

A Message from the Editor

A steady geographic competition in contesting has been unfolding for some time. It's really nothing new. The continental point rules of the CQ World Wide contests — the biggest contests on the calendar — favor stations close enough to the high-volume continents of Europe and North America to work the lower layers of signals from those areas on the low bands, yet far enough to be classified as being on a different continent. The northern South American islands of Curaçao and Aruba, the coastal African islands, such as the Canaries or Cape Verde, and the island of Cyprus (considered to be Asia) all fit that bill.

So, stations set up shop in those special places and do battle to win the world trophies. Their efforts to put these islands on the air, and the presence of their big signals on the bands make contests more fun for the rest of us too.

The US has its own geographical game as well. How far northeast can you go? For years it has been stations on the coasts that have performed the best in DX contests, with only occasional breakthroughs of stations farther inland — except that it's been all East Coast, ever since the JA explosion ran its course in the 1980s. Now, that phenomenon has become even more exaggerated as stations move into

New England — and especially into Maine. The constraint of finding gainful employment in these choice places to play radio is less relevant today as well, with many of us nearing retirement age or availing ourselves of remote contesting technology.

The CQ WW CW contest last year featured three stations in Maine and one from Cape Cod among the top five single operator, high power scores. It was a great battle, certainly — especially since the station that won, N5DX, wasn't even in New England! Kevin mounted his big score from across the Hudson at the station of N2QV. Great battles are great for contests, with lessons learned and inspiration to improve. But that battle at the top might be hiding something a little more troubling.

Is Activity “Hollowing Out?”

What happens when you shine your light beyond the easternmost regions, into the interior of the country? Scores go down, of course. That's the northeast propagation advantage. But something else also happens. The number of serious efforts goes down as well. In fact, lost in the focus on the top-scoring stations — their eye-popping QSO rates and big scores — may be a “hollowing out” of contest activity, especially in CW contests. Is this the case?

This is the kind of question that comes up in such places as the hallways in Dayton. People argue one way or another. I know that I've been in some of those conversations. But thanks to our German friends who are administering the WRTC 2018 qualifying competition, we have a little more data to apply to the subject. Led by DL5AXX, the WRTC 2018 team has compiled scoring statistics for all of the qualifying events held in 2015 and through the spring of 2016. Those data can give us a more comprehensive look at the distribution of contest activity.

A WRTC score, as computed by the DL team, represents what is essentially a rescaling of your raw contest score. Your WRTC score is equal to your raw score divided by the top score in your region. A score of 1, for instance, means that you are the top score. The nice thing about this method is that it represents scores within each US region, comparing W1s to W1s and W6s to W6s. WRTC scores for purposes of the competition are the sum of your scores for your 12 best contests. Dividing each operator's score by the number of qualifying contests gives a measure of how competitive they are, on average.

For the US, the data paint an interesting picture. More than 6100 different US call signs have a WRTC score! That's pretty impressive, but it's also a very skewed distribution (see Figure 1). The average WRTC score per contest for US participants is 0.088, which means that the average US contesteer turns in a score that is 8.8 percent of the winning score for their region. But the median WRTC score per contest is even more revealing. That statistic tells us that 50 percent of all contest scores are less than 1.8 percent of the winning score in each region!

When you look at the totality of contesting scores in this way, it is striking how small a number the top competitors represent. Just 33 stations — not even 0.5 percent of all contesters — submit scores that are 80 percent as high as the leaders in their regions, on average. The number of little pistols is truly huge, but the scores of each are very small. More than 95 percent of contest scores submitted in the WRTC-scored categories were less than 50 percent as high as the region-winning score.

What Does It Mean?

There are some caveats to these numbers. For one thing, they pertain *only* to DX contests. Popular events such as ARRL

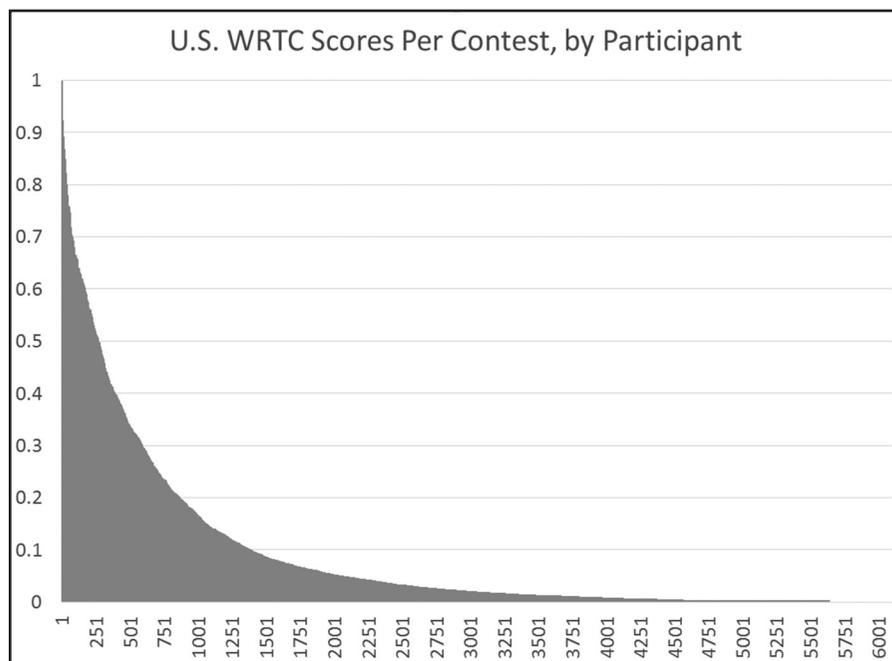


Figure 1 — Ranking of WRTC scores per contest for US participants, 2015 and 2016.

November Sweepstakes and Field Day are not included. They also tell us nothing about the degree of effort stations are putting into the different competitions. Some of the contests included in the WRTC qualifying competitions, such as the All Asian Contest or the Worked All Germany Contest, have never attracted a large number of full-time competitors from the US

Despite these shortcomings, I think the data point to a need to revitalize competition and competitive contest entries, especially in the breadbasket of the country, away from the Northeast Corridor that has always turned in the winning scores. Do we have a plan that addresses how to refill the pipeline with contesters ready to step into the shoes of those posting today's big scores?

One place to start might be the Youth Radiosport survey, announced in this issue. Another is ARRL Field Day, right around the corner as these words are written. And, of course, gateway contests such as the CWT and our very own NAQP are great places to start.

The Space Squeeze

Another competition that takes place in contesting is for space in *NCJ*. K4ZA's excellent "Workshop Chronicles" column lost out in that competition in our previous issue. We've carried it forward into this issue. Sorry Don! Part 2 of K9YC's excellent piece on dealing with receiver noise will appear in the September/October issue. Thanks to all of our *NCJ* authors for their continued contributions.

On a Sad Note

Just as *NCJ* was going to press, we were saddened to hear that the contesting community lost one of its most prolific station builders and mentors, Milt Jensen, N5IA. His impressive 160 meter array and station is the subject of KY7M's article, "Using the N5IA/N7GP 8-Circle Array in the CQ 160 Meter CW," in this issue of *NCJ*. The world lost Milt in a tower fall on June 9. RIP, OM.