Florida Contest Group

Contesting Do's & Don'ts

October 2011

Do's Before the Contest

- Plan ahead for the contest
- Do all necessary antenna work far in advance
- Know your contest strategy in advance
- Know your category – SO, SO Assisted, SO2R, Multi-single, Multi-two
- Select your power level. Consider if the contest rules allow for a power multiplier when making your decision of QRP, LP, or HP.
- Select your logging software – N1MM, WinTest, WriteLog, CQ/X, N3FJP, etc.
- Load logging software and test with your transceiver
- Record and test CW and/or voice messages in advance
- Make sure your signal is clean – no key clicks or SSB splatter
- If multi-op, setup and test your network
- If using packet, select the cluster to be used, and set up filters if necessary
- Choose your goals, such as breaking an existing record, making 1,000+ QSOs
- Prepare your station, antennas and logging program and test everything in advance…and test again!
- Prepare snacks, drinks, meals in advance
- Know your sleep and break plan in advance
- Know the log-submittal deadline
- Be active on the air at least a couple days before the contest…get a "feeling" for the bands.
- Check NG3K.com to see who is going to be active from the rarer locations. Keep the list handy during the contest
- Synchronize your computer clock to WWV or the Internet

Do's During the Contest

- Start on time
- Send your full call when calling another station…no partial calls

- Be Quick!!!! Avoid time-wasting words, comments or conversations
- When running gets slow, turn the key speed down. If on phone get the "friendly voice" out.
- Don't be a packet rat. Listen for the guy's call, don't just log him from the cluster. It will save you from a busted Q or taking 10 minutes to work a dupe.
- Record notes about any questionable QSOs during the contest. (In most logging software, Alt-N will record a note on the fly.)
- Work dupes…don't argue whether or not the station is a dupe
- If you are working from a DX location, and you start to get a string of dupes, it means that you call has been mis-spotted. If this happens, change your frequency and start a new pile up. (Advice from Alex, W2OX/V47KP)
- Tune in the direction of the sideband – tune up for USB, tune down for LSB.

Don'ts During the Contest

- **Don't send or say any unnecessary words or comments**
- **Don't send "UR" or "NR" in Sweepstakes**
- **Don't send "BK"**
- **Don't say "please copy"**
- **Don't say "good luck in the contest"**
- **Don't say "good luck in Field Day" (Yes, we know that FD is not a contest!)**

After the contest

- Save and backup your log file to another computer or flash drive
- Turn off your rig and disconnect antennas
- Resolve any notes that were recorded during the contest
- Create your Cabrillo file and review for correctness
- Write a Soapbox if you are so inclined

- Immediately report your score to 3830:
  http://www.hornucopia.com/3830score/
- Submit Cabrillo file to contest sponsor before the deadline
- Report to your family that you are alive and well!

For any contest entry:

- Read the rules write up of the contest BEFORE THE CONTEST! Not only will you be able to determine your entry category, you may also find out activity band segments, rules changes, etc.
- Determine if the contest rules allow for a power multipler.
- If your goal is to "win" (section awards, etc.), look over previous results either in QST, CQ, 3830 archives on "contesting.com" or the event sponsor's website. Results from previous years, while not completely reliable (think different conditions, activity, etc.), can give direction to your choice of entry category, goals and planning.
- Establish a goal for your effort: Beat my buddy, beat my last year's score, work new ones, contribute max score for FCG, keep my butt in the chair for X number of hours or "just have some fun."
- Determine your best historical score for this contest, and post it in front of you as a goal to beat this time.
- Know your station's strengths and weaknesses. Spend more time on bands & modes that work well with your station.
- Know propagation, sunrise/sunset times, etc. Being at the right place at the right time will help your score.
- Know your rig's capabilities and know how to use them. Knowing how to quickly go split can often earn one a QSO while others are fumbling to remember where the VFO B button is.

- If your radio has 2nd Receiver capability, use the 2nd RX to Search and Pounce (S/P) in other portions of the band where you are not CQ'ing. Also try tuning both RX's at the same time while you're doing S/P. Start at the bottom of the band with one VFO and the top of the band with the other. This takes some practice, but you'll find your S/P rates will improve once you get the hang of it.

- For single RX operators, search and pounce from the bottom of a band to the top. The lower portion of any band is often where you'll find easier to work, bigger signals. "Big Gun" stations know this and try to stay in the lower half of band segments. Use this knowledge to either make easy Q's, or avoid butting heads with the "big boys."

- As you move up the band, you increase your chances of finding a space in which to CQ.

- When starting to S/P on a band, put band edge frequencies into your radio's memory or simply type the frequency into the call sign field of your logging program and press enter. This saves time so that you don't have to manually dial your radio to the edge.

- Consider "thinking out of the box" for an entry. For example, K8MR fights the SS "Sunday blues" by dividing the contest into 5 or 6 hour operating periods at up to 4 different stations. He is always "fresh meat" at each stop and always aspires to have a total score for his multiple entries to be better than the #1 S/O score.

- Invite someone to operate your station if you can't get on, or organize a multi-op entry. This is a great opportunity to teach or learn contesting skills. It's also a great opportunity to enjoy the fellowship of like-minded contesters.

When planning a part-time contest entry:

- Know what bands, modes and operating times will maximize your goals for the amount of time that you can spend on-air.
- Unless you are philosophically opposed, use packet or Reverse Beacon Network (RBN) assistance to increase score and enjoyment. While unassisted operating is a greater challenge and perhaps offers more personal reward, operating with Packet/RBN can be a great learning tool for those not familiar with openings and activity. WARNING: Use of Packet can be hazardous to your score by giving you BAD information (think broken calls). In the words of some famous guy, "Trust but verify."

For a low-power entry:

- Search and pounce operation will make up a good portion of your Q's, but don't be afraid to call CQ if you find an open spot in the band.
- Choose your CQ spots/bands/modes intelligently. For example, don't open up with your mighty 100w on top of someone you know is running higher power and better antennas.
- Spending a few minutes calling "CQ Contest" loses little and there is much to be gained. The numbers of operators that are tuning a band far exceed those who are calling CQ. If you find a spot (after checking to see if it's not in use), jump in. You might be surprised at the result.
- Be prepared to QSY after a few minutes of unanswered CQs or if someone decides that they like that frequency as much as you do. Ego and playing "macho man" in a frequency fight usually doesn't improve your score. Often those fights inevitably result in the station with the weaker signal moving on. Don't give the frequency away at the first hint of the presence of another station, but recognize that when stations start answering someone else on

your frequency, it's time to QSY. Your score and your blood pressure demand it!

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