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WRTC 2010 — One Team's Story

After WRTC 2006 in Brazil, my teammate Dave, N2NL, told me he didn't believe he'd be able to make it to WRTC 2010 in Russia. Dave and I had done well in the two WRTCs we'd participated in, but I knew right away whom I would pick in his place — Chris, KL9A. Dave, Chris and I have been very good friends going back many years. We all have similar operating styles. Chris agreed to be my teammate, so it was up to me to get qualified again.

Since I don't have my own station, I have to rely on others to share their stations. I am fortunate that Jim, W6YI, lets me operate from his station on a regular basis. If it weren't for him, I would have never been able to qualify for WRTC 2010. When the event organizers released the list of qualifying contests, I knew exactly which ones I would have to enter to secure a spot. Jim was more than accommodating. When the dust settled, I was once again in the top two for the West Coast.

Figure 1 — Dan, N6MJ (left), and Chris, KL9A (right,) operate as R33M at WRTC 2010.

Preparation

Chris and I have teamed up for past events, but we wanted to operate together using the WRTC rules as a guideline, so we did the 2009 IARU World HF Championship together. Since the WRTC rules did not fit into any existing IARU category, we had to submit a check log. We racked up more than 3100 contacts, not a bad total from the West Coast. The thing we had to practice most was the dual CQ. To do this effectively you have to be able to work together with minimal interaction. We found that the best strategy was to use a headphone splitter, so we could hear each other. Without the splitter, it's difficult to get the proper timing down.

We had one last trial run in the CQ World Wide WPX CW, using the equipment we planned to use in Russia. Everything worked great, and we had another good showing in that contest. Afterward, Chris and I divided up the equipment we were going to take. This included two Elecraft K3s that the manufacturer loaned us (*Thanks!*)

Arrival and Setup

We both arrived in Moscow on the Thursday before the contest. Our first goal was to put the station together in our hotel room. We wanted to keep the station as simple as possible. The last thing we wanted during the competition was having to fix something. We also brought along a backup for everything, including a third K3, thanks to N6OX. It took a few hours, but the station finally was set up in the hotel room, and everything worked.

Table 1
CW was good, SSB, not so much!
Some R33M Statistics

Best Clock Hour	228
Worst Clock Hour	75
Best 60 Minutes	236
Best Dual-CQ Hour	191
QSOs by CQ	3039
QSOs by S&P	625
CW QSOs	3081
SSB QSOs	522

Several important things were on the schedule for Friday. This included the competitors' meeting, station/referee selection and the opening ceremony. There was some heated debate during the competitors' meeting about the rules. The one generating the most debate was whether or not *we* should lose points if the other station copied our information incorrectly. Several contests on the calendar already have this same rule in place, so it was of no concern to Chris and me.

After that we selected our stations. This involved picking an envelope off the table with a location number in it. We looked at the maps ahead of time, and it seemed as though some locations were better than others.

We ended up with the location closest to the hotel, and it turned out to be excellent. We later learned that this was the winning location from the previous year's RRTC. Our ref was UT7QF. We didn't get to spend too much time with him outside of the contest, but he did a superb job. Later that day we were treated to a nice show during the opening ceremonies. We can't thank Harry, RA3AUU, enough for doing such a fantastic job.

We were up early Saturday morning to head to our tent. Since we were so close, we were among the last teams to leave. We got to the station a little after 8 AM, which left us plenty of time before the 4 PM kick-off. We immediately started to set up the station inside the tent. It was just like Field Day. There were bugs everywhere, and it was very hot and humid. After an hour or so, we had everything just the way we wanted. We fired up the gear and found that a couple of things weren't working. One of

Figure 2 — We used just about every square inch of space on the R33M operating table.

Figure 3 — Dan and Chris accept their third-place trophies.

our ICE 419s was DOA, so we swapped in a spare. In addition, my ZS4TX combo keyer was acting up. We spent at least an hour trying to fix it before coming to the conclusion that it wasn't going to work. The only device we had for a backup was a simple CMOS keyer. This meant I would have to send CW by hand the whole contest. I didn't have any other choice, so we went with it. Everything else was working, so we had about five hours left before the contest started.

We spent the next few hours running stations on the bands. The pileups were intense, and the signals from Europe were huge. Fifteen wasn't in very good shape however, and that concerned us a little. We determined that we would have to start CQing on 20 and work what we could on 15 and 40 on the second radio.

Fifteen minutes before the contest started, we turned down the audio and opened the envelope containing our call sign. We were very happy to get R33M. It was a good call sign for both CW and SSB. We programmed it into the logging program and waited for the opening bell.

Off and Running

Our goal before the contest was 3000 contacts. Little did we know that this would be a gross underestimate! We also were aiming for first place after the first hour. A lot of strong teams were in the competition, but we still felt we had a very good shot at winning. I took the lead on 20, and Chris started working the other bands. I ended up on 14.003, and Chris started running on 15. The rate was absolutely incredible. After 10 minutes we already had 46 contacts in the log. After 30 minutes we were at 127. We just kept shaking our heads. Fifteen didn't pan out, so Chris started working HQ stations on 40. Even though darkness was several hours off, 40 had good signals from most of Europe. We ended the first hour with 228 contacts, far more than we ever expected. We had a good mix of mults from the second radio as well, and this put us in the lead after the opening hour. Even though we were allowed to know how we were faring against our competition, we both decided that it's better not to know.

The second hour was probably the most exciting, but not because of anything that was happening on the radio. Some dark clouds had been forming overhead, and we knew we were in for a thunderstorm. The WRTC 2010 organizers had told us beforehand that if a thunderstorm developed, they might consider halting the competition until the lightning danger had passed. We were really hoping that this didn't happen, but it was sure looking that way.

Sure enough, heavy rain started around 1330 UTC. The rain was falling nearly horizontally, so our site helpers rushed to close the tent to keep out the water. Sporadic rain static would wipe out the bands for minutes at a time, but we kept running. There was a lot of lightning all around us too, and we kept waiting for the call to stop operating. If this were just *any* contest, we would have pulled the plug. We were both very nervous, at one point asking ourselves what might happen if lightning struck while we had our headphones on. We didn't know the answer, but we didn't want to find out either.

After about an hour, the rain stopped. Somehow even with all that distraction, we still managed another 152 contacts during the second hour. I was a lot more impressed with that number than I was the 228 contacts we'd logged during the first hour.

The rate on CW seemed never-ending, with hour after hour in excess of 150. We tried SSB a few times, but the rate was never as good as on CW. We would usually get a quick rate surge of about 10 minutes on phone, and then it would just die. It was frustrating not to get anything going on SSB, but we just had to keep banging away on CW.

The rate started to slow down after sunset. Forty went long, and we started running out of stations to work on 80. The 2300, 0000 and 0001 UTC hours were a disappointing 84, 75 and 81, respectively. These were the only three hours of the event when our rate dropped below 100, and we noticed that some teams were able to maintain much higher rates during the same time period. In retrospect, I believe that if we'd concentrated a little more on SSB during this time, we would have done a little bit better. Of course it's always easy to say that *after* the fact. Also during this time frame, both of the teams that beat us had logged many more mults than we had; this likely had something to do with the fact that those ops were more familiar with the prevailing propagation and were able to move stations readily to other bands.

Shortly after sunrise 20 opened up to North America. This was the best time to work stations all across the US. The rate

wasn't as good as it was when Europe was coming through, but it was well worth it, because North American contacts were worth more points. This opening lasted from about 0200 until 0600 UTC. Around this same time 15 and 10 also started to open up, and we picked up many needed mults with the second radio.

A Strong Finish!

We spent the rest of the contest moving from band to band. Whenever we changed bands our rate would jump again, and this pattern continued until the end of the contest. Even the next-to-last hour was a solid 175. Things slowed a bit during the final hour, but we finished with 3664 QSOs. We were very pleased with our score and knew that if anyone beat us, they would have earned it. Harry, RA3AUU, was in the tent as the contest ended. We asked him how we did, and he said we were in the top five. While we were glad to be in the top five, we were really hoping for a podium finish.

We quickly packed up our stations and headed back to the hotel. It was a long 24 hours in the tent, and it was nice to get back to civilization and shower. Once we felt more human, we went in to check the results. We were in fourth place, with a fairly large gap between us and third. To be honest, we were a little disappointed. I knew that our log was very clean, but we were just so far behind I didn't think we had a chance of making top three.

Closing ceremonies were held on Monday night. Harry and crew once again put on a great show. After a long wait, they finally got to the medal winners. Dave, K1ZZ, kept us in suspense, since we still didn't know if we were going to place or not. It was a great feeling to hear our names announced to come up for "the 3nd place trophy" (yes, the trophy says "3nd place!"). Second place went to the very deserving ES5TV team, while first place went to one of the top Russian teams — RW1AC and RA1AIP. Congratulations to both teams on a job well done.

Chris and I had a wonderful experience at this year's WRTC. We really liked the new rule that allowed both radios to transmit with an interlock, and we hope future WRTCs will continue this. It is a major undertaking to put on one of these events, but they get better every time. NCJ