



Contest Operating Techniques

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Contest Academy

Visalia 2014



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Our Time Together

- Our Topic: ***Competitive Operating***
 - Why & How; What to do vs. What to avoid
Efficient S&P, Running, Multiplier Strategy,
Operating Assisted, Sample Contests
 - Working Toward the Next Competence Level
- Not Our Topic:
 - Equipment, Antennas or their Construction, General Operating, Expeditioning, Propagation, History, Cabrillo, Rules, Logging software, Log checking, other boring stuff

Contesting Vocabulary

- Qs—QSOs
- Dupe—duplicate contact during the contest period
- Rate—Qs/hour (short term/long term)
- Mult—Scoring multiplier
- Run—CQing
- S & P—Search & Pounce

Contesting is FUN!

- Great to make DXCC or WAS in a weekend
- Decorate your shack with awards
- Put a whole season's worth of contacts into the log in a day
- Set your own goals—needn't win to enjoy
- Beat your neighbor

Contesting vs. General Operating

- Similar yet different
 - Same: technique, achievement awards
 - Different: rules, time limit, competitive awards
- Compressed time
 - Season's worth of operating in a weekend
- Your efforts are "Graded"



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How Contesting Improves You

- Operating while striving to excel
- Operating under stressful conditions
- Judged Operating
 - measure your accuracy/improvement

Practice really does matter.

Do it Right

- Before the Contest
 - Read the Rules
 - Tune bands and observe propagation
 - Read the DX Bulletins
 - Set Goals, bandplan
- During the Contest
 - Efficiency & Accuracy
- After the Contest
 - Review & Submit your Log

"The Job isn't over until the Paperwork is Done"

Contest Operating Theory

- Deliberate Practice Makes Perfect
(K. Anders Ericsson, et al, as discussed in M Gladwell's book *Outliers: The Story of Success*)
- Practice your Weakness—Compete your Strength (ND2T)
- Contest Exuberantly. The First Rule of Contesting is to have fun (W6SX)

Basic Contesting—Strategy

- Out to Win?
- Out for Fun?
- Earn a Certificate?
- Test Your Equipment?
- Beat your Neighbor?
- For New States/DXCC counters?
- Beat your previous Score
- 1000 QSOs/100 DXCC/ ???

Basic Contesting—Tactics

- Search & Pounce (DXing)
- Running (CQing)

Search & Pounce

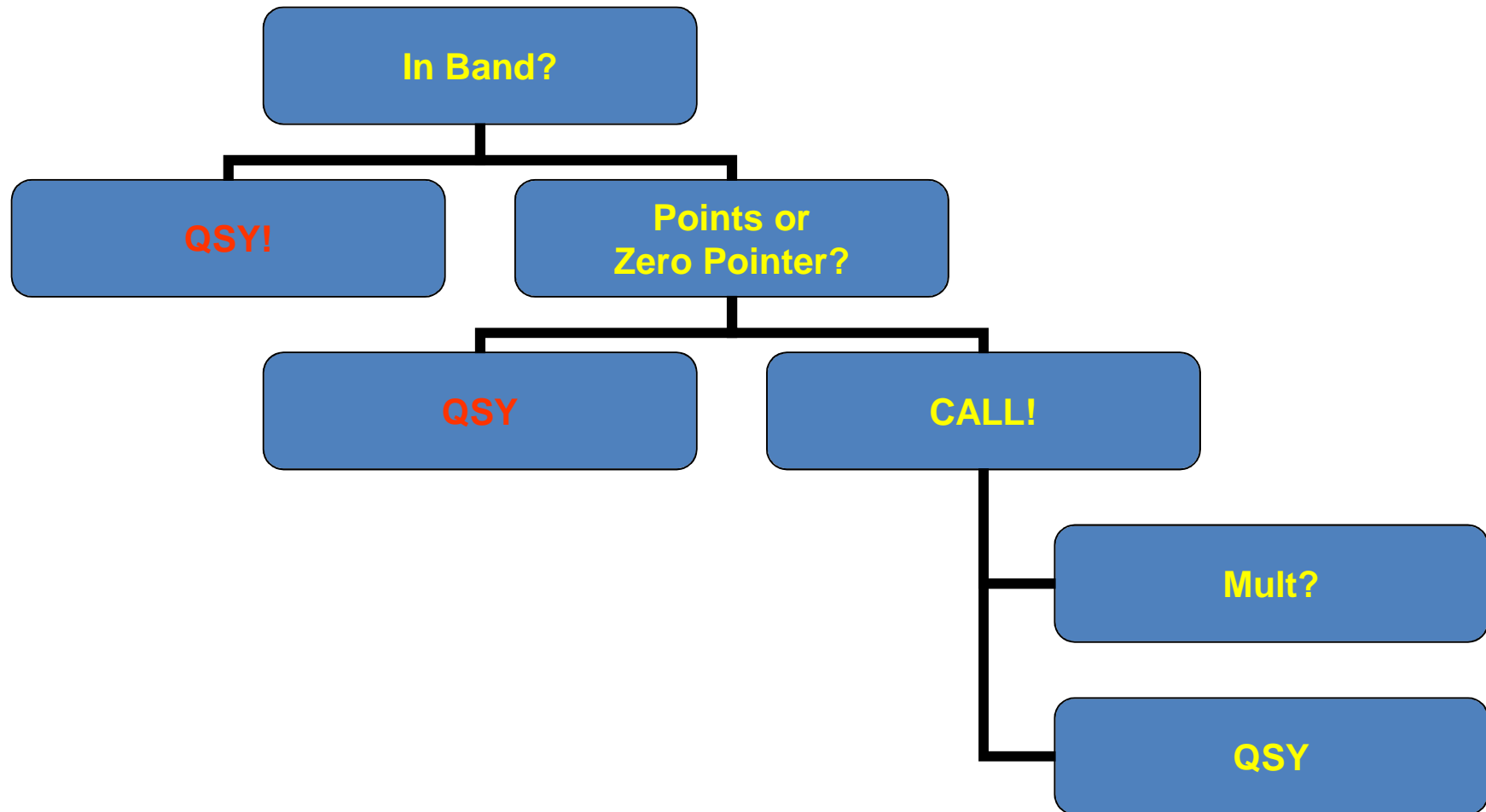
Do It Right!

- FullCall
- (R) 59 Exchange (once)

S & P Techniques

- Copy his call—right the first time!
- Dupe Check—no typos!
 - Calling station's responsibility
 - Other Zero-pointers
- Time your call
- Send your callsign correctly

Decision Tree



S & P Techniques—Advanced

- Use your Band Map
- Use a Panadapter
- Up or Down the band?
- Do you really need that repeat?

S & P Techniques— Contest Pileups

- Different than DX pileups
- There is no tomorrow (*well...*)
- Almost never Split—"microsplit"
- Mults are Mults: is there another one right around the corner?

Running

- Better rate = more QSOs
- Must be capable of holding a frequency
 - Both station and operator
- Less likely to get the rarest multipliers

Running Techniques

Do it Right

- CQ TEST XX6X XX6X (TEST)
- TEST XX6X (TEST)
- HisCall 59(9) Exchange
- TU XX6X

Running Techniques

- Frequency in use?
- Copy his call—*right the first time*
- Send exchange consistently
- Maintain consistent rhythm
 - Timing is main confirmation
- Polite; some urgency
- Dupes? Work `em.

Advanced Running Techniques

- ID Properly
 - Huge Pileup? Skip an ID once or twice
 - It's not how many Qs between your IDs, its how many TRANSMISSIONS you've made
 - Err on the side of IDing too often
- *"Please try later"*
- Walking

“Que Are Zed” is NOT your callsign!

S & P or Run?

- What is your strategy?
- Determine a rate; can you maintain it running? If not, S & P.
- What produces the most *points*?
- Try *both*
 - Contest dependent

S & P *and* Run?

- Why not do both simultaneously?
- This is called “SO2R”
- Advanced technique requiring much practice

Slow times become more exciting

Operating Hints

- Phone: know multiple sets of phonetics
 - Appropriate speech processing
- CW: perfect sending required
 - Appropriate speed
- Ears: practice makes perfect
 - Strive for first-time perfect copy
- Brevity is next to Godliness

Everyday Mistakes—Time wasters

Break from these bad habits

- Q-Signals—Don't Use Them!
 - "QSL" on CW—use "R"
 - "QSL" on Fone—use "roger"
 - "QSL, QRZed"—use your callsign!
 - /QRP
- Unnecessary Repeats
- "Sixteen" vs. "One Six"
- "Please Copy"—just say NO(thing)...
- 5NN (RTTY)

Sometimes silence is golden

Beginner's Mistakes

"Ignorance is Bliss"

- Unintelligible phonetics
 - Language appropriate
 - Doesn't always mean ICAO!
 - Phonetics on CW? (*See EXPERT Liddisms*)
- Not knowing the exchange
- Q-signals on phone.
 - Worse, Q-signals on CW!
- Sending Exchange info out of order or "Unstable"
- Know Thy Sideband (band edges)



Lidisms

- No "QRL?" before CQing
- Arguing over "Duplicity"
 - Just work 'em again
- Split Frequency Snafus
 - RIT/SPLIT Mistakenly ON (or OFF)
- Answer someone's CQ with instant "?"
- Answering a CQ with Call+Exchange
- Wrong CW speed
 - Too Fast: Auroral flutter, answering QRS operator
 - Too Slow: Answering fast CQ with QRS exchg
- Last-Two



Perfecting the Operator

- Be Efficient
- Know your Radio
- Operate Purposefully and Pleasantly
- Identify Properly
- Think!
- Participate in Contests
- Participate in a Contest Club

Multipliers

- Multipliers Greatly Increase your Score and the “Fun Factor”
- Two schools of thought:
 - Mults call You (CQP, SS)
 - Gotta collect `em yourself (DX Contests)
 - Intermediate: WPX

Multipliers

- Knowledge of Propagation
 - Best time for Sudan on 15m?
- Knowledge of Personalities
 - VY1JA prefers frequencies ending in “7”
- Time management
 - Right band at the right time
 - Right compromise between Mults & Rate
 - When to give up on a nonresponsive mult

Multipliers

- While Running, you get mults on *their* schedule
- While S&P, you are in more control
- Best time for Mults?
 - DX: Saturday & Sunday morning Eus
 - SS: Any time, but Sunday morning/15m for the rare VO/VE1/ KP2 etc.

High Rate Multipliers

Situation: DX Contest. Saturday Dawn.

- 40m closing to JA. Still workable
- 20m opening to Eu. Weak signals
- 15m open to South America

High Rate Multipliers

- Choices, choices...
- Can Run on 40
- Or S & P on high bands
 - They open rapidly
 - Eu is multiplier rich
 - S America open all day long

What do you do?

What to Do?

- S & P efficiently toward Eu!
- Can achieve 70+ rate
- Many available mults
- Generate best score boost
- Sweep through 20m then QSY to 15m
- Then to 10—if you're lucky

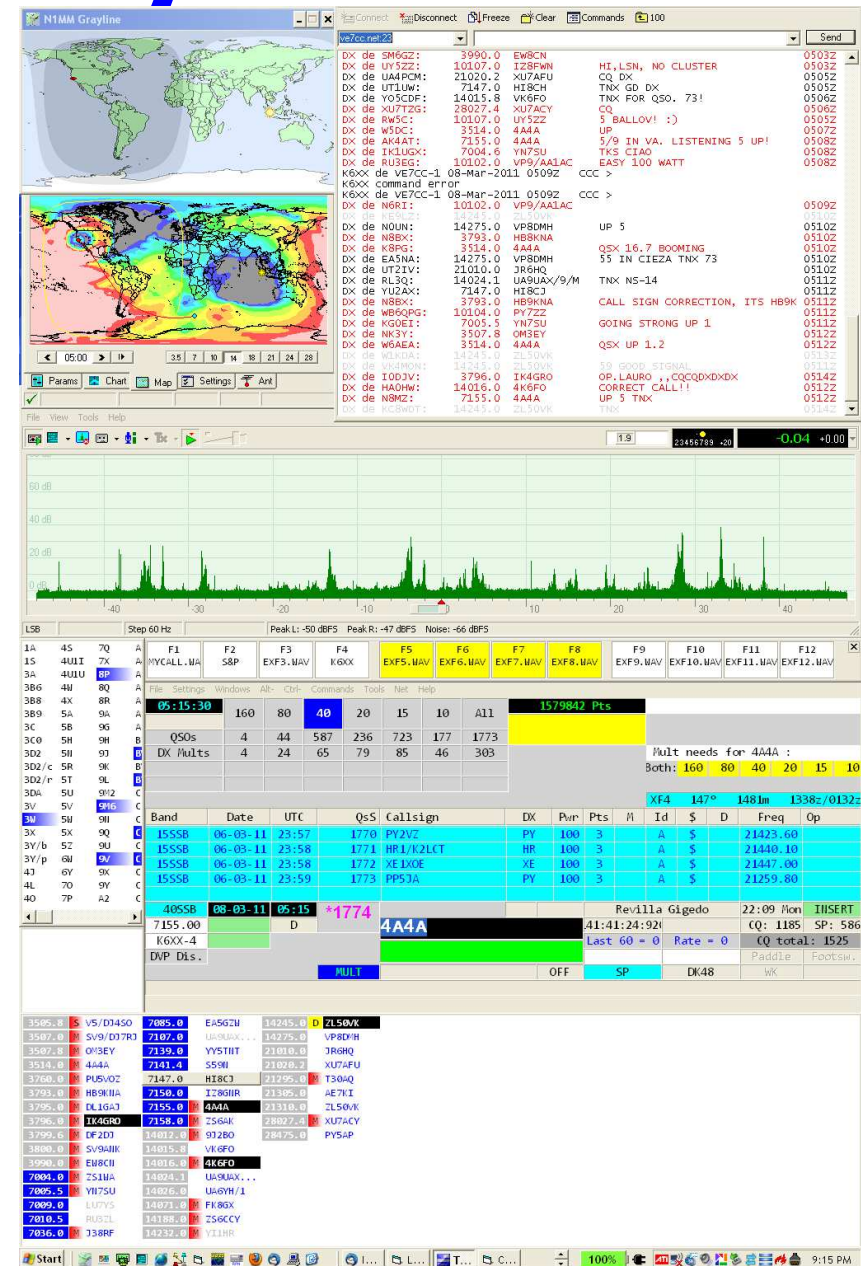
Spotting Network

"Packet Spotting Network" ; "Packet"

- Developed by *contesters* as a more efficient method for finding and distributing *multipliers* during club competitions
- Hundreds of ears distributed worldwide
 - "Listen" to all bands, simultaneously
 - Mostly for S&P, but can show band openings

Spots Before Your Eyes: *Click to QSY...*

- Logger checks it
 - New Mult?
 - New Q?
 - Dupe?
- One mouse click
QSYs rig;
call & work 'em



Using Spots in Contests

- “Assisted” or “Unlimited”
- Click your way across the bands
- Hit a pileup? Bounce off to the next spot!
 - It’s in the band map, so you can try again in a few minutes
- Mults.... Or Qs?
- *Always confirm callsign!*

Spotting—Drawbacks

- “Busted Spots” (callsign, freq)
- Competition for new spots can kill rate
- How many of the spots can YOU hear?
- Soliciting spots gets you DQ'd
- Self-spotting: even worse
- ***What skills are you developing?***
 - *Shooting Fish in a Barrel is fun?*

Band Scopes & “Skimmer”

- Band scopes are an allowed accessory; Skimmer makes you Assisted
- What goes for Packet Spotting goes for Skimmer—except you can hear EVERY spot

Contests for New Contesters

- **CQP**
- **ARRL 10m**
- **CQWW**
- **Field Day?**



California QSO Party (CQP)

Simply the most fun we'll have all year!

The Best Regional Contest

- Rules fair to all
- Lots of Awards
- Significant Features
 - Everybody-works-**us**!
 - Mixed Mode (But awards for Single Mode)
 - RUN!
- First Weekend of October



ARRL 10m Contest

Big Rates for Little Guns

- Most popular ARRL contest—lots of activity
- 2ND Weekend of December
- Temporary station still=Big Signal
- Significant Features
 - Everybody-works-Everybody
 - Single or Mixed Mode
 - All Power levels
 - Huge Rates Possible



CQ World Wide

World's Biggest Contest

- Band-filling activity throughout the world
- Expeditions
- A "Must"
- All Modes: Last full weekend of
 - September (RTTY)
 - October (Fone)
 - November (CW)
- Significant Features
 - Mults are DXCC and CQ Zone
 - Everyone Works Everyone EXCEPT
 - Zero points for same DXCC country



Field Day

The Un-Contest Contest

- But it's "Not a Contest!"
- For many, first contesting exposure
- Last weekend of June
- Significant Features
 - All Bands, Modes, plus
 - Everyone works Everyone
 - **Lots of Once-a-year ops**



Post Contest

- Before you shut down
- Generate Cabrillo
 - Inspect before Submitting
- Notes (to self, others)
- Ponder Improvements

Join a Contest Club?

Meet & Learn From the World's Best

- Operating
 - Techniques & Tricks
 - Provide a good (*great!*) example
 - Propagation, including strange openings
- Station Building
 - Antennas, Equipment
 - Get assistance
 - Give assistance (gain experience)
- Invitation to Multi-op or Expedition

Do it Right

- S&P (Answering CQ)
 - FullCall
 - (R) 5nn Exchange (once)
- Running (CQing)
 - CQ TEST XX6X XX6X (TEST)
 - TEST XX6X (TEST)
 - HisCall 5NN Exchange
 - TU XX6X

Contesting

- Fun way to improve operating competence
- Correct Way is the Easy Way
 - Do it right: send it once; practice makes perfect
- Tactics vary with goals
- Post Contest is important
- Help is available



You, the Elite Operator

- Operating Competency
 - No Rookie Mistakes
 - Better Rate
- Wallpaper/"Paneling"
- DXpeditions
- YOU are the Mentor

Welcome to the Golden Age of Radiosport

Contesting for Beginners

The Do's & Don'ts of Contesting

DO

- Read the rules before you turn on the rig
- Always use your complete callsign
- Time your calls. Good operators transmit at exactly the right moments
- Remember the station calling CQ really does want to work you, even if he doesn't answer your first call
- Try calling CQ (after you understand the proper QSO flow)

DON'T

- Unnecessarily repeat information. Send your call and exchange once: repeat your exchange only if requested
- Ragchew
- Get upset. You won't work everyone on the first call. (You probably won't *win* the first contest you enter, either!)
- Give up. Instead, persist! You'll be hooked!

Necessary Vocabulary

- **Big Gun** A big, high performance station (and sometimes the operator thereof).
- **Dupe** Short for "duplicate". A contact that has zero point value and should be avoided. Duplicate contacts are indicative of operator error.
- **Multiop** A contest station operated by more than one individual.
- **Multi-single** Short for "Multiple operators, Single Transmitter".
- **Multiplier** A bonus that is multiplied by your QSO point total to give your score.
- **Q** Short for "QSO", as in "Thanks for the Q!".
- **Running** CQing.
- **Run Rate** (n) Your QSO rate, in contacts per hour. Also called simply "rate".
(v) Rapidly working QSOs.
- **Running** Calling CQ on a frequency and letting them come to you.
- **Search & Pounce** Tuning around and answering other stations' CQs.

Resources for the New Top-Op

This presentation was made possible by a cornucopia of suggestions forwarded by the following excellent operators:

N0AX, N6DE, K6KR, N6WG, AE6Y, AA0MZ, K6III, K6LRN, N6ZFO, W6FB, N6AJR, K6VVA, AE6RF, K6RB, WW6D, K6GNX, K6TD, AD6E, W6SX, N6IE, WE6F, KW6S, K6GHA, ND2T

Other Resources:

Northern California Contest Club (NCCC; www.nccc.cc)

National Contest Journal (NCJ; www.ncjweb.com)

Contesting Online (www.contesting.com)

WA7BNM Calendar (<http://www.hornucopia.com/contestcal/weeklycont.php>)

Look around! We surround you this weekend!



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