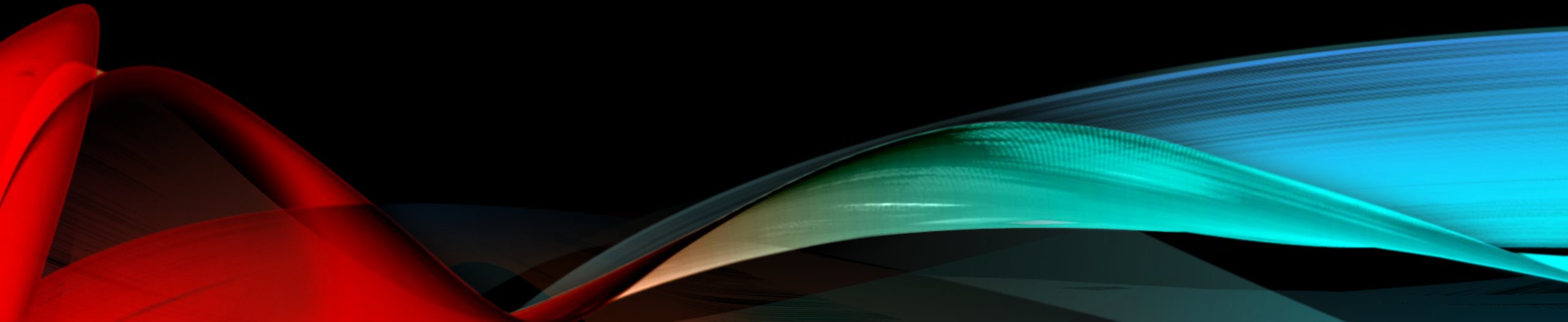# CW SPRINT INTRODUCTION & BASICS

W4WF for the 2019 Melbourne Hamfest Contest Forum

# CW SPRINT INTRODUCTION

When is a contest not a contest?

# CW SPRINT HISTORY

- The first CW Sprint was held in September, 1977
- For the first ~10 years, it was administered by W6OAT
- First winner was N6BT. It took until February of 2006 for another California station to win (N2NL/6)

- No plaques/awards – "The public's admiration and fame forever"

- Early computer log checking from N6TR

# SPRINT HISTORY CONT'D

- The earliest results available on the NCJ's website are from 2000…lots of familiar calls!

- Known as the "Contester's Contest" (at least, within NA)

- Can be and has been won by operators from all parts of the country (Midwest, West Coast, Northwest, Southeast)

# PHILOSOPHICAL QUESTIONS

- What skill differentiates the best operators from the merely good (or mediocre) operators?
  - Until 2BSIQ, at least
- How can contest rules help flatten out hardware and geographic advantages to make it possible for a medium-size station to beat a superstation?
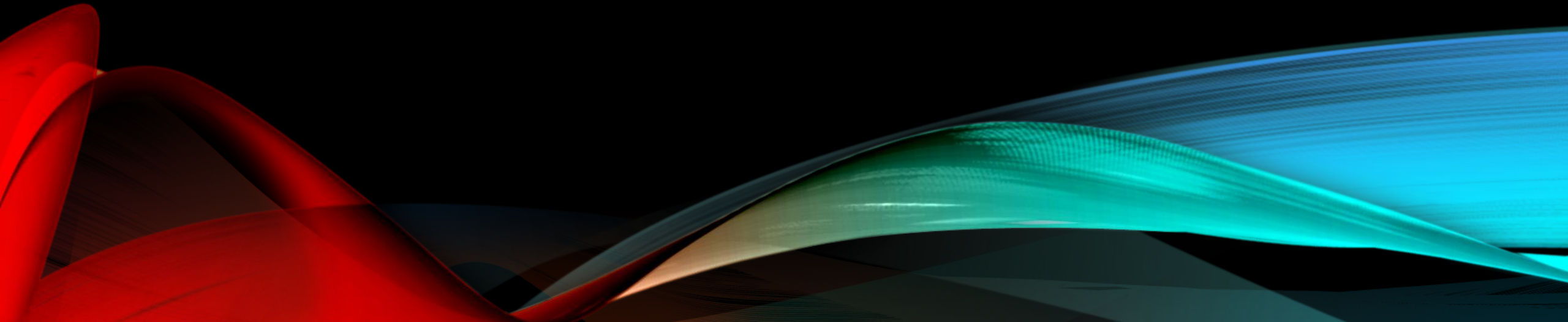- How can contest rules obviate assistance from skimmer/packet/SO2A?

# PHILOSOPHICAL ANSWERS

- S&P! The best operators can S&P more efficiently and effectively than mediocre operators. The delta between a great operator's S&P rate and my S&P rate is greater, in many cases, than between a great operator's run rate and my run rate (assuming the same pileup)

- No running stations! No dominating the band edge! (K3LR "owns" 14.001 and 14.151 – or does Tim timeshare both with W3LPL?)

- See above! Move after every QSO!

# SPRINT SPECIFICS

So…what's the big deal?

# HOW IT WORKS

- Sprinting (there are RTTY and SSB Sprints as well) is unlike any other contest on the calendar

- The QSY Rule - when you answer a CQ and receive an exchange, the former CQ-er vacates the frequency…it's yours now!

- If you work a station by calling CQ, you must QSY at least 5khz before you can call CQ again. You must QSY at least 1khz before you can answer another CQ.
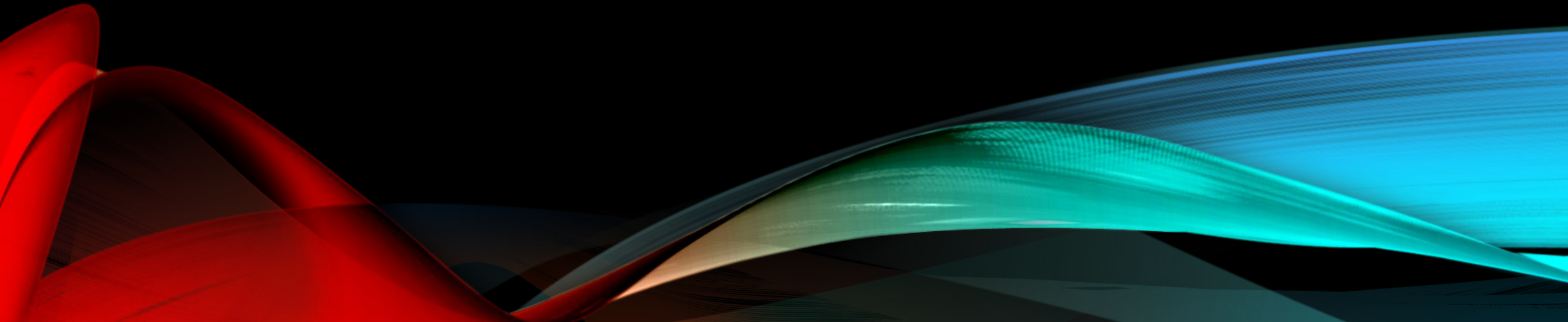
# TEXT REPRESENTATION

- N5TJ: NA N5TJ
- W4WF: W4WF
- N5TJ: W4WF N5TJ 123 JEFF TX
- W4WF: N5TJ 100 CHRIS FL W4WF
- (ALMOST) SIMULTANEOUSLY
  - N5TJ: <dit dit>
  - K8MR: K8MR
  - N4OX: N4OX
  - K4BAI: K4BAI
- W4WF: N4OX W4WF 101 CHRIS FL

# AUDIO RECORDING (TNX N6TR)

# PREPARATION

How to excel…or at least improve

1. Read the rules thoroughly…
   - Know what to expect (for instance) from stations outside US/VE…it's a shame to work a KP2 or a VP5 and then lose the multiplier because you entered the wrong exchange in your logging program
   - Glance at prior results…they may give you an idea of who may be on from where
2. Prepare yourself mentally
   - Sprint is tougher mentally than most contests because you can't zone out while you call CQ waiting on a response
   - Measured expectations are the name of the game

# BEFORE THE CONTEST

- There are opportunities to practice every week!
  - CWOps CWTs – 3x 60-minute contests each Wednesday (Wednesday and Thursday early morning UTC) – great chance to practice copying names and #'s
  - NS Sprint – weekly Sprint contest each Friday at 0230z-0259z – Sprint format with a few wrinkles – 15m/20m/40m/80m/160m, 100w max, multipliers per band https://www.ncccsprint.com/ladder

- RELAX – IT'S SUPPOSED TO BE FUN

# MEASURING SUCCESS

There are as many measures of success in Sprint as in any other contesting endeavor

Golfers = shooting par

N5TJ - 14 wins overall, 11 wins in a row from TX

400 Club - 400 valid QSOs after log checking (only W4AN (SK) and N6TR)
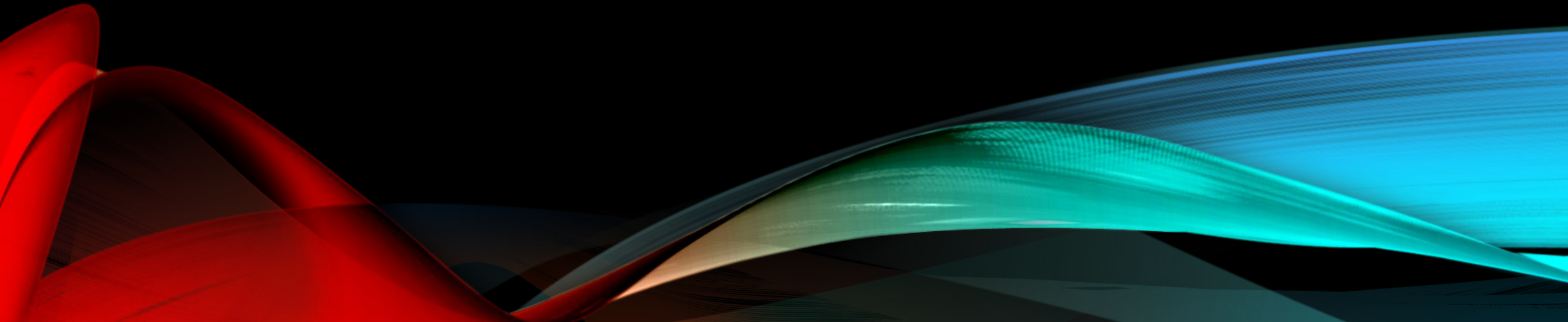
# SOFTWARE CONCERNS/SETUP

- At one time, Sprint was a considered a niche contest and CT, the dominant software of its day, did not support it

- There were holdouts who logged on paper and sent by hand for a loooong time

- Today, those concerns are a thing of the past. N1MM+, Writelog, Win-Test, TR4W, and DXLog all support Sprint natively

- Unless you like sending by hand, use software and computer keying

- Test your software to make sure it's behaving as expected…

# SOFTWARE SETUP GOTCHAS

- There is one main gotcha in using computer keying – Run vs. S&P

- Your exchange looks different depending whether you've answered someone who is calling CQ or if you've called CQ yourself

- The difference is required by the rules, so you need to either figure out how to make your computer send what you need, or make your paddlin' hand comfortable

- CQing Exchange: <OtherCall> <YourCall> <Your#> <YourName> <YourState>

- S&P Exchange: <OtherCall> <Your#> <YourName> <YourState> <YourCall>

- PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE make sure you've tested your software in both scenarios, so you send the exchange correctly!

- N1MM+, Win-Test, and DXLog (representing the extent of my personal experience) worky worky

# DURING THE CONTEST

I've answered a CQ…now what do I do?

# YOU'RE SPRINTING…NOW WHAT?

- CW Speed
  - You probably noticed that the CW is "brisk" compared to most domestic contests
  - In my experience, most serious Sprint operators send somewhere between 35wpm and 45wpm
  - Assuming you can copy +/- that fast, feel free to match them
  - If you can't, send at your own speed
  - There are always casual ops handing out QSOs in the 20's
  - Those casual ops are particularly welcome
    - Late in the contest
    - From "rare" states/provinces/countries

# THIS IS HAPPENING, THIS IS REALLY HAPPENING!

- **RELAX…**
- For better or worse, the Sprint only lasts four hours
- If you don't get it right away, keep plugging away
- If you decide that you don't like it (as opposed to not getting it) then you're in good company
- Bear in mind…rates are not *that* fast (hours > 100 are rare)
- Jim Rome: "If you don't like my show, give it two weeks. If you still don't like it…give it another two weeks."

# IT'S STILL HAPPENING...

In other contests, you may be used to listening to an exchange or two to confirm the runner's info, then calling when the pressure is off

That's not a possibility in the Sprint...what happens instead? CALL CQ

- Find a clear frequency near the top of the activity (+/- 045) and call CQ
- If someone answers your 25wpm CQ at 45wpm, don't give your exchange, ask them to QRS
- Once the QSO is complete and confirmed by both sides, QSY > 5khz and try again

Remember...the first 15 minutes on each new band are madness. Once the big fish bite each other, everyone will be listening for smaller signals
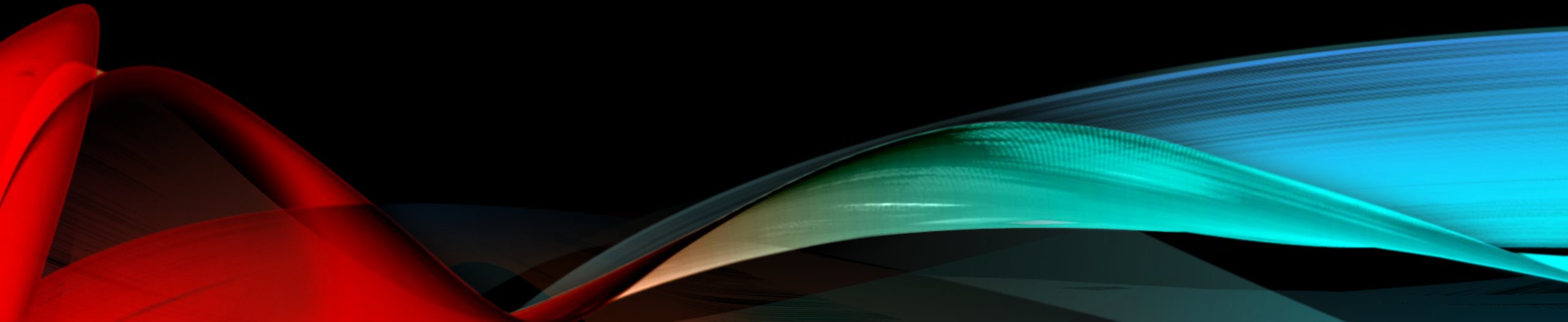
- You may have noticed in the sample QSO that there's not much of an opportunity for the CQ-ing station to ask for a fill
- For the S&P station it's easier...just send "NR?" or "NAME?" or "ST?" in place of your exchange. Your partner will virtually always oblige with a fill. Once you have their exchange confirmed, proceed with your exchange
- For the Run station, there are a few techniques
  - The Sprint community has done a good job emphasizing the importance of an ack on the Runner's part at the end of each QSO
  - Usually "R" or "TU" or "Dit Dit" before the next QSO
  - ASK QUICKLY...either ask for the fill you need ("NR?" "NAME?" "ST?") in place of the ack, or
  - Send a string of 5-10 dits (just lean on your dit paddle). Release, then ask for the fill, or
  - Listen to the next QSO and try to get the fill that way
- If you don't get the fill, consider strongly deleting the QSO from your log

# INSIDER INFORMATION

Gathered from the School of Moderate Knocks

# MODERATE KNOCKS, VOL.1

- The "real" Sprint is only three bands (20m/40m/80m). Activity starts at ~025 and extends upward…sometimes as far as 060 but usually to around 045

- When you're S&P up the band, tune in one direction only (which prevents aimlessly tuning up, then down, then up again and inadvertently violating the QSY rule)

- Start at 025, tune upward. When you reach 045 or 050 or you stop hearing any Sprint activity, QSY directly back to 025 and start again, or change bands

- Be realistic about your QSO partner
  - If a W6 calls you on 80m and needs 2-3 repeats of your number, then you're probably going to need his number more than once as well

- Sprint rewards a good internal SCP…if you have a working knowledge of where N9RV and K9YC and KU8E and N5KO and N3BB and N2IC (etc. etc. etc.) are, along with their names, you'll save yourself some fills

# MODERATE KNOCKS, VOL. 2

- It can be helpful to keep a notepad next to the radio to write down mults you hear "on the other side" of a couplet
  - Rare states, NA countries, provinces
  - Always KL7, VE(anything but 3), KH6, KP4, KP2 (KL7 and KH6 count as multipliers)
  - Lots of states only have one station representing the multiplier…can be common states like FL or less common states like VT or NV
- If you hear a fragment of one of those calls responding to your CQ, you'll know to come back to them even if they're not the loudest
- Log checking is stringent and includes a penalty…if you're not sure whether you have your partner's info correct, it's a judgment call whether you leave it in the log or not
- It is incumbent on both parties to recognize and minimize uncertainty

# MODERATE KNOCKS, VOL. 3

- Some single-radio entrants (and unless you're already pretty good at SO2R, I recommend starting the Sprint with one radio…if you're already pretty good at SO2R, why are you taking advice from me?) limit themselves to two band changes, from 20m to 40m and from 40m to 80m

- Often far western multipliers like AK and HI are limited to 20m only

- Check 20m even after 40m is open. Check 40m even after 80m is open. Check 40m/80m early…sometimes the SO2R guys are calling CQ fruitlessly on non-prime bands and you can snag some easy QSOs and mults with little competition

- When you check a non-prime band, call CQ in addition to tuning around

# MODERATE KNOCKS, VOL. 4

- Terminology
  - Couplet = a completed QSO sequence, from CQ to Response
  - Jump Ball = 2 or more callers respond to the same CQ. You can "win" a jump ball (the CQ-ing station calls you) or "lose" a jump ball. Jump balls are more common as the contest goes on and fresh meat is progressively rarer
  - Wrong Side = you hear someone (a needed multiplier, usually) but not in a position where you can call them. Usually they're in the middle of a couplet and they're not going to "inherit" the frequency
- Other tips
  - I don't particularly like ESM even in conventional contests, but I think in Sprint it can cause additional problems
  - Despite reputation, rate is usually not *that* high (> 100 hours are very rare)
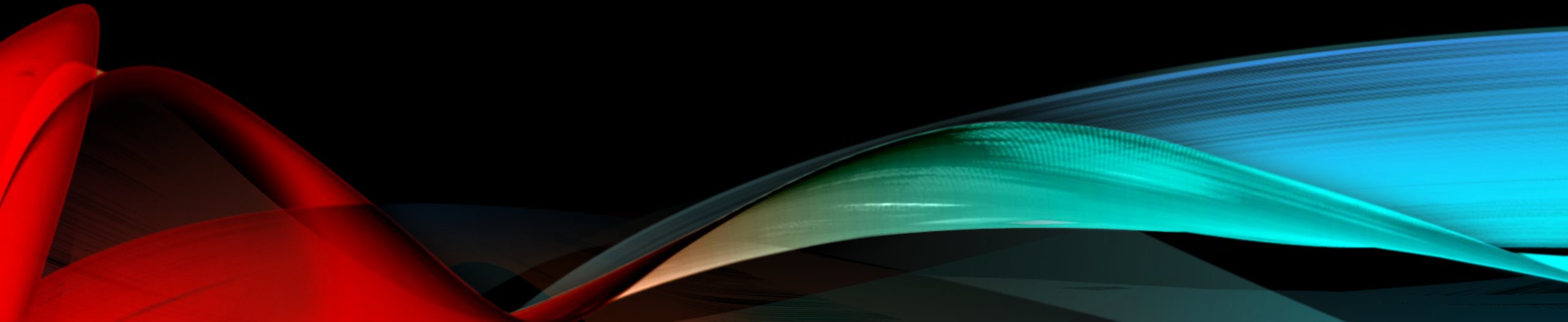
# MODERATE KNOCKS, VOL. 5

- Multiplier totals vary wildly between contests…Sprint is enough of a niche interest that sometimes common states (WI!) are not well-represented
- It's possible to hear needed mults "on the other side" for an entire contest
- Counter-intuitively (to me, anyway) it's usually not the best bet, if you lost a jump ball, to wait around and try to work the next person

# POST-CONTEST

My brain is scrambled…

# SCRAMBLED EGGS

- Sprint (in any mode) is intense…if you last the full four hours, you'll probably be more tired than you would expect

- I find it helpful to evaluate my score as a percentage of the winning score, so if my score went down but the winning score went down more, I'm doing OK

- Available multipliers play a *huge* role in final scores – September 2019 Sprint < 40 multipliers available, no VE1/2/3/4/6/8/9/VY1/VY2

- Submit your 3830 post, but don't forget to submit your log at ncjweb.com (someone posts their claimed score but forgets to submit nearly every Sprint…don't fall into that trap!)