

Competitive Contesting Starts With A Question By Many Hams – Summary by N4XL

Pete Smith, N4ZR included the following in a post to the CQ-Contest Reflector on January 4, 2007:

“Until recently, I was pretty much of a solitary contester - never had any occasion to operate in multi-op situations, nor to compare my results with top operators.

Over the last 8-10 years, though, I've built a fairly capable station for the first time in my 53 year ham career. I've also had a couple of occasions to operate at multi-ops with some top operators, and I'm struck by the fact that I do not seem able to consistently get the sort of results they do, even from the same station. This is particularly the case in hell-bent contests like the CW Sprints, but I have the same feeling about the first evening in Sweepstakes, and to a lesser extent in the big DX contests.

To the extent that I can isolate the problem, I think it lies in the inability to keep myself totally focused in the moment. Even in the midst of a 120-150 hour on CW I find myself not always totally "zoomed in" on the pileup. Watching good ops, they seem to have a really special focus that I find hard to maintain, even for a 4-hour sprint.

If there's anything to be done about this, I'd like to try, even though at age 65 I am inevitably losing some of my edge. So I'm wondering what others have done about this, whether there are particular techniques that you use to help stay focused.”

Pete's observation mimicked my own thoughts and encouraged my own quest for answers. Here are excerpts from two of the replies that spoke to me.

“I remember something the late Bill Fisher, W4AN told me about what he did. He would mentally break the contest into one hour chunks, and treated each one like its own contest. It was for this reason that we added the "Contest By Hour" real time window to my NA logging program, which showed hour-by-hour the number of QSOs, mults, and QSO points scored in the last few hours. Bill's goal was to beat the previous hour as the contest went along.” - K8CC

“...There is a book titled The Ethical Brain, which goes into how important extensive practice is for all expert-level people who deal with physical and mental coordination... Contesting is a combination of physical and mental capability. From my experience, the best contesters get a great deal of experience (they do a lot of contesting) and also they are talented in this area. It's the combination of both practice

and inherent ability that produces the top levels. Maintaining focus and concentration is one area of expertise aided by practice.” - N3BB

Pete’s post can be found at

<http://lists.contesting.com/archives//html/CQ-Contest/2007-01/msg00056.html>

That thread included an interesting commentary from K5TR about how he watched WM5R develop as a contester. <http://lists.contesting.com/archives//html/CQ-Contest/2007-01/msg00060.html>. It is even more impressive to first read what George says about Ken’s growth and then read Ken’s own words.

Here is Ken talking about his 13,224 point ARRL WPX experience in 2005

<http://3830scores.com/showrumor.php?arg=7Taozugiqqmb>. I was struck by how his comments sounded so much like my own did when I had just begun to get the contesting bug. A focus on station limits and disappointment when he discovered he had entered a world where the rules were different from what he had known and expected.

Here he is describing his 2012 6.3 million point effort in the same contest.

<http://3830scores.com/showrumor.php?arg=RbaOzEcsgcmiE> I’ll let you discover the change in tone on your own. True, he had a bigger station for the 2012 effort, but that is part of my point.

The word “Contest” implies there is competition. If you are a competitive contester you will find a way to compete. For some that means using someone else’s station. Most of us though will seek to improve our own station, nurture our competitive spirit, and hone our operational skills.

I’m not content with my contest scores. They aren’t good enough. Are yours?

Kevan

N4XL