of this fast paced game. The situation changes by the millisecond!

As I got more experience, I began to have more fun flying in competitions. I wasn't so 'driven' to win with attacking and that gave me a much more relaxed attitude....still eager to win but now realizing that there are many ways to win, not just being the first off the mark to attack. I'm a slow learner, but when I finally get it, it usually sticks ;o)

These days, I fly in competitions primarily because I like the challenge of flying against other flyers who are better than I am. It's a blast.....tons of fun! Oh sure, I like winning, but I almost never think about winning when I'm flying or in a competition. I'm more focused on making sure my kite is correctly tuned, I have selected the best kite for the conditions and other similar details. And when flying I focus on flying my best.

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