

A Message from the Editor

When contesters gather in one place, either on the bands or at a convention, magical things still happen. The magic occurs despite deteriorating band conditions or even deteriorating physical health, for that matter. And in the case of the Xenia version of the long-running Dayton Hamvention in May, it occurs even when Mother Nature opens up with a rain shower or two.

Some of us are in the ham radio business, but for most of us, ham radio is an escape from the pressures and issues of the real world — into a playground of sorts. We relax with our radios, and we get enjoyment from using them, especially in contests. When we gather on the air en masse for the big contests, there is always that moment of elation at the start, just like the roar of children being let out for recess. We are with our friends and buddies, doing what we love.

We've just finished the major events of the contest season, including last fall's CQ World Wide SSB and CW contests, the two largest competitions in the world. The publication of the final scores of those two contests contained some rather unpleasant news for some. For both modes, 122 stations were disqualified in 2016's WWs, affecting 291 operators. Under current World Radiosport Team Championship (WRTC) rules, those operators are disqualified from competing in WRTC 2018 in Germany. That makes these outcomes especially painful.

Much has been written and said about this turn of events — how the disqualifications were determined, their geographical fairness, and their severity, and whether those affected are innocent victims of circumstance or guilty perpetrators of fraud. But, this narrow focus misses the point, and indeed, spoils the celebration that should happen every time a big contest goes into the books. That's because the stories this time and every time are special, and deserve to be told.

An amazing thing has been unfolding in the WW contests over the last 5 years, and that has been the rise of North America in world-wide competition. Not too long ago, it was common wisdom that you had to be in a location where the high-volume European and North American QSOs were 3 pointers, in order to come out on top. The high scorers consistently came from the northern rim of South America and the islands off the west coast of Africa.

But four out of the top five scores in 2016's WW CW were from North America, with top scorer N6MJ at ZF2MJ pulling up just short of what would have been his second straight 10,000 QSO effort. Incredible!

This year's WW contests mark the end of the 2-year WRTC 2018 qualifying competition. It's been a special kind of longer-running contest, akin to NASCAR or the Grand Prix, that has, in many cases, gone on behind the scenes. While the bright lights shine on the overall contest winners, there have been some very quiet, but very intense, battles to win oft-neglected geographies like central Europe, the Pacific Rim, or West Coast USA. Congratulations to all the competitors in these long-running slugfests.

The kinds of things that happen in a world-wide DX contest as big as the CQ WW are amazing. Some people go down to their shacks and flip on the switch. Others fly on planes to islands and put up stations from whole cloth. Some stations operate Field Day style, others have built up (and maintained!) incredibly sophisticated multioperator stations that push the envelope of what is possible a little bit further every year.

All of them are getting on the air and making plenty of noise in every corner of the bands, which is what we all have in common. All of their individual and collective efforts are what make contesting fun, and we should never stop celebrating it.

A Voice from Over the Pole

I suppose *NCJ* editors should be like good parents and love all of their columnists and contributors equally, and I try to do that. But this issue's *NCJ* interview of UA9BA conducted by K1AR really puts me to the test. There was always something special about that period of time when contact with the old USSR was unique in ham radio, and to find a Soviet contester who spoke English and was just as crazy about contesting as we were was really a treat. And how could you not find Willy? His club station in Chelyabinsk, UK9AAN, had one of the most potent signals on the bands.

Time have certainly changed, but I know I felt that old excitement rekindling when I was putting together the transcript of the Skype interview with Willy. Perhaps it will be the same for you. The idea that a 20-year-old kid in Asiatic Russia was making friends and building and operating contest stations on the other side of the world just as many of us were — and is still going strong — puts a smile on my face and always will.

Our conversation with UA9BA just scratched the surface of that rich ham radio contesting story, with many stories about friends and contesting heroes left on the cutting room floor. We hope you enjoy it as much as we did.

Summer is Here

There's an old Scandinavian folk tune about life in the four seasons of the year that I've always gotten a chuckle out of. Its chorus is simple and direct — no matter what time of year it is, you really should be chopping more wood. In ham radio contesting terms, that means we should be working on our stations right now, even if the major fall contests are months away. It's always fun to hit the new contesting season with some new toys. Please be safe out there, and we'll see you on the bands.