

# The World RadioSport Team Championship

An international field of radio racers rattle Seattle.

By John Crovelli, W2GD

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I first heard the idea of holding an international radio competition almost three years ago. Danny Eskenazi, K7SS, broached the subject in a roundtable QSO. All we had was a vague knowledge of the popularity of such events in the Soviet Union and throughout Eastern Europe.

K7SS pressed the issue. "Why not a world championship event with an international field of participants, competing on-site in Seattle as part of the 1990 Goodwill Games?"

Where do we apply?

An *ad hoc* committee soon was formed to market a proposal. After nearly 18 months of negotiations, Goodwill Games officials agreed that the WorldRadioSport Team Championship (WRTC) deserved official status as a Goodwill Exchange Event, and the stage was set. For the first time, the operating skills of world-class radio operators would be tested under equal conditions.

Missing the deadline for being a contestant, I decided to at least be an observer, and with surprising ease I convinced my wife Fran, KB2JAK, and son Nick, KB2JAL, to take a summer vacation in Seattle.

Meanwhile, initial euphoria in Seattle was replaced with the stark reality of a thousand details to work out in just a few months. Who should be invited? Would the FCC waive its rules for the visitors? Would a sufficient number of stations be available in the greater Seattle area?

Would enough volunteers come forward to host our international guests? What contest format would challenge the skills of our competitors and assure significant worldwide participation? How would we get the word out? Who would judge the event?

The biggest challenge of all would be finding sponsors with sufficient resources to assure success.

The WRTC Committee, under Chairman K7SS, paid special attention to issues



Boris Stepanov, UW3AX, congratulates 1990 WRTC champions (i-r) KR0Y, KQ2M, KI AR, KI DG, W8RE and K7JA. (photo courtesy of ICOM America; all other photos by author)



The Japanese team of JMSJOW (J) and JJJUHS model some of the official WRTC sportswear.

with early deadlines. Timely invitations to foreign Amateur Radio societies were critical; how and when the radio societies would respond was also a major concern. How would each country select its team members? The list of participating countries was finalized only weeks before the competition.

FCC licensing requirements would need to be modified, or at least temporarily relaxed. Negotiations ensued between the US State Department and four Eastern European governments for which no reciprocal licensing agreements existed. Notice of the FCC rule waiver was received just nine days before the event, granted on the basis that permanent reciprocal operating arrangements with Bulgaria, the USSR, Hungary and Czechoslovakia were imminent.

The ARRL staff and Bob Cox, KJEST, the WRTC Licensing Committee Chairman, worked tirelessly to solve what could have been the stopper.

## Approaching Critical Mass

Once word got out that the WRTC was approaching critical mass, volunteer hosts came forward to open their Seattle homes to the expected 50 visitors. Even more gratifying was the number of station owners willing to make their operating positions available for the contest. Competition for bragging rights that "my station was used by a WRTC team" was intense.

Creating a "level playing field" was interpreted to mean supplying each team



Gene, UZ3AU, practices a little "disco diplomacy" on the group's boat ride to Tillicum Village on Blake Island. K7LXC observes, right



1ZUIY cranks up the "Italian 2-kW linear amplifier" while teammate IK2DVG operates the WRTC.

The Teams	
(in order of finish)	
K1AR/K1DG	1ZUIY/IK2DVG
W9RE/K7JA	OH1XX/OH8PF
KF0Y/KQ2M	OK1 ROK2FD
VE7SV/VE7CC	YT3AA/YU1RL
DL6XX/DJ8QT	HADMM/HASNY
LZ2POL/Z1 MS	UW3AA/UA9SA
G3YDV/G4BUO	UW8CN/UW8CA
EA5BRA/EA9EO	JE1JKL/JE1 CKA
UW9AR/UA9AM	PY5EG/PY4OD
W7EJ/AA4NC	FD1NYQ/F2CW
UA1DZ/RB5IM	JM3JOW/JJ3UHS

WRTC Publicity and Promotion Chairman, included feature articles and full-page advertisements on the event in QST, CQ, and other outlets around the world. Lapel pins and T-shirts for various levels of operator achievement provided that extra something to pique the interest of the general ham population.

Danny Eskenazi, the WRTC Committee Chairman, is universally viewed as its iron-man and spiritual leader. Danny expertly organized a willing army of volunteers and guided them through uncharted waters, assuming the role of full-time coordinator during the critical months just prior to the event.

the contestants emerged. Ages ranged from early twenties to sixty-something; all but two were men. Nearly everyone had developed an interest in Amateur Radio by their early or mid-teens. Professions represented were unexpectedly diverse: students, engineers, salesmen, tradesmen, editors, printers, scientists, a toy store proprietor, a company president, even a professional politician.

Although a few radio societies staged qualifying events to choose their team members, most of the entrants were selected through a less formal process, using criteria from contest experience to ability to cover personal expenses.

with the same radios, a tribander at 40 feet or so, and a station location with no undue advantage (competitions in the Soviet Union are run Field Day style, but difficulty in securing an adequate facility and fear of foul weather ruled out this option).

ICOM America, just across Lake Washington in Bellevue, provided IC-765 and IC-735 transceivers for each WRTC team. MFJ offered to provide the coax switches and antenna tuners and Hill Engineering provided the microphones, while Ham Radio Outlet and US Tower came through with other station accessories.

One by one, the logistical problems were solved, in large part because of the efforts of Patti Meeks, KS7L, whose committee arranged housing and transportation. But what about the contest itself? WRTC organizers had to come up with a format to assess the skills of world champions. And the search for participants was only in the planning stages.

Marti Laine, OH2BH, was appointed Operating Event Chairman. His international perspective and flair for the theatrical can be seen in the final rules, which balanced operator skills and strategic abilities. Rusty Epps, W6OAT, accepted the title of Head Judge.

A carefully planned publicity campaign, guided by Steve Morris, K7LXC, the

### Take Me Out to the Ballgame

Gene Walsh, N2AA, the US team coach, shared our July 18th flight from Newark, New Jersey. We speculated on what to expect over the next seven days in Seattle and marveled at how recent political changes in Eastern Europe had created the climate that made the WRTC possible. "Just imagine," Gene said, "an Olympics of Amateur Radio contesting!"

Listening to the unofficial WRTC repeater after arriving, we heard N0AX arranging for UW8CA and UW8CN to attend the Seattle Mariners baseball game that afternoon. Next was a QSO with AA7BO—it was an unfamiliar call sign, but the voice was unmistakably that of Willy, UW9AR.

"Electricity was in the air and did not begin to subside until days after the activities were concluded," says N2AA.

Puget Sound provided a majestic backdrop for the K7SS open house later that day—where I quickly picked out many familiar faces. It was a living *Who's Who* of international contesting (see the sidebar).

About midnight, IK2DVG boiled up a large pot of pasta for a snack, to the delight of everyone, especially 1ZUIY. The exchange of QSL cards and other mementos was unending.

As evening became morning, a profile of

About half the international participants had never before visited the United States; a few already held US Amateur Radio licenses.

Some entrants, particularly those from Eastern Europe and the USSR, were unfamiliar with the ICOM equipment and spent considerable time "test driving" it. Some teams made a serious effort to observe local propagation patterns.

Despite the jovial atmosphere, there were no loose lips when it came to discussing operating strategies.

Fran, Nick, and I toured the Olympic Mountains, with their spectacular glacier-capped peaks, then went to the first official reception. Excitement and anticipation were evident everywhere, along with strong doses of national pride. A reporter from National Public Radio was doing interviews. Former ARRL Northwestern Division Director Rush Drake, W7RM, greeted everyone on behalf of ARRL President Larry Price, W4RA (the ARRL Board of Directors was meeting in Connecticut that weekend).

Vasili Bondarenko, UV3BW, Chief of the Krenkel Central Radio Club, addressing the crowd through an interpreter, proclaimed the WRTC a "meeting of the stars." The evening was capped with presentation of distinctive WRTC jackets to all competitors, courtesy of the organi-

zing committee.

Coverage of the WRTC by the Seattle media was extensive. *The Seattle Times* and the *Seattle Post Intelligencer* published informative feature articles. TV broadcasters seemed particularly interested in stories involving the Soviets. One piece highlighted the "34-hour birthday" celebrated by UW9AR as he crossed the international dateline enroute to the US.

Another video clip featured NBAX explaining the sport of baseball to UW0CA and UWBCN at the Mariners game at the Kingdome.

## Murphy Strikes

The day of the event was clear and hot, the temperature near 90°F. When I arrived at my first stop—the Soviet team of UW9AR and UA9AM—station owner K7LR told me that just prior to the start an S9-plus line noise had erupted. UW9AR was distraught. Desperate efforts to quiet the offending power pole, with the aid of a water hose and a sledgehammer, were unsuccessful. But once Seattle City Light understood the significance of the problem, they responded in force with four bucket trucks and a crew of eight. The noise problem finally was brought under control several hours later.

I managed to visit 11 WRTC stations, exactly half the teams, during the competition. Most of the stations were in urban neighborhoods, on 50- x 100-foot lots, with a lone tower supporting a tribander. In my view, the WRTC Committee had succeeded in providing an equal playing field for all.

The teams' intensity levels varied from no-nonsense, total concentration, to carefree and relaxed. The British team of G3YDV/G4BUO and the K1AJR/K1DG "brother-in-law" team seemed particularly laid back. By chance, I ran into a group of roving WRTC judges (K6NA, N6AA and N6ZZ), who were randomly spot checking on-site rules compliance. Another group of officials manned a listening post throughout the event, logging potential operating infractions for later review.

Fears that the WRTC might be a contest without an audience dissipated rapidly once everyone heard the pileups. The WRTC stations averaged about 1100 contacts in ten hours—running just 100 watts! Worldwide, nearly 4000 stations in more than 150 countries are believed to have participated. Steve, N2IC/V, who amassed an incredible 100 contacts with the competitors among his 750 overall QSOs, thought "the activity level was awesome for a contest with no history. . . the WRTC Committee deserves a lot of credit."

KE7V, the WRTC Soviet Liaison, sensed extraordinary participation by operators who normally don't enter contests. "I would like to think the unique significance of this event enticed many to play, but you

## From Moscow to Seattle

My route to the first World Radiosport Team Championship in Seattle took a quarter of a century. In the early 1960s, the Sports Committee of the USSR agreed to decorate the winners of the USSR "HF Championships" with the same gold, silver and bronze medals as they do in athletics. We soon realized that to have real champions we needed to modify our traditional HF contests. The general idea of on-site HF competitions was proposed in 1965, but the first competition of this kind took place only in 1980, sponsored by Radio magazine. On-site HF competitions soon became popular in this country. And now, ten years later, we have another first—the WRTC.

Being involved for many years in the preparation and running of competitions of this kind, I can really appreciate the outstanding job done by the WRTC organizers. To the best of my knowledge, all Soviet participants in the WRTC were delighted by the reception (our special "thanks" to the hams and their families who were our hosts) and by the competition itself.

The organizers of the WRTC did their best to equalize everyone's chance to win. I realize the difficulties they faced to find nearly 30 approximately equal setups in a city like Seattle (located on the hills) was really a job.

I am sure the newly born Championship will have a long and fortunate life. And congratulations to the very first real World Champions of HF communication!—Boris Stepanov, UW3AX, Deputy Editor, Radio magazine

can't discount the draw of free T-shirts and lapel pins!"

Following the over-the-air portion of the event, the competitors endured several feverish hours double checking their logs. Physical stamina now became a real factor in the competition.

Early Saturday morning, the judges began a marathon log-checking session, finishing just in time for the Monday evening awards ceremony. Raw scores had suggested there was a real horse race for the first six positions, and the leaders were invited to review portions of tapes from another team of their choice and make log challenges if desired. The judges (K6NA, N6AA, N6ZZ, N7NG, OH2BH, OH2MM, UW3AX, UZ3AU and W6OAT) did yeoman service.

## Everybody on the Bus

A host of social activities were scheduled between the log-submission deadline Saturday morning and the awards dinner Monday evening, including a bus trip to the Willamette Valley DX Club convention and picnic in Portland, followed by lunch with Washington State officials, including the Governor, on Monday. During the travel time between cities, many of the foreigners busied themselves taking FCC license examinations, administered by a VE team. Nearly thirty people qualified for new tickets, many advancing from Novice to Extra in one session.

Meanwhile, Fran, Nick and I took side trips to Mount Rainier and Mount St Helens enroute to Portland.

The WVDXC banquet was attended by nearly 300 DXers and contesters from throughout the Northwest. Participation by the WRTC teams as the convention's guests was arranged by Stu, N7ZZ, a WRTC Committee member who also solicited sponsorships for some of the teams.

Katashi Nose, KH6JJ, the honorary captain of the US teams, was presented with a special award by WRTC Chairman K7SS for his many years of contesting achievements and continuing inspiration.

Willy, UW9AR, posing between two military policemen at the Portland picnic (held at a US military installation) cracked "Captured by the US Army! What will I tell my mother?" Willy then offered to trade hats with one of the MPs.

On Sunday, the City of Vancouver, Washington, honored the Soviet team at a ceremony on the steps of the Chkalov Monument, which commemorates the Soviet rescue of an American Arctic expedition. This is the only monument in the United States commemorating an accomplishment by Soviet citizens.

At this point, my family and I took leave of the caravan and resumed our touring activities. Fran observed that "the foreign contestants, especially the Soviet team members, seem much more at ease today [than they were] last Thursday. Maybe this notion that Amateur Radio promotes good will and international friendship and understanding isn't so far fetched after all."

On Monday evening, some 250 people showed up at the WRTC awards dinner on Blake Island in Puget Sound. Vasili Bondarenko, UV3BW, leader of the Soviet delegation, said, "the only winner here was friendship. We are sincerely thankful for the great efforts of the organizers in making this difficult project possible. We appreciate the chance to meet all of you face-to-face; there is nothing more important than people to people contact. A new page in radiosport history has been written."

Bondarenko presented a special award from the Soviet people to WRTC Chairman K7SS in recognition of his special individual efforts contributing to the success of the WRTC.



British teammates G4BUO (l) and G3YDV "rally" round the flag. . .

finally arrived for presentation of the Gold, Silver and Bronze Medals. Would the US teams sweep the top three places or had one of the visiting teams managed to beat the odds and score an upset?

With appropriate pomp and circumstance, as video cameras whirred and electronic flashes blazed, the gold medals were awarded to the team of K1AR and K1DG, the silver to K7JA and W9RE, and the bronze to KQ2M and KR0Y. Bondarenko presented Soviet medals to the competition winners as well. Finishing in fourth through sixth places were the teams from Canada, Germany, and Bulgaria.

Among the special citations, the Murphy Award was presented to the Soviet Team of UW9AR and UA9AM, for their effort under exceptionally difficult conditions.

VE7CC and IZ1UY received awards for most accurate CW and phone operator, respectively.

With a spectacular view of the Seattle skyline as a backdrop, the first World RadioSport Team Championship came to an end.

What will happen next in the international arena of radiosporting? For one thing, discussions already are underway to create a World RadioSport Federation to serve as a permanent sanctioning body for international on-site competitions.

For another, the Soviet Radio Sport Federation would like to see the International Olympic Committee include RadioSporting as an Olympic Demonstration Sport. It is too late for the 1992 Games, but the wheels are turning for '96.

And although the future of the Goodwill Games may be in doubt, a second WRTC at the Leningrad Games in 1994




Although less extravagant than his British counterparts, IK2DVG, unofficial WRTC "pasta chef," gets in a little flag waving of his own.

already is penciled in on the calendar as another "impossible dream" that just might come true.

*W2GD is an active contester and is director of systems services for the consulting firm of M. F. Smith & Associates, Inc.*

Editor's note: A 20-minute broadcast quality video on the WRTC is scheduled for release by year's end. Advance orders for the tape will be accepted. Send \$19.95 plus \$3 shipping to WRTC Video, 4821 51st SW, Seattle, WA 98116.

The ARRL and QST in no way warrant this offer.

Complete scores for all WRTC contestants are slated for publication in the *National Contest Journal*. 

Boris Stepanov, UWJAN, deputy editor of *Radio* magazine and often called the "father of competitive radio" in the Soviet Union, commented to the crowd, "many dreams are coming true with this happening and it is sad to see it come to an end."

ARRL International Affairs Vice President Jay Holladay, W6EJJ, expressed the League's pleasure in having had an opportunity to play a small supporting role in the WRTC project, and to provide financial support through a grant from the W3RLR Fund.

### And Finally, the Medals

One by one, country by country, the operators received plaques and other mementos for their participation in the very first WRTC event. Then, the moment