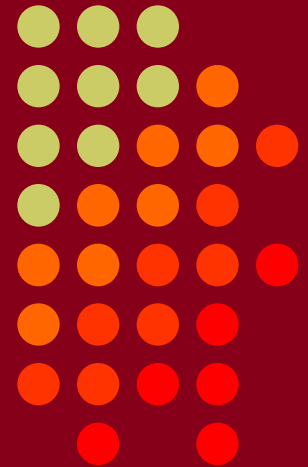


# Strategies on Improving your USA Contest Scores

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# Domestic Contests (USA / VE)



- ARRL Sweepstakes
  - The biggest domestic contest.
  - Big emphasis on receiving accuracy.
  - Fast rates first day – walking in mud the second (unless you are in KP4/KP2/VY1).
- NAQP
  - Great two radio event.
  - Uses all six bands – multipliers by band.
  - Fast rates!!
- NA Sprint
  - QSY rule makes this a great challenge for the operator.
  - Lots of competition in low power and QRP categories.
- Other QSO Parties
  - Typically very sparse competition.
  - Good rates can be made just running guys who tune across you.
  - Should not be “advertised” as a contest.

# Why are domestic contests different?



- Easier propagation.
- Often lower antennas work better.
- Only one or two directions typically needed for good results.
- In some cases – more reliance on working the non-contester (primarily on SSB).
- Exchange “quality” enables almost complete log checking.

# Basic Strategies for Score Improvement



- Get Louder
- Hear Better
- Antenna Flexibility
- Logging Accuracy
- Maximizing Rate
- Touchy Feely Stuff



# Get Louder



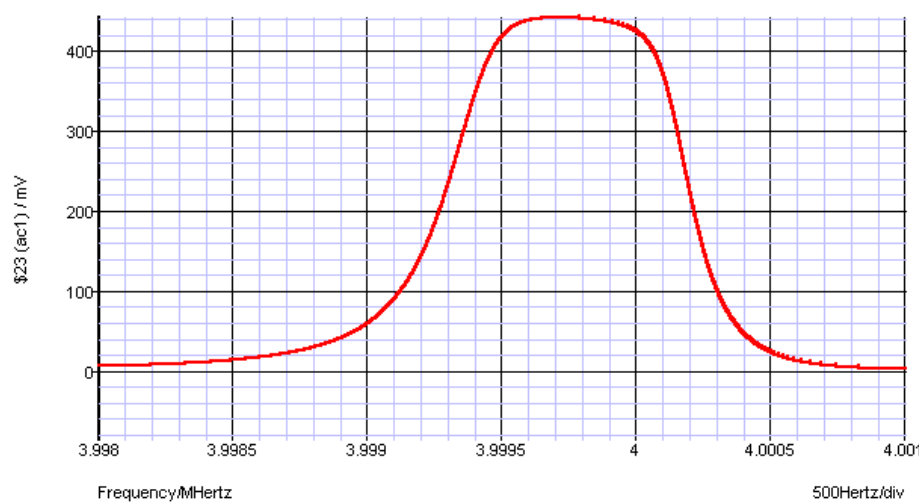
- Understand how your location interacts with your antenna
  - Domestic contests are not typically low angle
  - Sharper beam patterns not always needed
  - Do you need to point east and west at the same time?



# Hear Better



- New receivers are really good at reducing QRM and QRN.
- Is your code speed holding you back?
- Are you listening to too narrow of a bandwidth?
  - Do you hear people calling you off frequency?



# Antenna Flexibility



- Can you quickly locate a signal and select the best receiving antenna for it quickly?
- Can you optimize your transmitted signal for busting through pileups.
- Can you change your antennas pattern based upon conditions (time of day or propagation).



# Logging Accuracy



- If your error rate is over 1 percent – you can improve your score simply by making fewer mistakes.
  - Get copies of your log check reports – look for areas of focus to improve accuracy.
  - Compare your reports against audio recordings.
  - Stay in the moment – most people have found that using a database of exchanges actually hurts their accuracy. Copy what was sent instead.
- However, don't over-do it – you do not want to be asking for un-necessary repeats. You should build confidence in your ability to get it right the first time.
  - Operating a lot between contests helps your ear stay in shape. Spend time on “weak signal” bands.



# Maximizing Rate



- On SSB
  - You are giving a performance that is trying to suck in non-contesters
  - Make sure your audio is pleasant to listen to.
    - Don't be that guy with a CQ that sounds totally different than the live operator.
  - Imagine an SWL working on his Heathkit and you need to entice him to put in the effort to find a footswitch and call you.
  - Avoid repeating received exchanges and other un-necessary words.
- On CW
  - Make sure your CW is pleasant to listen to.
  - Code speed should change based upon your rate.
  - Minimize the “pregnant pause” – the time between when you get an answer and when you come back.
  - QSK can improve efficiency – but also might make you more tired.
- Diversity reception can eliminate one letter drop-outs from QSB.
  - It can also help you identify location of a signal quickly.

# The ARRL Sweepstakes



- Logging accuracy is a big factor
- On CW – a second radio has a big impact.
  - An SB-101 & trap vertical can work most CQers.
  - Many stations work > 100 QSOs on their 2<sup>nd</sup> rig.
- Clean sweep is nice – but don't sacrifice rate.
- Off time strategy is important
- Focus on your best two bands

# Sprint (mostly CW)



- Strategy depends on your ability to win “jump balls”.
  - If you own the band – find guys to work and get “doublets” on each frequency.
  - If you are weak – calling CQ a lot might be more effective.
- Code speed is important
  - Many stations sending 35+ WPM
- Need to be effective on three bands
- Advanced two radio techniques are used by most top-ten, high-power entrants.
  - Call CQ while tuning on another band
  - Call CQ while receiving exchange from a CQ solicited QSO on another band.
- SSB Sprint is a contest in flux.

# NAQP



- If you are in a rare state – you can have a decent score just running guys.
- Two radio techniques really work well on CW.
- Move multipliers!!
- When the rate gets slow – changes bands.
- Be careful not to miss a 10 meter opening.

# Other points



- Are you having fun?
- Are you setting firm goals?
- Do you over-plan?
- Do you have a good off time strategy?
  - Can it adapt to the unexpected?
- Are you able to “see” band openings
- Do you operate too many contests (AA3B does not need to answer this question).

# Summary



- Domestic contests offer opportunities to have pretty competitive scores with modest stations and fixed directional antennas.
- NAQP with low power further enables two radio operation that would be challenging at high power levels for most city lots.
- Get on and have fun!!

# Thanks for your time



See you in the next contest!!

