



## Second Century

# Fall Into Contesting!

*Autumn is my favorite season. It has always felt like renewal, new beginnings. And nothing makes that truer for me than the arrival of contest season. I've been contesting since I was a teenager. It was quite accidental that I met contesting. I was a new ham, with no experience whatsoever, trying to achieve Worked All States. I got on one weekend, and WOW! The bands were on fire. Stations everywhere, from everywhere. My states count looked like it would skyrocket, but what in the world were these ops sending to each other? 123 B WB2AAA 65 WNY? Well, of course, it was ARRL Sweepstakes. A call to a friend provided what I needed to know — before he slammed the phone down to get back to the contest.*

And so began my love affair with contesting. Much of what I have learned about ham radio has come through the reading and operating associated with DX contests. I have been a longtime subscriber to ARRL's *National Contest Journal*, where many secrets of the "Big Guns" are shared, such as this simple one: "If you can't hear it, you can't work it." Makes perfect sense, so you'll see over the years many contesters make an effort to get just a few more dB of SNR to hear stations that are just below the noise, principally through advances in receiving antennas.

My call sign comes from a friendship and mentorship I enjoyed from contesting. Gene Walsh, N2AA, had a huge impact on me in my late teens and early 20s. He was a remarkably skilled and competitive operator. Most importantly, he had space in his life to give me pointers and advice. I met Gene as part of the Tuxedo Park contest station owned and operated by Hazard "Buzz" Reeves, K2GL. When my friend Doug, KR2Q, took me to the station as a teenager, he said, "After today, you will never look at ham radio the same way again." He was so right! It was there I fell in love with the style of contesting I still focus on today: multioperator.

I have had the opportunity to participate in multioperator events during myriad contests on HF and VHF from N2AA (@K2GL), N2RM, WA2SNA, NW2D, K2BAR, V26B, and most recently — and my favorite of all — PJ4G. I have met many people, and learned everything that I know today by partnering with these teams. I've worked stations using long path, skewed path, aurora, and even EME! Through incremental improvement to the stations and the operators, we were able to be constantly improving our capabilities.

This month in *QST*, we celebrate the beginning of contest season with our Contesting Supplement. We have partnered with the best contesters from some of the best contest clubs to bring you their advice: their learning and secrets to success. As you read through this section, the advice may seem too advanced, or may not even make sense. That's fine! Don't let that discourage you.

Make an upcoming contest experience your own. Set a simple goal, perhaps 50 or 100 contacts. Don't let the craziness of the beginning of a contest dissuade you. Come back later as things start to calm down. During DX contests, the last 8 hours are an easier time for getting on and operating. If you're working on WAS or DXCC, make a list of what you really want to work — and work it! Use dxwatch.com or a similar website for showing who is on, and from where. And don't be afraid to work QRP in a contest. I have done it, and even earned a plaque for one of my efforts! I only made 200 or so contacts over the entire weekend, but for QRP, it turned out to be a winning effort. Who knew?

So, fall into contesting. Give it a try if you haven't. And if you have, come back and enjoy operating. Yes, I know there are people who get upset when a contest interrupts their weekend plans for a net or a desire to DX, and the bands are a mess, or dead because "everyone" is using a different mode. This is where some patience and forbearance go a long way. Every contact counts. Every contact helps. Jump on and make even a few contacts to help the ops, the teams, who work all year for those precious few hours to compete with their fine-tuned stations. They're looking for you!

I have made lifelong friends through contesting. You'd be surprised how inclusive the community can be. So be *contest* active! Be a connector and get your friends or club to set some simple goals and get radio active — maybe even set up a little challenge between friends. With these being the early years of Cycle 25, the bands are only getting better.

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