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HamXposition

Getting Started in Contesting

Randy Thompson, K5ZD

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"Contesting affords all of us worldwide a 48-hour escape to this fantasyland where politics, economics, misery, injustice, and all other suffering seem briefly distant and abstract.

Sport is escape from the burdens of everyday life. Contesting is our sport. And I'm most grateful for this sport - contesting - and the friendships and fellowship and escape it brings us."

Geoff Howard, W0CG/PJ2DX



Why do we play games?

- What is a game?
 - A contest with rules to determine a winner
 - An amusement or pastime (fun!)
- Games provide players with
 - A means of exploring one's own capabilities
 - An opportunity to look at, understand, and experience things
 - Lessons about themselves and the world



What is a radio contest?

- A game using radio to encourage activity
- The game has

Defined
start and
end time

Specified
bands or
frequencies

Information
to exchange

Entry
categories

Method to
calculate a
score



Fun!

It comes in many forms

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- Personal Satisfaction
 - Better score than last year
 - Better score than “that guy”
 - Cool band opening
 - Finessing through pileups
- Part of a team
 - Help your club (or multiop) win
- Peer recognition



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Contesting is not always a Fair Game

- Geographic advantages
- Local terrain advantages
- Rareness advantages
- A small station in a valley has a big disadvantage when compared to a mega-station on the coast

Success is overcoming these challenges and doing the best you can with what you have



"We choose to go to the Moon in this decade and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard."

John F Kennedy



Contesting Basics

- Have the best set up that you can for the bands permitted in the contest
- Read and understand the rules
 - If you don't understand something – ask!
- Develop your operating skills



Station Readiness

- Invest in antennas
 - Effectiveness
 - Flexibility
 - Station Configuration
 - Everything within easy reach
 - Comfortable chair
 - Reliability
 - Do things right
 - Have spares!
- Is it comfortable to spend long periods of time on the radio?
 - Is your station easy to use when you are tired?



Contesting Skills

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- How well can you type?
- Copy CW or SSB?
- Is that callsign valid? What country?
- When are the bands open?
- What is the multi-single 10-minute rule?
- What countries are in CQ zone 22 or 39?
- What is the beam heading to 9V1?
- What is polar flutter and what does it mean?



Skills Development

- Driving a car
 - Had to think about everything at first
 - With experience, able to focus on other things
- Know the “flow”
 - Contest QSOs have a rhythm and sequence
 - Good operating habits require less thinking, less energy
- Practice
 - Converts thinking to flow



Contest Skills That can be Improved with Practice

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- Copying/Logging
- Callsign Vocabulary
- Running
- Search and Pounce
- Changing Bands

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Copying/Logging

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Objective

- Translate sound to keyboard – accurately!
- A callsign is only 4 to 12 characters
- Exchanges have expectations

Practice

- Get on the air and listen/make QSOs
- “Log” along to recordings of good operators
- Record yourself and notice good/bad
- Review your log checking reports



**Repetition is a key learning aid
because it helps transition a skill from
the conscious to the subconscious.**



Know Your Logging Software

- Find a consistent set up that you use for all contests
- Practice entering calls and exchanges by typing in old contest logs
- Practice FIXING typing errors
 - Learn the accelerator keys (start, end, wipe)
 - Know how to transit the entry fields
- Logging needs to be automatic, so you have brain power left for processing other info



Continuous Improvement

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- When asked what was the most powerful force in the Universe, Albert Einstein replied, “Compound interest.”
- Incremental improvement, applied relentlessly, is unstoppable.
- Plaques are won a dB at a time



**Every time you are on the air
you are gaining experience and
knowledge.**

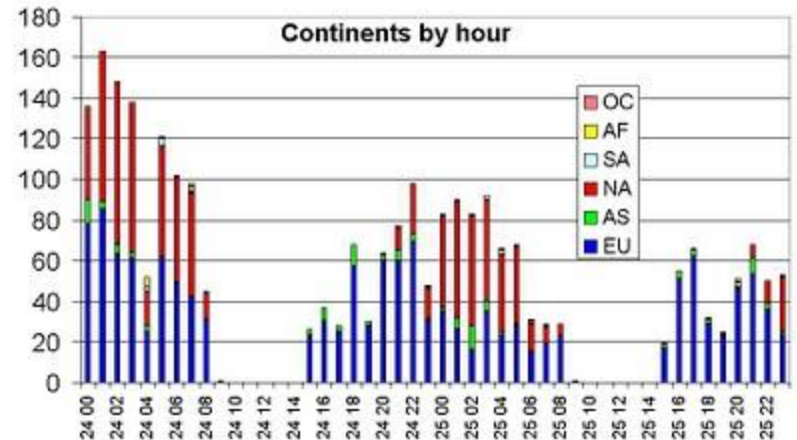
Be active



Before the Contest

- Understand the scoring
 - Points for each QSO?
 - What is a multiplier?
- Study past results
 - Do the winners focus on QSOs or multipliers?
 - Where do the QSOs come from?

| Band | QSOs | Pts | Cty | ZN |
|------------------|------|-------|-----|-----|
| 1.8 | 7 | 14 | 5 | 5 |
| 3.5 | 143 | 408 | 42 | 21 |
| 7 | 761 | 2252 | 59 | 24 |
| 14 | 401 | 1142 | 64 | 28 |
| 21 | 2021 | 5980 | 70 | 27 |
| 28 | 118 | 322 | 14 | 14 |
| Total | 3451 | 10118 | 254 | 119 |
| Score: 3,774,014 | | | | |



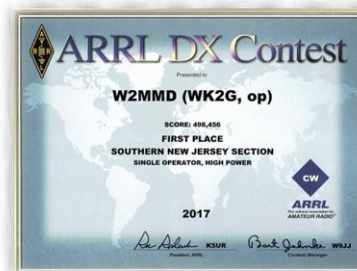


Choose the Game

- ▶ Select category
 - All band or single band?
 - Power – High, low, QRP?
 - Assisted or unassisted?



- ▶ Set a goal
 - Have fun?
 - Win a certificate?
 - Set a record?



All Time Score Records for United States 1st Call Area
1948 - 2023

Multi-Operator

| SSB | Call | Year | Score | CW | Call | Year | Score |
|-------------------|-------|------|------------|-------------------|-------|------|------------|
| Multi-Multi | KC1XX | 2011 | 28,763,770 | Multi-Multi | KC1XX | 2011 | 33,348,300 |
| Multi-Thru | KC1XX | 2013 | 23,851,137 | Multi-Thru | K3LZ | 2013 | 24,945,250 |
| Multi-Single High | KC1XX | 2021 | 14,560,432 | Multi-Single High | K3LZ | 2022 | 16,690,848 |
| Multi-Single Low | WW4LL | 2022 | 3,342,634 | Multi-Single Low | W4KZ | 2022 | 5,619,065 |

Single Operator - High Power

| SSB | Call | Year | Score | CW | Call | Year | Score |
|-----------|--------|------|-----------|-----------|-------------|------|------------|
| High ALL | K1DG | 2014 | 9,552,092 | High ALL | NN1N | 2013 | 10,652,128 |
| High 1.8M | K1KI | 2012 | 1,049,238 | High 1.8M | K3BM | 1999 | 789,330 |
| High 1.2M | K3DTJ1 | 2003 | 1,304,015 | High 1.2M | K2SSC1 | 2000 | 974,440 |
| High 20M | KQ2M/1 | 2008 | 1,242,150 | High 20M | KH1H (KQ2M) | 1993 | 1,001,035 |
| High 40M | W3JA/1 | 2010 | 362,943 | High 40M | W3JA/1 | 2011 | 1,049,760 |
| High 80M | AA1BU | 2004 | 237,600 | High 80M | W1MC | 2006 | 530,264 |
| High 160M | K12M | 1995 | 55,420 | High 160M | K12M | 1995 | 142,338 |



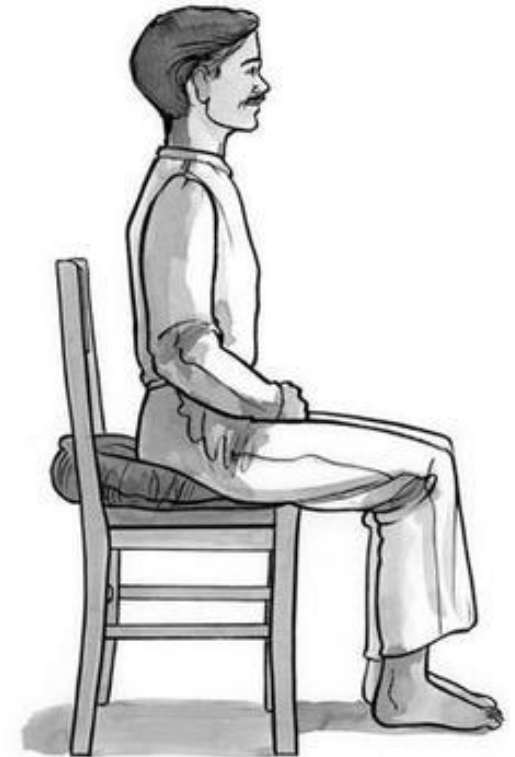
Make a Plan

- What hours to be on the air?
- Operating plan for each band
- When to “run” and when to “search”
- Be committed!



BIC – Butt in Chair

- No other single thing will help you more to improve your scores
- It only works if you spend your time working people





Operator Commitment

- Plan your life to meet your contest goal
 - Work, family, food, rest, station repairs
- Part time?
 - BIC for the best rate or at different times each day
- Outline an operating plan
 - Bands and times
 - Likely off times

**Decide.
Commit.
Succeed.**



**If you don't know where you are
going, you probably won't get
there...**



Contest Sleep Strategy

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- Preparation
 - Have good physical fitness
 - Stay on your normal sleep schedule
 - Get extra sleep 4-7 days before the contest
 - Take 3 hour nap before contest starts
- During the contest
 - Sleep for 90 or 180 minutes
 - Avoid caffeine until needed





Keep Pushing

- Use time wisely
 - The clock never stops
- The next QSO could make the difference!
- Pay attention to accuracy
- Everyone is experiencing the same conditions!





Final Thoughts

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- Set goals
- Do your best
- Enjoy the experience
- Submit your log
- Make plans to do better next time

Have fun!

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