

Editorial

Keeping It Interesting

One thing that fascinates me about contesting is the fact that there is essentially no top of the mountain. Winning a world title in one of the major contests certainly represents a top level of achievement, but the *next* contest is always right around the corner. This is not to diminish in any way the record holders and dynasty achievers, past or present, but to illustrate the temporary nature of participating in competition. While it's a thrill to finally beat our competition or reach a milestone such as 1000 contacts in a contest, it's usually the thrill of the *next* competition that draws us forward in the game.

I've always been impressed by the way some top contest operators maintain a high level of enthusiasm and performance year after year, and in some cases, decade after decade. But, it's not like that for everyone. Sometimes the enthusiasm only lasts a few months or a few years before other things in life displace contesting to the back burner. Frequently other priorities, such as school, career, family or health issues, require a redirection of all available energy and focus. A lot of things are more important in life than contesting (but you didn't read that here!).

I also know quite a few people who *used* to contest, but simply lost their enthusiasm and eventually their interest over the years. These folks may still have the time and even the stations needed to pursue contesting, but they choose not to. I've asked a few ex-contesters why they gave up playing the game. Answers varied, but often the simple reason was that they were no longer enjoying it. Some perceive a sense of general unfairness — they simply don't view the playing field as level enough to interest them. Some were so focused on winning that they lost the ability to enjoy the actual operating, and it became nothing but an

exercise in tedium. Others simply burned out and didn't have anything left to give the sport. Bottom line: It wasn't fun anymore.

Maintaining interest and enthusiasm is not as easy as it might seem. While some of us just seem to bleed RF and can take radio 24/7/365, most of us have to find some kind of balance with the other things in our life. One trait that I see often in the folks who have maintained their enthusiasm over the decades is a deep love for the game. They come back year after year, because they've discovered ways to nurture the joy of contesting. They don't dwell too much on whether they won or lost the last contest

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(Okay, maybe just for a while), but begin planning for the *next* contest. I prepare a punch list after each contest of what went right and what went wrong. If there are technical issues to be resolved, I develop a plan of action. If there are operator problems, I begin searching for ways to overcome them. If a piece of gear needs repaired or replaced, I begin searching for the components I need. The bottom line is that I remember how much fun or challenging or interesting the last contest was, and I work at making the next one even better. Working toward constant and steady improvement keeps contesting challenging and rewarding. What will *you* do to prepare yourself and your station for the *next* contest?

Contesting 101

The "Contesting 101" column has been on hold since I took on the editor's position

at *NCJ*. I have been searching for a new author to take it over, and that search continues. If you know of someone (perhaps you?) who might be interested in continuing this column for newcomers, please contact me. There is still a need to help new folks understand our favorite game.

In this Issue

N2BA continues his fascinating series with "Game Design for Contesters — Part 2." K5KG tells the story of "Team Orange Crush" at PJ4X. OH1VR shares a tale of operating the ARRL DX contests from two very different coasts, and SM0JHF gives us a glimpse of contesting from Tunisia. We also have the annual "Dayton Hamvention® Photo Gallery," compliments of K8CX. On the technical side, N2QT explains his method of adding an IF output to the subreceiver of a K3 transceiver. ND8L explains how he found a way to strengthen his inverted L's feed point. K0PC shows us how he uses APRS with a smartphone for tracking mobile and rover stations during contests. N4UA explains how to build a very inexpensive, yet effective, RFI sniffer. N4ZR offers up a little history of the Reverse Beacon Network. K0TO shares his bench tests on the effectiveness of various common-mode choke configurations. K9LA (in addition to his great propagation column) provides thoughts to consider when using diplexers and triplexers.

Our regular columnists have lots of great info for you too. K4ZA explains the importance of rope, and the various types used in tower work. K9ZO shares a very cost-effective noise cancelling headphone idea. N0JK reviews propagation experienced during the 2012 ARRL June VHF QSO Party. AA5AU offers some tips that are important to contesters of every mode. K6MM features another profile of one of contesting's living legends, W6NL. We hope you'll enjoy this jam-packed issue.

NCJ