

My first Contest Contact N4XL

(Written for a club newsletter in 2009)

You're in for it now! Adam, WJ4X, asked me to do a monthly column on contesting, so here we go.

Before talking about the upcoming North American QSO Party (NAQP) lets look at a couple things about contesting in general. Why contest at all? There are many different reasons. If you would like to get your WAS or DXCC award it is possible during a contest to get it in a single weekend. Some like the thrill of competition – pitting themselves and their station to the limit against other people. Others, like me, enjoy learning how to make their stations perform better and the simple thrill of making contacts around the world. I compete against myself by trying to better last years score.

Most people are intimidated by what they see as the chaos of a popular contest. They are afraid to jump into the fray and do something wrong. I was. So I listened to what people were doing. Went to a website and read the contest rules to learn what all those funny numbers and letters people were exchanging meant. And then I found someone who seemed to be calling and calling with few answers to his pleas for a contact. The speaker blared “CQ Contest, CQ Contest. W2XYZ.”¹ I listened for awhile and copied down his exchange information. Then I simply said: “NT8A” after his CQ was done. He answered “NT8A. Tom. New York.” And then he stopped. I looked at what I'd already written down and it matched. I said “Tom, this is my first contest and I think I'm supposed to say Kevan. South Carolina. Is that right?” He actually stopped calling CQ and took a few minutes to thank me for the contact and welcome me to contesting. We also exchanged signal reports. That's all there was to it. I had New York in the log. Because of contesting I've worked thousands of stations around the world and exchanged hundreds of QSL cards.

Instead of being upset with a new person serious contesters WANT your call. In fact they depend on and welcome the casual operator stopping by because it helps their scores. If it weren't for people like you it would be a fairly boring time working the same people over and over again. Sure, there are jerks everywhere. Just ignore them and go on. Jump in and get your feet wet in the upcoming NAQP. It is a good place to start.

The purpose of the NAQP is to work as many North American stations as possible, in as many different North American states, provinces and countries as possible, during the contest period. The dates for the next ones are January 10 and 11 for the CW, January 17 and 18 for the SSB, and February 28 and March 1 for RTTY. They all start at 1800z the first day and end at 0600z the second. You are only allowed to operate for 10 of the 12 hour period. Breaks must be at least ½ hour, but you can take the entire 2 hours at once if you want.

See <http://www.ncjweb.com/naqprules.php> or ask me for a copy of the rules. There are some things you should know if you want to submit a log that will count towards points in the contest. Things like you are a contest entrant you are limited to 100 watts (Note: if you just work people

for fun use whatever power you are licensed for). And only contacts on 10, 15, 20, 40, 80, and/or 160 meters count. You can only work a station once per band. So you might end up working the same Nevada or Puerto Rico station on all six bands. There are also different classes such as Single or Multi-Operator. Read the rules for details.

The exchange for this contest is fast and simple. All you do is say your call, name, and state. A typical contact goes like this:

(Him) “CQ Contest, CQ Contest. KF6TOK”

(Me) “N4XL”

“N4XL. Stan. California”

“Ken. South Carolina”

“Thanks. KF6TOK”

You don't have to use your own name. I use Ken because trying to spell K-E-V-A-N trips up a lot of people. The “A” is a real killer. There were a lot people using the name of “Chad” just after the infamous 2004 Bush-Gore Florida vote recount for example.

Also, some might note the exchange doesn't quite follow the FCC rules for station identification. Since the contacts are so short, it doesn't make a lot of sense to repeat the calls so quickly at the end of the contact. The FCC has never taken issue with this. For once common sense seems to have prevailed over government rules!

That's all for this issue. I hope to see you on the air. If you have any specific contest questions, just ask.

¹ I really don't remember his call or what contest that was but have a vague recollection it went something like this. And I've had people do similar things with me over the years – so treat it like it really happened this way.