

# ***Compliments of Florida Contest Group***



## **Contesting Do's & Don'ts**

**October 2012**

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## *Contesting Do's and Don'ts.*

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### **Dos 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, Multi-single, Multi-two, Multi-multi
- 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
- If using packet, decide if you are going to use the Skimmer
- 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 – set the alarm clock
- Know the log-submittal deadline
- Be active on the air at least a couple days before the contest...get a "feel" for the bands and propagation.
- 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

## *Contesting Do's and Don'ts.*

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### 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 your 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't's 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!)**

## *Contesting Do's and Don'ts.*

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### **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 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 multiplier.
- 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.

## *Contesting Do's and Don'ts.*

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- Know propagation, sunrise/sunset times, etc. Being at the right place at the right time will help your score.
- Display your loggers “gray line” map to watch for sunrise/sunsets in target areas, such as deep Asia, Eastern EU, Western EU.
- 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.
- Use a band scope (e.g., Elecraft P3 scope, Icom scope) to literally view the band with your eyes – to spot open slots for CQ’ing, to avoid splattering SSB signals, to spot signals on a “dead band”.
- 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.

## ***Contesting Do's and Don'ts.***

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- 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 the 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 one 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

## ***Contesting Do's and Don'ts.***

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who are calling CQ. If you find a spot (after a quick “QRV”), 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!

## *Contesting Do's and Don'ts.*

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### **THOUGHTS ON WINNING by Pete Chamalian, W1RM**

First, you have to define what winning means to you.

Are you looking at single op? Multi-2, M/M? What category? Assisted?, Unassisted?

What mode?

What is the scope? Top in the world? Top in your continent, country, ARRL Section, state?

Which contest are you trying to "win"?

Once you have this down, find out who your competition is.

Now, figure out what they have for gear, antennas, location, etc. If you can't get that info from the web then go visit them! Yeah, visit and assess what they are using. Assess how they operate (Single Op, Single Op 2 Radio, etc.), see what equipment they use. How about antennas and tower(s)?

Gather all this information together and see what you can do to match or beat their physical situation.

Next, what about skills? What about age? Skills can be improved but age not so much.

Now let me share my tale. Back in the late 60's I had the bug bad. I had operated my own station with just low power and wires in a rental room on the famed Selden Hill in West Hartford, CT. This house was the favored home for many famous guys at ARRL Hq like W1HDQ, W1FB, and many more.



## *Contesting Do's and Don'ts.*

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Now I was living in a different apartment with two roommates while I went back to college. I moved my station back to my family home in New York.

Here, W1BGD/2 had eyes set on some serious contesting. I put up a 50-foot tower with a TH6 and dipoles for 80 and 40. So now I plunge head-long into CQWW, ARRL DX, SS, etc. I run smack into guys like W2PV, W1UU, and others in the Boston area. Hmm, how do I beat these guys?

By this time W2PV was multi-op and out of my frame. The boys in Boston clearly had an advantage over me by virtue of distance and equipment. So, I went on a little trip to visit these guys and see what I was up against.

What I found was pretty simple and common. Everyone had at least 2 towers, multi-element monoband beams and sometimes fixed beams south.

Now to the planning phase. I designed my own monobanders - 4 elements on 20, 4 elements on 15 and 5 on 10. I also acquired a 2 el for 40. I bought aluminum to build the beams and 70 feet of tower. The plan was to put the 20 and 40 on the new tower and the 15 and 10 on the 50 footer.

OK, long story short. In 1971 when ARRL DX CW was 2 weekends long, I went full bore. After the first weekend I was in the running but the Boston boys had an advantage. The second weekend rolls around and Friday late afternoon as I and my then my new wife drove to NY, the rains started. We had a Nor'easter on our hands. We get to my parents' home I race upstairs to check antennas et al and found 20 totally dead! OMG. I had made a not so good connection to the gamma match so up the tower I go, in the rain and dark, last the connection that had indeed broken then down the tower. I quickly change my clothes (I was soaking wet) and ran to the shack (which was on the 3rd floor). Off we go. Bobbie brought me some food for dinner, and I went to work.

When the dust settled, contests over, logs checked and submitted, I found out how my competition did. While I had rain in NY, they had ICE and that made a shambles of their antennas. I won!

## *Contesting Do's and Don'ts.*

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In 1974 with the same station, I won CQWW CW for the US. Since then I have had the pleasure and honor of a number of "victories". NE Division in CW SS, IARU Low Power for North America, single band 15 in CQWW CW, AA CW for NA, and more.

So, what is winning? It's whatever you want it to be and how much of an investment do you want to make against what you find are the odds.

Here are some of Peter's key winnings in past years.

Top US, ARRL DX CW 1971

Top US, CQWW CW 1974

Top US, All Asian, 20 meters

Top US, CQWW CW and new record, 15 meters, 1979

Top North America, CQWW CW and new record, 15 meters, 1982

Top New England Division, ARRL SS, low power CW, 2003

Top New England Division, ARRL SS, low power CW, 2004

IARU Radiosport, CW, Low Power, and new record Top NA 2010

IARU Radiosport, CW, Low Power and new record, top W/VE 2006

Pete Chamalian, W1RM

CQ-Contest@contesting.com - June 7, 2021

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[W1rm@comcast.net](mailto:W1rm@comcast.net)

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## *Contesting Do's and Don'ts.*

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### Contributors

- K1TO, Dan
- K4XS, Bill
- K5KG, George
- K8NZ, Ron
- W1RM, Pete

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### **CONTEST FORUM NOTES**