



TALES FROM THE SWAMP

November 2020

Editor: Kevan Nason, N4XL

Thank you to our current group leadership.

President – Ed, K3DNE

Vice President - Dave, WN4AFP

Treasurer – Phil, NI7R

Secretary – Ed, WB4HRL

Presidents Corner:

Increase the “Fun-Factor” During Contests with Real-Time Scoreboards

I recently shared this video: *Tips for Being a Better Single Op Contester* (<https://youtu.be/zKlOMi1N3e0?t=1>) to the SFCG reflector. Towards the end (starting at 37:55) of the video presentation, on-line, real-time scoreboards are discussed – check it out if you haven’t already – the entire video is excellent! For further reading, there is an article in the July-August 2020 issue of NCJ on pages 36-37.

Not long ago, several members of our club were discussing their use of real-time scoreboards on our reflector. They seemed to really enjoy watching where they were placing in comparison with other club members (who is leading, who is running and making a jump up the scoreboard, who is continuing to operate when it was getting late, who is right behind or in front of them, etc.) and found it increased the fun-factor and was a significant motivating factor to keep operating and pushing during a contest. Why wait till the contest is over to check 3830 or the SFOTA leaderboard to see where you stand *after* the contest has ended when, in real-time, you can monitor your progress and check your standing *during* the contest? Most, if not all, sports use real-time scoring to track where the participants or teams stand during an event – why not radiosport?

The chatter on our reflector got me curious and I recently started using contestonlinescore.com. I have to say, it's added a new dimension to my contesting. It's great fun to see where I am compared to the leaders, other club members or our club versus other clubs that we compete against in our category or region. I enjoy setting my sights on the station immediately in front of me and try to overtake that station. It is highly configurable to your desired preferences. Personally, depending on the contest, I switch between the overall scoreboard in the category I'm operating in and our club scoreboard.

It is very easy to set-up contestonlinescores.com in N1MM+, N3FJP and Writelog contest logging software. Until recently, I kept the scoreboard open in a separate browser window but that was awkward and distracting to have to switch back and forth. Now, I overlay the scoreboard on N1MM+, adjust the size and fit it where I want it on my main logging screen. Warning! Focusing on the real-time scoreboard to the extent of it becoming a distraction is a potential downside and rate killer. Probably best to focus on operating the contest and use the scoreboard when appropriate. I often check it when I switch from running to or from S&P, when changing bands or when I take a break. I'm yet to use the scoreboard in a "serious" effort – ARRL SS SSB (which is a full-time serious effort for me) is coming up next weekend. I plan on putting the scoreboard on my main logging page – I'll let you know how that works out and if it was distracting. I'm guessing that other contesting software can be configured as well but I don't have that experience – contestonlinescores.com does allow for manual entry if you don't use a logging program that uploads to the scoreboard. There are several helpful videos on YouTube to get started, set-up and integrate the scoreboard with your contest logging program. Use the YouTube search functionality – I searched "contest online scoreboard" and "N1MM contest online scoreboard" and got plenty of results that were helpful.

I'd like to propose, suggest, strongly encourage (you get the idea) that as a club we increase the utilization of real-time scoreboards - let's make this niche within our hobby even more fun! We almost always discuss on our reflector upcoming contests, who will be operating, which categories we will be competing in, expected propagation and how much time we will operate. Let's remember to discuss and use a real-time, on-line scoreboard to further increase the fun-factor and motivation. I hope to *hear* and work you in upcoming contests and *see* you on the scoreboard!

Did I mention ARRL SS SSB (a club competition contest) is next weekend?

73,
Ed K3DNE

From the Reflector:

- In general, there has been quite a bit of chatter encouraging people to put their "BIC" and get on the air. For Example, Matt, NU4E, threw out a focused plug for the Worked All Germany contest. There's something wrong with you if you aren't at least thinking about it. And if you're wasting time thinking about it you should act on it. At least take a few minutes

and hand out some points to those who are more serious. (I intend to start following my own advice too!)

- After feedback from a presentation on verticals he gave, Kevan, N4XL, asked if the group thought he should add a 4:1 Balun to his 160 meter Inv-L. Consensus was “Don’t mess with a good thing. Leave it alone.”
- Dave, WN4AFP, posted a link to the 2020 SCQP results. In his words “This year was crazy.... more logs than ever...” Thanks for the effort Dave! Well appreciated. Matt, NU4E, took top honors with 254,518. Kevan, N4XL, trailed with 228,908. Bob, AC4MC, and Dave, WN4AFP, both had >100K. Thank you to other SFCG members who contributed to the effort.
- Al has been feeling better and active in contests. Glad to hear your vertical came back to life. Al is enjoying the capability created by a combination of low angle vertical antenna radiation and NVIS from a low horizontal loop.
- Your editor missed the SFCG Zoom meeting on October 20 due to illness. From AJ4UQ’s comment it sounded like a good meeting. Perhaps someone took notes and could summarize it?
- Some discussion about using non-standard SSB pronunciation happened. It was triggered by W3LPL saying he had his multi-op team record audio files of his call as “Tree” instead of “Three”. There is a surprising amount of theory about SSB phraseology and how best to record audio files. Perhaps a future article? Anyone want to tackle that?
- Several SFCG members enjoyed surprisingly good 10 and 15 meter band openings in the CQWW SSB and ARRL Sprint contests. I’m looking forward to the CQWW CW at the end of this month!
- Matt, NU4E, Bill, N4IQ, Jim, K9JDP, and Dave, WN4AFP operated with some others at Fred’s, K4RM, mountain shack for the CQWW SSB test. They did fantastic with over 2,000,000 points. Good going, guys! (Can’t believe they quit early though. Next time you should keep your mouth shut about SFCG club goals, Ed.)
- Kevan, N4XL, made a lousy guess at expected propagation for the CQWW SSB. It is good to remain flexible and remember propagation forecasts are really propagation guesses. See the Editors Observation section later in this newsletter for more on this subject.
- A discussion involving tips for operating Sprints was shared by some.
- Bad weather and power outages in the upstate disrupted some SFCG members’ enjoyment of the SSB Sprint.
- Bill, N4IQ, has a new FT991A for VHF/UHF contesting.
- Jim, K9JDP, has a Sotabeams Contest Console he was trying out for the first time. No report back on how it worked. Jim? Any update?
- Club Officer nominations were requested. All current serving Officers are willing to continue, but nominations for others are gladly accepted.
- Several had a great time in the ARRL SS contest. Even our fearless, and non-CW op, leader Ed, K3DNE, got into the act. I would have liked to, but I wasn’t alone in saying the XYL wanted some family time after so much recent BIC time.
- All the talk of CW and seeing how full the band scope was during ARRL SS has got Scott, KN4SMO, thinking about figuring out what that dit-dah stuff is all about.

Contest Tips:

K1AR Contest Tips

27 Nothing looks better on the Saturday evening of a DX contest than a good night's sleep. Here's a few ideas to make sure you don't sleep too well. Try using two alarm clocks set 5 minutes apart to ensure that you actually wake up when you want to. If you have a guest room, use that "less comfortable" bed instead of your own. Finally, learn how to set your alarm clock(s) before the contest. There's nothing worse than trying to learn how to set an alarm clock (is it AM or PM?) on 2 hours sleep!

31 OK, so you've been hearing about all this talk of second radios and you're gazing at your old beat up TS830 saying "but this doesn't apply to me." Although not nearly as efficient as a second radio, is the use of your second VFO on a single radio. Try calling CQ on one VFO and during periods of 5-10 second breaks tune with the other VFO. It may feel awkward at first, but it will allow you to call CQ more often and maybe put another 5-10 QSOs in your log per hour at peak times.

39 Practice curing yourself of the bad habit of writing down callsigns/exchange information on scrap paper while operating. This adds unnecessary overhead to your operating style and has become especially pointless with the advent of computer logging. The best way to reduce your "paper-dependence" is to simply eliminate any access to note paper altogether. Remember: if you want to walk, you got to get rid of your crutch! (tnx K1ZX)

Station Weak Links

(Excerpts are from National Contest Journal Nov/Dec 2015, Contest Tips, Tricks & Techniques, W9XT)

- Feed Lines and Connectors
 - In the ham station the coax and control cables are prime candidates for failure points. Cheap connectors and cables are rarely a bargain in the long run
 - Water ingress in coax connections has spoiled a lot of contests.
 - Buying used items can be a good option, but that should *not* include such things as coaxial cable that can degrade over time or have been exposed to the elements.
 - Another vote for quality feed lines comes from K9EL. John noticed that the noise level on one radio was higher than on the radio right next to it. It turned out that noise from the PC power supplies was getting into the coax of the noisy radio. This had not been an issue until he got the second radio and the coax came within a couple of feet of the power supplies. The jumper cables did not introduce SWR issues and measured loss was low; they just leaked RF. *(This may be a problem for single radio ops too. They just might not notice it since they have nothing to compare their one radio too – N4XL)*
 - John decided it was time to replace the 20 year old RG-8 used to jumper the equipment in the shack. He ordered double-shielded cable and some Amphenol connectors. According to John, it took "zillions of hours" to measure, cut, and install the connectors to replace all the jumpers... Not only did this effort eliminate the

noise problem, it also reduced RFI into the computer and stereo speakers. *(RG-8 is single shielded cable – N4XL)*

- Antennas
 - Carl, K9LA, says that wire antennas are the weakest link at his station... Trees surround his property and the wires are susceptible to falling limbs and even to entire trees in extreme cases. Swaying branches can also be an issue in high winds. Carl places the wires away from trees as much as possible and makes an effort to trim limbs and remove dead trees before they come down on his antennas.
 - Wire antennas are common on the low bands. It is standard practice to use rope and a pulley to raise and lower them from their supporting trees. K5PA used to have problems with the support line binding in the pulley. Other times it would rust. If the pulley is up at the top of the support point, getting at it could be major. Gene has switched to stainless-steel eye bolts as anchor points. The wire slips through the eye bolt easily, and it never gets bound up or rusts.
- Design for Reliability Philosophy
 - One school of thought to improve reliability is to keep your station simple. A simple station has fewer things to break. *(I can hear Tom, W1TEF, saying "See? See? They know how to do it right." – N4XL)*
 - (K9LA) Everything in his station is a single point of failure. He goes for reliability the first time and does not rely on redundancy, a common practice in systems that you can't afford to have fail.
 - AA4NU also suggests having a plan. Billy's advice is to have "a practical plan of where you want to go, and allow for expansion. Then build slowly using as high as quality materials as you can afford, even if it means delaying the overall progress." He believes that used items, such as PCs and switches, can be great values. Used coax or items that may have RF or weather damage, not so much.

Welcome New Member Jim, K9JDP

Jim joined us this month and we're glad to have him. From his bio on his website at <http://www.nd7j.com/k9jdp/#portfolio>.

Ham Radio.

I received my Technician license in Feb, 2014 and general May, 2014 and upgraded to extra in June, 2017. I have wanted to be a Ham for years and just now getting started and loving it. Now that I'm retired, I enjoy being a member of the SCDXA and other Ham clubs in the Greenville, SC area. I enjoy DXing, contesting and other activities related to Ham radio.

Professional Experiences.

I am the retired owner/president of Den-Mar corporation. Den-Mar corporation was a general contracting company building custom homes in up-state and coastal South Carolina.

Also love my Clemson Tigers !!!! "all in" (go Tigers).



I can attest to Jim's love for the Tigers. Take a look at his outbuilding. He told me it once held a work area for his company, but he converted it to an entertainment room for his family and friends specifically to watch Clemson games. Complete with climate control, a huge flat screen TV, kitchen, bathroom, and seating room for 20 or so fans. He later added his Ham shack. The space is so large he opened it up to the well-attended SFCG sponsored Contesting 201 class we presented a few years

Jim is already contributing to the club scores. Again, glad to have you Jim!

Observations by the Editor:

- The Deep Dixie Contest Club (DDCC) has been making some waves in the Ham community with a series of contest and ham related YouTube videos. As a direct result of their efforts, the Norfolk Amateur Radio Club (NARC) in Norwich, UK has begun doing reciprocal presentations with the DDCC. Upcoming on November 19th is one by Steve Nichols, G0YKA, about HF Propagation. It promises to be remarkably interesting. I will post a link to the event when the Zoom meeting is finalized. If you missed my earlier presentations with the DDCC, they are posted on You Tube; and I will be giving the vertical presentation to NARC in January and the one about using N1MM spots in March.
- Truth of fiction? It came to my attention while preparing a presentation on different types of feedlines for our local club that most coax cables, including the non-contaminating type, have a finite lifetime of between 15 and 25 years. After that, the loss begins to creep up. I didn't care enough when I first set up this station to record station data so have no idea what SWR or reflected loss changes have occurred over the years. It seems likely any changes due to aging coax would be waaayyy to slow for me to notice over the 20 years that have passed since I installed my coax runs; and to that point I can't say I actually do have excessive loss. So, I started looking on the internet. Most posts say it should be replaced. I ran across a discussion about this on the TowerTalk reflector (at least I think it was that one) where K3LR (I think) said he doesn't replace his unless he sees a problem. He has quite a station so maybe it doesn't need to be replaced.

Looking at my exposed coax it is rough feeling and no longer shiny and black. For the most part, it is Davis Buryflex. I bought some new Buryflex for a doublet I installed a couple years ago. The 20-year-old cable seems to be more flexible than the new. Also, when I put the Rigexpert antenna analyzer on the 175 ft run out to the elevated vertical it says the 7 MHz return loss is a bit over 1 dB (one way) higher than the specifications say it should be. Since most coax runs were installed at the same time I assume they all would read similar loss.

It is getting harder to work as these bones get older. About 200 ft of my coax is buried in clay. Beginning with the tower, I decided to replace all the coax rather than waiting a few more years. I'll rent a trencher next spring when the grass starts growing again to replace the buried runs. Is it worth the cost and effort to replace? At the very least I'll feel better about my system when I'm in the heat of the contesting battle. At best, I'll remove or prevent a couple dB loss in my antenna system. Loss that I might not be up to fixing 10 years from now. Those crimp on PL-259's we talked of last newsletter are working out well.

- Before retiring I wore the Site Safety Representative white hard hat for our company at their GE project site. Climbing safety was tightly controlled, and 100% tie-off was a must. Even though I knew better, when climbing my own tower, I used a single 6 ft lanyard coming from my harness connected to the mid-back D-ring and a shorter 3 ft lanyard on a waist D-ring. I would keep one connected at all times, but if I had fallen when that short lanyard was the tie off point I'd have flipped sideways and maybe badly hurt myself – or worse, since the harness isn't designed for stress at that point, it might have failed and I might have died.

While climbing that Rohn 25 tower, I also found myself looking at those thin cross bar rungs that held the bigger diameter vertical "pipes" together. Yeah, they are welded to the vertical pipes, but they look awful thin. I kept wondering if they would hold the weight of my falling and jerking on them as my harness and lanyard caught. OSHA design weight for tie off is it should handle 5,000 lbs and those bars looked pretty thin. In confirmation of my concerns, I ran across a discussion about it on TowerTalk in which it was definitively stated those thin cross braces are NOT stout enough to meet OSHA regulations. That made nervous during the two climbs I made after reading that post.

I decided to follow the direction I gave those construction and maintenance workers. I purchased a Y-lanyard with two rebar (gorilla) hooks. It attaches to that mid-back D-ring. It is much easier to clip those big hooks around the vertical pipes than to use the small clips of my previous lanyards. Since the two hooks share a single connection point to the harness it is easier to locate the unattached hook when moving up the tower than it is when I used two separate lanyards. Simpler means less chance of falling. And just as the equipment should do, having two hooks connected to the back D-ring means if I fall the harness will distribute the shock evenly across my body. I felt much better while replacing those tower coax runs yesterday. The Y-lanyard is made in the U.S., meets OSHA standards, and was only \$60. I consider it money well spent. The extra one hangs out of the way behind me when not in use too.

- Word to the wise for tower climbers. Don't forget to bring insect killer on your warm weather climbs. As I neared the top of the tower a buzzing shadow moved across the sunlit tower in front of me. Looking up I counted six agitated wasps that were clearly upset by my approach flitting about the VHF/UHF antenna mount connection point on the mast. I decided to go back down and add a can of Raid to the tool pouch.

N1MM+ Tips:

Here is a montage of tips pulled from the N1MMplus user manual.

- Changing current frequency & mode
 - To change modes, type CW or SSB or RTTY or PSK into Entry window, hit Enter – or, if your radio is interfaced for radio control, just change modes on the radio
 - To change frequency, type the frequency in kHz into the Entry window, hit Enter – or, if your radio is interfaced for radio control, change frequency on the radio
 - *Editors Note: If your radio is not interfaced to your computer you can use these to tell N1MM what to log.*
- Com Port In Use Error Messages – Occasionally Windows can get confused and orphan both physical and virtual comports. These ports are not visible to the user in Device Manager, but Windows will enumerate them causing failures when trying to create a virtual com port where one invisibly already exists. This procedure will in most cases allow the user to un-hide hidden com ports in order to delete them eliminating possible com port conflicts. Before starting, shut down your radio and close any programs what may be using the virtual com ports, like SmartSDR CAT or other third-part applications.
 - Click Start, point to All Programs, point to Accessories, and then click Command Prompt.
 - At a command prompt, type the following command , and then press ENTER: `set devmgr_show_nonpresent_devices=1`
 - Type the following command a command prompt, and then press ENTER: `start devmgmt.msc`
 - Troubleshoot the devices and drivers in Device Manager. Click Show hidden devices on the View menu in Device Manager before you can see all devices associated with the computer.
 - Scroll down to the Ports section and you will be able to see all the hidden and unused COM ports. The hidden com ports have a grayed out icon next to them.
 - To delete a particular port, click to highlight it and hit the Delete key on your keyboard. In the Confirm Device Removal dialog box, click OK.
 - After you have deleted the unused and hidden COM ports, the list will show only those COM ports you use or may use in the future. Be careful not to delete com ports that are working properly.
 - When you finish troubleshooting, close Device Manager.
 - Type exit at the command prompt. Note that when you close the command prompt window, Window clears the `devmgr_show_nonpresent_devices=1` variable that you set in step 2 and prevents ghosted devices from being displayed when you click Show hidden devices.

- Finally – if all else fails – this suggestion from Peter DF1LX: “I had this problem for some month. Nothing helped me what was mentioned in this thread. Only using the registry editor and searching for the comx value show, that another program, which never use any com port have a registry entry which show this com port. Deleting this registry entry and the problem was done. I would do this as last option if the given hints are not working.”
- Reverse Call History Lookup
In addition to the regular Call History lookup, where you type a call sign into the Entry window and the program pre-fills the exchange based on the data in the Call History file, there is also a Reverse Call History lookup feature, where you can enter an exchange into the Entry window and the program will search the log and the Call History file for callsigns that correspond with that exchange. This does not work in all contests (for example, it makes no sense for serial numbers and it doesn't work for Sweepstakes because of the complicated exchange). If the Call History lookup option is selected, the Reverse lookup feature will search the Call History file as well as the log

The Reverse lookup feature is enabled using a pop-up (right-click) menu item in the Check window. If the Reverse lookup feature is not available for that contest, the menu item will be greyed out.

(Editors Note: I use the “Check” window feature of N1MM with the contests associated Call History file. Using that window and the Reverse Call History Lookup feature saves me time finding duplicates or being ready to quickly send my call and beat the competition to the “punch”. The scenario is while S&P I tune across an in process QSO in time to hear the running station give their exchange. Often after typing that exchange into the Entry Window fields I see a list of calls which includes stations I have already worked with that exchange. The station I just ran across might show up as a duplicate. When the QSO reaches the point where the running station sends their call it is quickly obvious if they are a dupe or not. If so, I move on. That only saves a couple seconds, but when you are trying to be a competitive S&P operator those seconds add up over a 48-hour contest. Likewise, by typing the exchange in the Call History the list of calls may show I haven't worked anyone with that exchange. In that case I am ready to toss out my call as soon as the current QSO is over.)

- Editing QSOs does not update your score
When you edit one or more QSOs in the Log window, that might result in a change in the multiplier status of that QSO and/or in your claimed score. The score is not recalculated automatically when you edit QSOs, so you can end up with incorrect multiplier counts and claimed scores. To correct your claimed score after performing edits in the Log window, use the Tools > Rescore Current Contest menu item in the main Entry window
- The “Supported Radios” section of the user manual has both general information on how to set up computer control of a radio and information specific to many different radios. The specific information is sometimes further divided into general manufacturer settings and differences between the “norm” and your specific radio. It often pays to check all three places if rig control isn't working correctly for you.

Upcoming Contests: See WA7BNM webpages

SFOTA Current Leaderboard:

Nov-10-2020						
Current Leaderboard						
2020 OVERALL STANDINGS						
CALL	Contests	CW QSO'S	SSB QSO'S	DIGITAL QSO'S	RTTY QSO'S	TOTAL QSO'S
1) WB4HRL	190	8017	1515	74	2985	12591
2) N4IQ	57	6321	1296	442	3950	12009
3) K3DNE	58	628	9126	343	0	10097
4) WN4AFP	81	5962	1739	0	640	8341
5) NU4E	17	2407	2100	365	2133	7005
6) N4XL	17	2759	2529	0	0	5288
7) KG6MC	31	2813	1838	12	105	4768
8) K7OM	23	1444	255	0	2061	3760
9) NI7R	26	2747	66	0	313	3126
10) KS4YX	12	713	55	43	624	1435
11) KG4IGC	6	408	18	0	971	1397
12) NJ4F	3	50	0	0	779	829
13) WU0B	1	0	358	0	0	358
14) KN4SMO	2	0	243	0	45	288
15) NE4EA	2	228	0	0	0	228
16) AJ4UQ	6	8	2	6	127	143

3830 Activity:

Timestamp	Call	Class	Power	Score
AzQP				
10/11/2020 15:43	K3DNE	SOSSB	HP	280
10/14/2020 1:22	WN4AFP	SOMixed	LP	168
CQWW SSB				
10/27/2020 0:45	AC4MC	SOAB Classic	HP	162,129
10/26/2020 1:32	K3DNE	SO(A)AB	HP	924,123
10/26/2020 1:23	K4RM	M/S	HP	2,008,602
10/28/2020 19:42	KG4IGC	SOAB	LP	15,664
10/26/2020 0:13	N4XL	SO(A)AB	LP	637,416
10/26/2020 0:02	NE4EA	SOAB	LP	80
10/26/2020 12:10	WB4HRL	SO(A)AB	HP	36,729
IIQP				
10/19/2020 14:31	WN4AFP	Non-IL	LP	16,575

JARTS				
10/20/2020 15:40	K7OM	Single Op	HP	51,106
10/20/2020 20:23	KG4IGC	Single Op	LP	82,830
10/19/2020 12:28	WB4HRL	Single Op	HP	24,618
Makrothen RTTY				
10/11/2020 16:44	KG4IGC	SO/Single Xcvr	LP	882,966
10/16/2020 14:50	WB4HRL	SO/Single Xcvr	HP	269,748
NA Sprint SSB				
11/1/2020 5:16	K3DNE	Single Op	HP	7,515
11/1/2020 22:17	K9JDP	Single Op	HP	280
11/1/2020 4:29	N4IQ	Single Op	HP	8,507
11/1/2020 12:55	N4XL	Single Op	LP	6,063
11/1/2020 11:15	NU4E	Single Op	HP	7,900
NvQP				
10/11/2020 20:23	K3DNE	SOSSB	HP	192
10/13/2020 3:01	WN4AFP	SOMixed	LP	204
NyQP				
10/18/2020 16:41	K3DNE	SOSSB	HP	660
10/18/2020 2:10	WN4AFP	SOCW	LP	4,176
PaQP				
10/11/2020 19:56	K3DNE	SOMixed	HP	5,352
10/16/2020 14:48	WB4HRL	SOMixed	HP	835
10/13/2020 4:44	WN4AFP	SOMixed	LP	8,810
Rus WW MM				
11/2/2020 2:42	K7OM	SO RTTY	HP	781
SDQP				
10/11/2020 20:28	K3DNE	SO FixedMixed	HP	1,743
10/14/2020 1:19	WN4AFP	SO FixedMixed	LP	160
SS CW				
11/8/2020 23:30	AC4MC	Single Op	HP	31,968
11/9/2020 2:27	K3DNE	Single Op	HP	27,336
11/9/2020 15:46	NE4EA	Single Op	LP	15,776
11/10/2020 1:54	WB4HRL	SO Unlimited	HP	16,800

TBDC				
10/18/2020 14:18		Single Op	LP	388
WAG				
10/18/2020 16:17	NU4E	SO Mixed	HP	18,000

Guest Article:

Maybe next time

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73 es QRT de N4XL