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Contest Club



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Our Next Meeting

The WRTC Experience

Moderated by Dean, N6BV

Date: Monday, August 14, 2006

Time: 6:00 pm schmooze, 6:30 pm dinner, 7:00pm program

Location: Tentatively planned for Holder's Country Inn in Cupertino. Confirmation, details and RSVP info on NCCC Meetings web page ASAP.

Holder's Country Inn, 1424 Saratoga Ave., San Jose, CA 95129
(408) 378-6022

Dinner details:

NCCC Officers

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Presidential Musings

By: Dean Straw, N6BV

Well, WRTC 2006 is over and all the participants have managed to get back to their home QTHs. As you all know, N6BV and partner AG9A made the lower half of the listings, #31 out of 46. This was sobering, to be sure. More about this later.

I'm really pleased that some NCCers did a lot better. N2NL with N6MJ came in #2, a prodigious achievement given the level of competition. W2SC with K5ZD were in the Top Ten, at #10, another major achievement. These guys represent the present -- and also the future -- of contesting!

There's a lot of talk now on the WRTC Reflector about "level playing fields" and unfortunately, too much testosterone may be showing. Let me be clear -- setting up almost 50 stations so that everything is perfectly equal is an impossible task. The PYs did an incredible job making things as equal as possible.

Sure, given another couple of months and probably another huge hunk of money, things could have been more "equal." (The picture of giant bulldozers leveling the hills springs to my fervent, terrain-assessing mind.)

But things weren't perfectly equal in all the previous WRTCs either. In 2006, those stations on hilltops generally did better than those in valleys. Big surprise, right? Same

thing happened in 1996. Those who enjoyed low powerline noise generally did better than those who were plagued by arcing insulators and noisy streetlamps. No surprise there either.

The winner of a competition like the WRTC aren't necessarily the best operators, but you can be sure that the best ops managed to squeeze the most points from their stations, no matter what. Mark and I had some small technical problems that we ironed out in the heat of the contest (including resoldering the VCO connections on the synthesizer board in the main IC-765 -- ask me sometime!).

We had some operational difficulties, including getting psyched out early by an unsuccessful start on phone (no QSOs in the first three minutes of the contest). We didn't devote enough effort to phone. Rookie mistake on my part.

So what I'm going to say here may sound banal, the mutterings of someone who finished well outside the Top Ten. To me, what was really important at WRTC was the spirit of camaraderie there. It was truly an honor to be with fellow contest enthusiasts of the very highest caliber, and it was great putting faces to call signs I have worked for so many years on the air.

Being located in a semi-tropical paradise called Florianopolis only added to the joy of the participants and observers. The scenery and greenery of Florianopolis reminded me of my homeland in Hawaii, and the Brazilian people showed the same kind of warmth and hospitality I associate with Islanders. I highly recommend to anyone a visit to Brazil. If you do make it to Brazil, make sure you see the Falls of Igassu. They are truly magnificent!

I'm in the process of doing terrain analyses of some of the stations at WRTC 2006. This is an intensive effort requiring a lot of manual manipulation of Google Earth maps. Trends are beginning to show up, and I'll talk about this at the August NCCC meeting,

along with observations from other NCCCs who were in Florianopolis.

There will also be a rallying cry for CQP, our own "California Sweepstakes" at the August meeting, and we'll be thinking ahead for the ARRL November Sweepstakes. Remember, PVRC is really gunning for NCCC this year. Our honor is at stake.

Kick, Duck!

VP/CC

By: Fred Jensen, K6DGW

This one will be a bit short as I've got a lot going on right now and I'm way to old to multi-task like I was forced to pretend like I really could do when I still had an employer. I'm also writing from Baghdad West, it's inversion season and it's 110° F in the foothills of the Sierra right now, 81 in the shack.

WRTC: The final results and some commentary are posted at www.arrl.org/news/stories/2006/07/14/100/ in case you haven't seen them yet. Gold went to VE3EJ/VE7ZO; silver to N6MJ/N2NL (both Californians), and bronze to K1DG/N2NT.

The NCCC team of N6BV/AG9A as PT5J (I didn't work) finished at 31st with 133+K points. A few interesting goings-on are reported at the above link – they speak to a miniscule group of hams that apparently need some refresher courses in ethics and sportsmanlike behavior.

NAQP: www.ncjweb.com/naqprules.php CW is 5 Aug, SSB is 19 Aug. By the time you read this, I'll have a team flogger for CW, but I'm taking applications for the SSB. First come, first served.

Unfortunately for me, the CW coincides with the Tevis Cup 100mi Endurance Ride from Tahoe to Auburn, however Andrea and I will be providing comm (UHF/VHF) from Robinson Flat way uptrail, so I'll make most of the CW. I should make all of the SSB.

We had a good showing in the RTTY two weeks ago from everyone except me. I've decided to go after the SSB adapter for my K2/100 one more time, and if I can't fix it, I'll just build another one. I'm sure my RTTY performance will improve when I can get on the K2 with its great receive filters.

WAE CW: 12 Aug – 13 Aug (zulu)
www.waedc.de I used to avoid this contest because of the complexity until a friend advised me that TR-Log (and most other loggers I now know) do the work for you. Given the fairly good to great EU openings in the IARU/WRTC even for mini-stations such as mine, this could be a lot of fun, and Andrea will be gone to one of her hobby things most of that weekend and the following week.

CQP: Larry, W4UAT, our Alpine County Expedition commander advises we will be using N6A again. This serves to stir up frustrations for me because we still have August and September before I can begin packing the truck and trailer. I love this contest!! I love the 5 days with the crew to end the summer!! Marc, W6ZZZ, has offered a tag for emails to other hams to promote CQP:

-CU in the California QSO Party (CQP), Oct 7-8

-All time results and records -
www.cqp.org/Results.html &
www.cqp.org/Records.html

I think pointing at the URL's for the results and records is a great idea to help stir up interest. Thanks Marc.

Other Ramblings: When I accepted this position, I exacted a promise that I could tap the accumulated wisdom, history, and oral tradition afforded by the NCCC OT's as mentors. I'm happy to report that every one of you is keeping that promise, in spades in fact, every time I make an inquiry. The latest has been an ongoing discussion into the ethics surrounding publishing "rally times" in contests. My original belief was that it was tantamount to making off-the-

radio, before-the-contest schedules, that was my story, and I was sticking to it.

The email conversations have tempered my rather rigid Victorian approach to this subject (not the first time that's happened and it delights my wife). First advice I got was, "Read the rules of each contest," a rather unique approach, no? So I picked the ones I really like to compete in, and found:

- ARRL SS does have some rather explicit words about "pre-arranged schedules," and some Q&A with HQ regarding the nuances.
- Most contests that I looked at mention in general that "specific pre-arranged schedules, and schedules arranged during the contest via other than the radio" are out-of-bounds or put you into the Assisted classes.
- Some don't mention the subject at all.

But club rally times are not addressed explicitly enough to satisfy the Victorian engineer, without some advice. As a result of the advice, mentoring, and information I've gotten (not to mention reading the rules), I've concluded that rally times, if made reasonably public and without the intent of secrecy, are just fine most everywhere, except maybe in SS. Contest sponsors often suggest frequencies and times. For example:

160 is a loser band in CQP with no incentive to put up the large antennas for it, particularly in county expedition field situations unless we have a publicized rally time. And, it is to everyone's advantage to have a 160 rally time publicized as widely as possible and make as many Q's as possible. The idea of "secrecy" within NCCC to foster TFUNFT in any contest is stupid at best. Many in places we won't hear will work each other, all good for the contest and scores.

My parents wanted me to be a lawyer ... I needed to show them something different, I'm not sure why but it seemed like a good idea at the time, and I'm still learning that

ethics and real life are not mathematics, my real love. My jury is still out on SS, but I think in general, well publicized rally times are ethical under the rules of most contests, and I think we've seen the JUG has a fairly large readership.

Stay cool, in the Celsius sense.

Ethics and Sportsmanship

By: Rob Brownstein, K6RB

There was allusion in both Dean's and Fred's column to discussions post-WRTC concerning serious breaches in contest behavior.

Here is the WRTC note sent by the log-checking and steering committee folks:

Dear WRTC 2006 Friends:

This memorandum is to record an anomaly discovered by the Judging and Log-Checking Committees in the course of adjudication of the WRTC 2006 competition and the action taken as a result, and to offer a recommendation for future WRTCs.

Immediately after the end of the competition at 1200 UTC on 9 July, electronic logs began arriving from participants in the IARU HF World Championship from all over the world for inclusion in the master database. Thanks to the extraordinary cooperation of the international contesting community, in a matter of hours we received more than 1,000 logs for use in adjudication of the 46 WRTC logs.

When initial trial discrepancy reports for the 46 WRTC stations were run, four logs were found to have unusually high numbers of "unique" QSOs. (A "unique" QSO is one with a station that appears in few other logs - it is not literally unique and the appropriate threshold for labeling a QSO as "unique" may vary from one contest to another. In the case of WRTC 2006 there were, as noted above, more than 1,000 logs used to determine "uniques" - that is, we did not limit our comparison only to other WRTC logs.)

In three of the four cases the reason for the high number of "uniques" was clearly that the

nationality of the WRTC station had been identified and communicated within the home country of the team. The three logs in this category were PW5B (SP7GIQ and SP2FAX), PT5P (DL6FBL and DL2CC), and PT5N (9A8A and 9A5K).

In some cases, multiple QSOs clearly had been made by the same station under different call signs. This is contrary to the spirit of WRTC, which is to provide a level playing field for all. QSOs that are available to one team but not to any of the others tilt the playing field. The purpose of WRTC is to determine the best operators, not who has the most friends back home. At the same time, it must be said that the WRTC competitors do not do anything wrong unless they do something that is intended to identify themselves. They are not expected to disguise their voices or their accents. So, in past WRTCs these "national uniques" have not been deleted from competitors' logs.

The fourth case, PT5L (YT6A and YT6T), was quite different. In this case there were hundreds of "uniques" with call signs from many countries, nearly all of them in Europe, beginning about two hours into the event. Not only that, but many of these "uniques" showed up on several bands, in some cases on both CW and SSB. Only rarely did these "uniques" show up in any other logs. The referee, G3XTT, confirmed that he had heard nothing suspicious or unusual. Most of the call signs were not familiar to the judges as appearing in CW contests, but this was apparent only when the "uniques" were identified as such and this was not especially noticeable when they were scattered among valid QSOs.

The audio from this station had been recorded, so it was possible to confirm that the QSOs had in fact taken place. It appeared to the judges, from listening to the recording while examining annotated log extracts identifying the "uniques," that there was a small number of stations, probably more than one, feeding "phantom QSOs" to PT5L. Again, however, this was apparent only in retrospect.

The motive for feeding these "phantom QSOs" was and is unknown. PT5L had only operated CW up to the time the "uniques" began to appear; we have no evidence that the identity of the operators had been communicated to anyone prior to that time, either by the operators

themselves or by anyone else. Identifying "uniques" is a standard part of the adjudication of any contest. Detecting QSOs added to a log "from the Callbook" was one of the very first objectives when computer analysis was first performed on contest logs. Anyone familiar with UBN or LCR reports - in other words, any active contester - would realize that adding such QSOs to the PT5L log was bound to come to the attention of the judges.

Therefore, in the absence of any evidence to the contrary, the judges could not conclude that the operators of PT5L were implicated in any way. They had to know that such manipulation would be detected and that there could be no acceptable explanation for so many people choosing, independently of one another, to work only PT5L from among more than 1,000 stations active on the bands during the contest.

It seems much more likely that the "phantom QSOs" were intended to be sabotage, either of the PT5L operators specifically (although this would have required knowing who they were) or of a WRTC station selected at random. Such behavior, by amateur operators outside the WRTC event itself, is both reprehensible and illegal and deserves to be thoroughly investigated.

However, doing so within the time frame of the WRTC event was impossible. Thus, the problem facing the judges was how to deal appropriately with the situation within the context of WRTC itself. It was decided to reduce the threshold for labeling a QSO as "unique" to a relatively low number of logs and to delete from all 46 logs, without penalty, all "unique" QSOs. Doing so resulted in the deletion of, at one extreme, just 3 QSOs from a log containing more than 1,900 QSOs to, at the other extreme, the deletion of 240 QSOs from the PT5L log of more than 2,300 QSOs. Most logs lost about 15 QSOs. No doubt a few of these were valid QSOs (others are busted calls where there is insufficient evidence to label them as busted).

However, deleting them is very unlikely to change the relative positions of any teams with "normal" logs and definitely did not affect the top three positions, which is the principal concern of the judges, other than to move PT5L out of 3rd place. PT5L moved from 3rd to 11th place, some of this movement the consequence of error rate. (If the intent of the "phantoms" was

to hurt the PT5L entry they certainly succeeded; the operators spent more than two hours working stations for which they received no credit.)

The impact was much greater on the three logs with significant numbers of "national uniques" (which were also a very minor factor in the PT5L log - among the 240 "uniques" are just 9 "national uniques" that showed up very late in the contest after the operators were identified on the BalkanDX Yahoo forum at 10:24 UTC). PW5B lost 125 "uniques" and moved down five positions, from 11th to 16th, some of this movement the consequence of error rate. PT5P lost 76 "unique" QSOs but actually moved up one position in the final results because their error rate was lower than average. PT5N lost 67 "uniques" and moved down one position.

While it is unfortunate that the operators of these four stations all spent time making QSOs for which they received no credit, the judges and log-checkers firmly believe that the appropriate remedy was applied to correct an unanticipated situation.

Disqualification would have been inappropriate in that there is no proof - indeed, there is no evidence at all - that any of the operators were at fault. On the other hand, allowing "phantom QSOs," once detected as such, to be credited also would be inappropriate and would make the whole WRTC event pointless. The same standard was applied to all 46 logs.

The judges and log-checkers recommend that in future WRTCs, all "uniques" should be removed from logs without penalty and that this policy should be announced in advance. All stations operating in the IARU HF World Championship should be encouraged to work all WRTC stations, without favoritism and without using more than one call sign from any station (unless family members share a station).

We also recommend that "unique" not be precisely defined in advance. The judges must be allowed discretion to determine the appropriate threshold for "uniques" for a given event, as this will depend upon the number of logs available for crosschecking and other factors.

While we regret that this attempt to manipulate the WRTC results occurred - for whatever reason the perpetrators may have had - we are pleased to

have detected it and to have been able to take appropriate corrective action.

The judges would especially like to thank Larry "Tree" Tyree, N6TR, for his analysis and Phil Goetz, N6ZZ for his invaluable contribution in uploading the WRTC logs and maintaining the communication link between the judges in Florianopolis and Tree at his home in Oregon. Trey Garlough, N5KO, also contributed significantly to the log-checking process from his home in California, as did Larry Hammel, K5OT, on-site.

Respectfully submitted,

Judges: Log-Checking Committee:
David Sumner, K1ZZ Larry "Tree" Tyree, N6TR
Roger Western, G3SXW Phil Goetz, N6ZZ

WRTC2006 Steering Committee
Atilano de Oms PY5EG

It is sad when hams try to upset the level playing field by favoring one team with unique QSOs. And, clearly, with the power of computers and software log checking, this is actually going to cost that team time and wasted QSOs.

But, it is even more disheartening to think that some hams used this weapon to sabotage a team. These competitors have gone through a weighty vetting process to get to these events. It is beyond despicable for someone to try to hobble one or more teams.

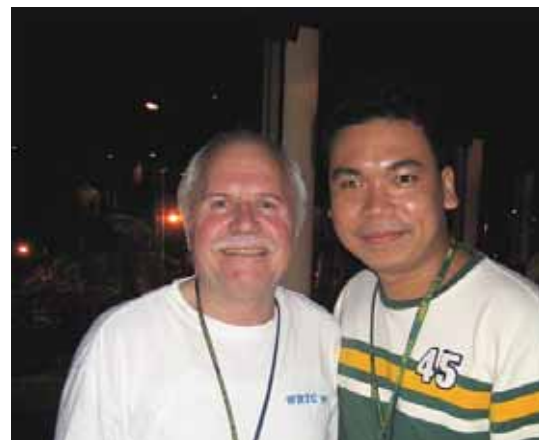
Sometimes in the heat of club competition, someone may be tempted to avoid giving a "competing" club a call and a QSO. NCCC has been emphatic about discouraging such wrong headedness. If you are going to participate in a contest, call everyone you hear. There is no benefit to anyone if you get on to give a couple of friends a contest QSO. In fact, you may cost them time and points – even possibly a mult.

If you can't do more than a minimal effort, make sure you work some reasonable number of participants. Otherwise, find something else to do.

Some Views of WRTC



Silver medal for N6MJ and N2NL. (photo, EY8MM)



S50A and E21EIC. (photo, W6OAT)



Competitors and referees meeting. (photo EY8MM)



Dean (N6BV) and Rusty (W6OAT). (photo EY8MM)



SM3CER and W2SC. (photo EY8MM)



PT5U getting started. (photo EY8MM)



EY8MM and W6OAT. (photo EY8MM)



Bronze (K1DG/N2NT); Gold (VE3EJ/VE7HO); Silver (N2NL/N6MJ) (photo EY8MM)



N2NT in the heat of battle. (photo G5LP)



WRTC closing party. (photo EY8MM)

