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Northern California
Contest Club



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NCCC Net
Thursday 9 PM
3853+/-

Our Next Meeting Sweepstakes Propagation Dean, N6BV

Oct. 10, 2005: 6PM schmooze, 6:30 dinner, 7PM program

Location: TIBCO, Building 2, 3301 Hillview Avenue, Palo Alto, CA 94304
(650) 846-1000

Pizza and complimentary soft drinks. Please RSVP in advance to W0YK, payment preferred via PayPal, else in cash or check at the door.

Directions: **From 101**

Take the Oregon Expressway exit south (actually, southwest), for a couple miles, crossing El Camino where it becomes Page Mill Road. Continue up the hill to Foothill Expressway which is about the 4th stop light. Turn left on Foothill and then left again on Hillview Avenue, the first exit. TIBCO is on the right about a half-block from Foothill.

From 280

Take the Page Mill Road exit north (actually northeast), for a couple miles, turning right on Foothill Expressway. Turn left on Hillview Avenue at the first exit and TIBCO is on the right about a half-block from Foothill.

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Mike's Mic

Mike Heideman, N7MH

I'm writing this just before CQP, so I hope to work all of you from wherever you happen to be. I did the early morning shift at W6YX last weekend during CQWW RTTY. Conditions were very surprising with a decent 15-meter opening to Europe both mornings and we even worked into the Middle East on 15. Let's hope for good conditions for CQP.

Sweepstakes is just over a month away. Now is the time to make those last-minute changes so that everything will be perfect for SS. Please come to the October meeting where Dean Straw, N6BV, will be giving an updated version of the propagation predictions that he first offered at the September meeting. Dean has spent more time researching some of the interesting propagation effects he described last month and will fill us all in on his latest theories. He's prepared to share some tweaks to his normal SS band plan that result from this propagation analysis. Ken Keeler, N6RO, will also reinforce his "stay in the seat" message for SS.

The CQWW SSB and CW contests are coming up at the end of October and November. It's always fun to see what can be worked in these contests when stations are on the air from all over the world. I'm planning to join the P40L

group that was 1st in the world M/S last year for this year's CW weekend.

Let's all KB in these fall contests.

VP/CC

Kurt Andress, K7NV

The contest season is off to a great start for the NCCC!

Kudos to everyone that participated in the CW & SSB NA Sprints. NCCC Team #1 won the CW Sprint team competition! This is no trivial task. Team #2 placed 9th, and Team #3 was 16th. The SSB results are not out yet, but the 3830 reflector scores are looking pretty good. Thanks to Ed, AJ6V, and Dean, N6DE for coordinating our teams!

I did a little analysis of the CW Sprint results and found that we really KB'ed compared to the 2nd place combined PVRC/FRC effort.

The top 5 NCCC stations beat their top 5 by 239 points (or .3%), whew....close one! Our second 5 stations won by 8962 points (or 18.3%), that's almost like having an extra log! And, our third 5 stations won by 7866 points (or 19.5%), that's another extra log.

The average score for the NCCC top 15 entries was 12,000 points; their average was 10,860 points, which is a 10.5% advantage for us per log. The NCCC fielded 5 teams for 22 entries, where the combined PVRC/FRC only had 15 entries. The total score for NCCC was 201,577 versus their 162,932 for a 24% scoring margin. Plus, they had to pool the resources of two clubs to be in the game.

The caveat to this analysis is that maybe the other guys didn't really put out their best effort. But, it does indicate what can happen when we do. And, that's the only thing we can do something about.

The NA Sprint RTTY is Oct 9! We had a little mix up here at HQ over who would be our team coordinator. Jeff, WK6I will be doing it for the Sprint. Be sure to look for Jeff's announcements on the club reflector. I'm sure this will be very competitive entry for NCCC. Phil, WA6TQG, will be coordinating one of the RTTY events later in the season.

The CQP is here! Fantastic job by N6RCE, W6ZZZ, & N6TV, for phenomenal CQP publicity and managing (yet again) to put all 58 CA counties on the air. Activating all the counties is not possible without having the many NCCC guys putting on expeditions. This is very cool! The 40th Anniversary should be a great one! See you all from N6"Oakley".....

The next big contests on our "NCCC focus contests" calendar are the SSCW, Nov. 5-7, and SS SSB, Nov. 19-21. This is really the big one for us to make our NCCC statement this season. We can win this one again if we show up in force and spend the maximum time possible on the air!

My analysis of the Sprint CW above showed that we CAN have two very important advantages in these big domestic contests. The first one is the ability to field more entries in the contest than our competitors. The second one is that we can field more stations with higher average scores than the other guys. Both of these are entirely within our own control. We need to have all (or as many as possible) of our functional stations manned and on the air. Then, we just need to have them put in as many hours KB'ing as possible.

Max No. of stations X max op time = Gavel
Pretty simple, eh?

Remember, no effort or score is too small! PLEASE, don't decide to not "go for it" with us because you think your effort won't matter. It is all the little stations with big efforts that win Club competitions, not the "Big Dogs." Be the little guy that won SS again with your pals.

Dean, N6BV analyzed the last 27 years of SS for us, and found out where NCCC SS wins

come from. If we can get 100+ logs submitted for both modes, we will be in pretty good shape. 125 logs would be better. Dean will be presenting this again at the Oct. meeting, along with some terrific new propagation analysis for SS. We do expect to have some useful 10m propagation to the southern US, and 15m should be pretty good for us to significant population areas. So, while everyone else may be losing interest in contesting, due to declining solar conditions, we can still get in there and have fun and WIN!

Rusty, W6OAT, has signed up again to coordinate stations and operators for the SS events. We need to get all our station owners that may have opportunities to host operators for part time, full time or M/S efforts, and all op's that don't have stations or are looking for that second place to HMO, to contact Rusty so we can see what can be sorted out. Contact w6oat@sbcglobal.net Thanks Rusty!

We do not have any organized station assistance teams this year. We will be relying on club members to help each other as much as possible with this. We also have a large contingent of computer & software experts in our club who can help with those kinds of problems. Don't wait till the last minute! Get started getting ready to WIN now.

I encourage all members needing assistance to send their requests directly to the NCCC reflector where they can reach the largest portion of our members.

We are moving the center of the ARRL 175 mile radius circle. This was suggested earlier this year by Dean, N6DE. The new center of the circle is: 39.07N, 121.1W. This moves the center approx 79 miles NE of its previous location. What this does for the Club's ARRL contest efforts is to add several willing and active members to our scores. With the move we gain KJ6RA, NT6K, KJ6GQ, and K6MR, all up in the northern extremities of the territory. We still retain N6IJ and the stations in Fresno. We lose Tom, N6BT, who no longer has a

permanent station to be active with. Tom was contacted about the change and gave us his ok on the move. Thanks Tom! There may be some more stations that can be added in the new territory. Please check this out and see if you can find some more folks who want to KB with us. A map of the new NCCC territory appears below, thanks to Marc, W6ZZZ.

We decided to continue an informal series of NCCC Sprint (NS) events on Thursday nights through the Fall/Winter season. This was largely due to some compelling comments from our friends around the country that participated in the summer series. This is simply for fun and to help us all stay in shape and learn how to perfect our craft. The NCCC is the leader in this kind of real-time contesting development support. Watch the club reflector for these events. There is nothing quite like getting in there and doing it regularly to learn what works best. We will always have practices focused on the major "Focus Contests" in the weeks they occur. This is great for sorting out your station and brain before the flag drops.

I'm pretty excited about what all of you can do this season! Let's go have some fun and KB!

The following is the article submitted to QST and later published in NCJ.

Rising To The Challenge *How NCCC Retook The SS Gavel*

By: Rob Brownstein, K6RB

The November Sweepstakes (CW and Phone) are wonderful contests. Individual amateurs with modest stations can really do well, and have a blast, besides. But what a lot of those individual participants don't know is that there is another contest taking place, simultaneously – the club competitions. That contest is an opportunity for experienced contesters and rookies, with stations large and small, to pool their resources and work as a team. Clubs are also a great source of additional participation.

Until 1975, common wisdom had it that a west-coast club could never win Sweepstakes (SS). We were just too far removed from densely packed

ham populations. But, that wisdom went out the window when the Northern California Contest Club (NCCC) won the unlimited club category that year. And, for several years, NCCC seemed to dominate the SS contests. The club won 14 times in its 35-year history. There was constant rivalry with the Potomac Valley Radio Club (PVRC) during the 90s. Then, out of the blue, a new club emerged to win the coveted gavel. The Society of Midwest Contesters (SMC) in both 2001 and 2002 trounced all comers.

NCCC analyzed the results. The average points-per-log was definitely in our favor, but SMC killed us by submitting about twice as many logs. Logistically, we could never grow to SMC's size because our 175-mile circle simply did not cover as large a ham population as SMC's. If we were to win back the gavel, we would need a multifaceted approach. We would need to raise the average points-per-log, but more importantly, increase the number of logs submitted. Faced with that prospect, we resigned ourselves to remaining "second banana" in unlimited club competition.

But, in April, 2003, Steve Dyer, W1SRD, became NCCC president. He made no bones about his primary objective for the coming contest season. "NCCC is going to win back the gavel," he told us. And, while most of us applauded and shouted our encouragement, a lot of us were skeptical.

But Steve was undaunted. He turned to Rusty, W6OAT, a veteran member of NCCC and a true contest strategist. Rumors began to circulate that Rusty "had a plan." We knew there was a lot of back-room discussion going on, but had to wait until our July joint meeting with the Mother Load DX and Contest Club (MLDXCC) in Jackson, California, to get the first inkling of his comprehensive strategy.

The Plan

Rusty, among other accomplishments, has a law degree. He is a stickler for rules and regulations. So, he studied the SS rules, intensively, and made sure that whatever NCCC would ultimately do would be consistent with the letter and spirit of those rules.

The SS rules preclude an operator from using one call for part of the time, and another call for the rest of the time, if at the same location, using the same transmitter. However, it is completely within the rules for an operator to use one call

for, say, 12 hours, at one location, then go to a different station, and use a different call for the next 12 hours. There is one "gotcha," though. If someone at that other station had been using a transmitter with one call, a new arrival cannot use that same transmitter with a new call. The call is associated with the transmitter. It only works if there is a second transmitter at the new location that has not been used. Otherwise, the new arrival must continue using the same call associated with that transmitter.

Thus, one key part of Rusty's plan was to create a team of contesters, called "highly motivated operators" or HMOs, who would give up their hopes for individual glory, and split their operation between two locations using two calls. In each case, the HMOs would be operating from stations equipped with at least a tri-band yagi and an amplifier. In my case, I used K6RB at my home station, using one of my two FT-1000s, then, at 6 AM on Sunday morning, I drove 25 miles to K6XX's house, bringing an FT-990 with me and plugging into his unused amp and antenna system. There, I used the call NZ6K – a club call for the Surf City Contest Club.

At the same time, Bob, K6XX, used his call from his home station on Saturday, then, drove 25 miles to my home station with an unused FT-1000 MP. He then plugged into my second amp and antenna system, and operated with club call N6IP. At the end of the 24 hours, Bob and I had filled four logs, using four calls, operating four unique transmitters for 12 hours, each. Compared with the scores we each generated in previous years using one call for 24 hours, our total scores were about 25 to 30 percent higher. Part of that was due to having a "virgin" call on Sunday. Part of it was due to adrenaline rush.

But Rusty knew that HMOs, alone, would not be enough. He needed to raise the points-per-log of all of the NCCC participants, and get more members to participate. To that end, we had strategy sessions at all meetings leading up to SS, where veterans shared their wisdom with rookies, and everyone learned something helpful. Then, to make sure that every participant had optimized stations, NCCC undertook a program of helping anyone with antenna renovation, contest log software installation and training, and guest operation practice at well-equipped member stations. The last piece of Rusty's strategy was for all of us to use "unlimited" class and take advantage of spotting to help maximize individual multiplier totals. This was especially important for HMOs who had to try and sweep, each day, within 12 hours. The same

strategy was to be used for both the CW and Phone contests.

Be Prepared

From the first disclosure of “the plan” until the first weekend in November seemed like a very short amount of time to do everything required. Members were visiting other members’ stations and helping them organize their gear for more efficient contesting. Others were climbing towers and checking out flakey coax connections. Still others were installing logging software and training paper loggers how to use them. In many cases, new users tried Andy Faber’s (AE6Y) homegrown Windows program, CQPWIN, which was tooled for SS; and in other cases, they downloaded N1MM. In still other cases, members bought programs, such as WriteLog. There was not enough time to try and standardize on one logging program, and with so many having diversified preferences, we didn’t bother.

There was a lot of help by members, using the club reflector, in bringing people up to speed in using spotting nets. The only time I’ve ever used a spotting net was for SS, and the online member help was priceless.

HMOs made arrangements with other HMOs to swap locations and antenna systems. In the weeks leading up the contests, we visited one another and made sure we knew what to expect on Sunday morning, and how to use the other station’s controls, and the like. The last thing anyone wanted to have happen was to arrive on Sunday morning and lose time trying to figure out what’s what.

Each week for several weeks we had practice contests during our weekly net schedule. We would simulate the real thing and have a chance to exercise our software to make sure everything worked as expected. Again, you don’t want to find out your logging program is doing something strange at 2100Z on the SS Saturday.

Waiting For The Starter’s Pistol

The last week before SS was very hectic. Members were scrambling to fix last-minute problems. We were watching the propagation projections trying to decide whether to start on 10 or 15 meters. We were testing our Telenet and 2-meter links to spotting networks. We were all getting antsy. In 2001, SMC had gotten its members to submit 342 logs to our 159. In 2002,

they ended up with 387 logs while we turned in only 156.

Our strategy was based on SMC turning in 400 logs. If we could muster 300, we believed, our higher average-points-per-log might be enough to squeak by them. Last minute phone calls were made to members who had not submitted a “points pledge.” We wanted to leave nothing to chance.

SS CW Saturday, 2100 Z

When the clock struck 1 PM, I expected to see lights dim in Northern California. About 300 NCCers began pounding brass within a 175-mile radius. Already the first “spots” were being posted, and HMO stations were running like crazy. I saw my rate meter shoot up to a sustained 90+ QSOs per hour. I could tell I was being spotted when all of a sudden a mini-pileup would ensue. I was so busy running I didn’t have time to look at incoming spots. It was only later, after the frenzy abated, that I began doing some “search and pounce,” and spotting the rarer sections, such as SC or MT.

Most HMOs were planning to go full tilt for 12 hours, grab a few winks between 1 AM and 5 AM, be on the road by 6 AM, and be running full tilt from 7 AM until 7 PM at the second location. During the first 12 hours, it was relatively easy to sweep. We could cover the east coast on 10, 15 and 20 until rates dropped, then continue filling in the middle sections on 40 m. Around 9 PM, we would QSY to 80 m and find all the close-in sections we were overshooting on the higher frequency bands.

My concern was that on Sunday, I would operate from 7 AM until 7 PM, and might miss some of the close-in sections because of limited time on 80 m. Thank goodness for early morning backscatter because a lot of close-in stations were worked on 15 and 20 on Sunday morning.

It was dark when I left my house heading for K6XX’s house at 6 AM, and dark when I returned home after 7 PM on Sunday. I don’t remember feeling as exhilarated nor as exhausted both at the same time.

By 8 PM our NCCC club reflector was abuzz with projected scores. Early returns looked real good. With a two-week respite before SS Phone, we took the time to compare notes, seeing what worked and what didn’t work, and what we could do to fix any problems.

In between the two contests our regularly scheduled monthly meeting was held. Preliminary

figures were posted based on reflector messages. Our “statistician,” Bill, N6ZFO, was combing through logs trying to get a sense of relative SMC turnout. We all felt a lot of momentum going forward.

SS Phone Saturday, 2100Z

This time instead of pounding brass simultaneously, the NCCC horde was shouting into microphones at the stroke of 1 PM. Again, the HMOs were planning back-to-back 12-hour sessions. Individual contributors were committed to staying in the chair for the full 24 hours. Those without digital voice keyers were already hoarse by mid-day Saturday. Those with voice keyers were also losing their voices. There seemed to be more participants in the phone contest, and, on Sunday, there seemed to be a slew of new calls. When it was finally 7 PM, we all knew we had given it our best shot, and all we could do, now, was wait for the results.

Again, by 8 PM the reflector was jumping with early, raw totals. Interestingly, some HMOs, myself included, had actually had higher CW scores than phone scores. We attributed that to the greater number of overall participants, and the influx of new calls on Sunday taking away some of the new-call advantage we had in CW two weeks before.

Post Mortem

By our December meeting (our annual holiday dinner), Bill, N6ZFO, had analyzed the logs for both contests and was projecting an NCCC win. But, he felt, it could be a close finish. In fact, it turned out not to be very close. NCCC had submitted 299 logs – one short of our 300-log objective. SMC had turned in only 294. With the number of logs that close, the difference would depend on the average-number-of-points per log. All of our efforts in urging people to put in the full 24 hours, in helping members improve their stations, in training members how to use computer logging had paid off. Our 299 logs totaled 21,943,202. SMC had posted 16,397,484.

Prologue

We didn’t want last year’s win to be a flash in the pan for NCCC. So, we set for ourselves an even higher challenge for 2004. Our goal was to set a new all-time record in SS. Again, we pulled out all the stops. We recruited the HMO team, we offered help in optimizing members’ stations, and we talked about strategy refinements. But,

we didn’t plan on Murphy and the weird solar conditions on CW Sunday. And, there was some attrition in overall participation. In the 2004 SS, NCCC submitted 251 logs, but posted a score of 19,852,098. SMC also had some attrition. They entered 203 logs with a total score of 12,768,654.

The SS in 2005 will probably have worse conditions than those of 2004. There may be no 10 meter openings, and we may all be scrunched on 20 meters for the first several hours. But our propagation expert and band-plan strategist, Dean Straw, N6BV, did an in-depth analysis of SS results over a protracted period of time. His findings were that sunspot numbers and propagation had much less influence on overall results than the number of logs each club submits. After all, SS is distinguished by its rule that you work someone only once, regardless of band. Some have argued that is a detriment, but it also makes the contest a lot less dependent upon sunspots than, say, the ARRL International DX Contest. So, as we plunge deeper into a waning sunspot cycle, it is safe to bet that NCCC will be beating the bushes to get as many of its members to participate in SS 2005. Now, having to risen to the challenge, and having won back the gavel two years in a row, we’re reluctant to give it up, again, without a fight.

Rob Brownstein, K6RB, was first licensed as KN2UMU at age 11 in Queens, New York in 1958. He upgraded to general in 1959 and to extra class in 1970. Rob worked as a physics teacher in New York, then moved to California where he worked as an electronics technician while studying for his masters in electrical engineering. In 1977, he became west-coast editor for industry trade newspaper, Electronic Engineering Times; afterward, he was a west-coast editor for McGraw-Hill’s Electronics magazine. These days he is a freelance writer and has had four books published by McGraw-Hill. He is an avid contester and CW operator.

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