

A Message from the Editor

“This changes everything.” I’ve never been a big fan of that particular phrase. It’s worse than an exaggeration. It’s just plain lazy. Claiming that *everything* is changed relieves you of the obligation to tell us what is different.

But people utter these kinds of phrases when something comes along that shakes up the order of things. And those kinds of things do come around every now and then in the world of contesting, even if they don’t *really* change everything. You might remember a few. I know that I do.

Of course, there have been plenty of changes in technology — from solid-state radios, computer designed antennas, and auto-tune amplifiers. These are impressive enough. But in the last year or two, changes to operating methods in two categories — multi-single and single operator — might turn the record books inside out. In fact, they already have.

Watching the claimed multioperator scores arrive for the just-completed CQ World Wide CW demonstrates that. You might be forgiven for expecting that the ranking of the top scores in the three major categories — multi-multi (MM), multi-two (M2), and multi-single (MS) — would be ordered as follows: Multi-multi, followed by multi-two, then multi-single.

Well, guess again. Until the big score of M2 leader D4C arrived late in the week, the MS leader’s score of 34 million was the highest of all three categories. That’s right, multi-single besting multi-multi.

Of course, calling some of the operations conducted in the MS category “single” transmitter is a misnomer. The CQ WW rules have always allowed simultaneous transmission by a second transmitter on a different band, if it is working multipliers. And so the competitive MS entries have always employed multiple stations.

But today’s winning MS setups are far

beyond that. They can easily employ a half-dozen stations and a similar number of active operators. Three or more of those stations might be on the run band, with sophisticated interlocks to prevent simultaneous transmission. The station that is running will have diversity antenna reception, with team of operators pulling calls out of the pileups. In short, they are a full-scale press, pushing the limit to what is possible. And their scores are far higher than ever before.

Another game-changing innovation is occurring in the single op category — the dueling CQ. Maintaining two different pileups on two different bands has always been possible, and plenty of operators have tried it from time to time. But at least on CW, it has changed the game of single operator contesting for the top scorers. From the right locations, for the right operators, the ability to run two pileups at the same time for substantial chunks of time, with two different audio streams reaching your ears and controlling two different frequencies, has made a big leap in QSO numbers possible.

Stepping Back

When these kinds of changes occur, and when you see the scores pushed to levels once thought unattainable, it is easy to recoil a bit. Certainly for those of us who are old dogs, learning these new tricks might be impossible. Multi-single operations might require a substantial investment in hardware and operators, if they want to remain competitive. And single operators need to think about different skills, if they can master them at all.

And many will push back against the changes. Is the spirit of multi-single really consistent with a room full of radios, with seven or eight ops tuning and calling skimmer spots at any given time, and with complex hardware for diversity reception

and in-band operation of multiple stations? Perhaps not. But you have to admire those who have found ways to push through what was previously not possible and setting the bar higher.

There are also side effects. Just as the advent of single operator, two radio (SO2R) operation gave us the situation where a CQing operator drifts away from the run frequency occasionally, sometimes to find another occupant there upon returning, these sophisticated new hybrids cause a few issues. When you work one of these multiplexed operations on the air, you will notice some long pauses — when the other in-band station is transmitting. Sometimes the pauses are so long that the QSO is disrupted.

But the horse has definitely left the barn. And contesters will adapt to these changes. Those who want to win, or keep winning, have no choice. And for the rest of us? When the result is more QSOs, it has to be more fun, right?

Losing a Double Mult

If Rich Strand, KL7RA, were with us today, and had not succumbed to heart failure at his contest location on the Kenai Peninsula in early November, there is no doubt about what he’d be doing. He’d be getting ready for the next contest. Few people ever did it any better, with more passion and more joy. To see him every year in the Dayton Hamvention flea market, looking over the used rotators with a twinkle in his eye, was something that made that event special. Just as putting his multi-multi station in our contest logs, almost always for a multiplier, made every contest complete.

Now there’s a hole where his wit, his wisdom, and his friendship used to be. It won’t be easy to fill. But his memory and inspiration will always be with us as we get ready for the next contest. RIP friend.