

# CW Sprinting

By Jim George, N3BB

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*"The Sprint - the most fun you can have in 4 hours with your clothes on." - N6TR*

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The Sprint contest is unusual. Usually “Big Guns” sit on a frequency and handle rolling pileups that continue for hours. The callers keep coming and the BGs run ‘em on one frequency. Imagine a contest where you called one of these BGs and the op just “up ‘n left” after the contact! Not only would the operator hand you the frequency (without you even asking), they will be glad you called. This unique feature helps put *all* operators back into the equation. You can't win a Sprint (or satisfy the rules!) by just sitting on one frequency and pressing the F1 key.

CW Sprints are held in February and September. For exact dates and full rules - check out the NCJ web page by clicking the rules link below. The CW Sprint is typically on the first Saturday of February, and the Saturday after Labor Day in September. (RTTY Sprints are held in March and September.)

The contests take place on 20, 40 and 80 meters. The contest starts at 0000 UTC and runs for 4 hours. (Note that the February 2021 Sprint will begin one hour earlier at 2300 UTC). Most stations start on 20 since the band is open only a short time at this point in the sunspot cycle. Within 30–60 minutes, most of the activity will have moved to 40 meters. Finally, most stations spend the last hour on 80 meters. It often pays to keep checking 20 meters, even later in the contest, since that's when the West Coast, Hawaii, and Alaska often answer a CQ or may call CQ themselves.

Stations operating SO2R (single-op, 2 radios) will keep one radio on 40 meters the entire four hours. While activity generally moves from 20-40-80, SO2R stations will operate 20/40 and then 40/80. One radio is always on 40!

The frequencies typically used on CW are 14025–14055, 7025–7055 and 3525–3555 kHz. The higher-frequency portions are where slower stations tend to hang out (above the more intense activity). If you are not comfortable at the blazing speeds many of the CW Sprint operators use, your best bet is to go to the top and call CQ at a comfortable speed. The good Sprint operators will call you at your speed. They need your contact!

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## **The Exchange**

The exchange is both calls (more about this later), a QSO number, your name and your QTH (state/province/DXCC entity). If this were the end of the rules, we would have just another average contest.

The QSY rule makes the Sprint a whole new experience. The QSY rule has two parts:

1. If you are the initiating party of a QSO (i.e., you called CQ) - when you are done with the QSO, you must QSY at least 5 kHz before you can **initiate** another QSO.
2. If you are the initiating party of a QSO, you must QSY at least 1 kHz before you can **respond** to someone else initiating a QSO.

Initiating a QSO can be done by any of the following means:

- Calling CQ (or QRZ): any action that initiates communication that leads to a QSO.
- Finishing a QSO where you inherit the frequency: Even though you don't send "CQ", if you "owned" the frequency when a QSO started, you do not own it afterwards.

This sounds a lot more complicated than it is. Essentially, think of it this way — if you "own" the frequency at the beginning of the QSO, after completing it the person you worked now owns the frequency and you must go find a new one. You can either move 1 kHz and answer someone and then inherit their frequency — or move 5 kHz and call CQ yourself.

This is obviously a lot different than just CQing away on one frequency. If you find someone CQing and call them — you get rewarded by working them and then having your own frequency for another QSO. Many times, people will call you before you even have a chance to CQ. Getting two QSOs per frequency is much better than one, so it's good to find stations you can call as they finish a QSO.

To help illustrate how this all works, some sound files (links to the files below) will step you through the process. You also can practice before the contest in the NS "Mini-Sprints" Thursday nights (Friday at 0230–0300 UTC).

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## When to Send Your Call During the QSO

Sprint rules require you to not only send the call sign of the station you are working as part of the exchange, but your call sign as well. You may notice that sometimes stations send their call sign at the beginning of the exchange and sometimes at the end of the exchange. What's up with that? Because of the QSY rule described elsewhere on this page, one of the stations in the QSO will be leaving the frequency after the contact is over and the other station will be staying on the frequency for the next QSO. A simple protocol has been developed to help you know who will be staying on the frequency – and when it will be okay to call them.

If you tune into a station that is sending an exchange – and **finishes** it with a call sign – that is the call sign of the station who will be staying on the frequency after the QSO is completed. If this is a needed station, you will want to be ready to call them but be sure to wait until the other station acknowledges that they have received the exchange, usually with a TU or R. Of course, it's also the "right time" after the station staying on the frequency calls a CQ.

It's much better if you use logging software which will create two different messages for your exchange; one to use when you are initiating the contact (by calling CQ or QRZ), and the second to use when you are the station answering a CQ and will stay on frequency to make another QSO. For example, *NIMM+*, *TRLog*, and *WriteLog* refer to the first as the "CQ Exchange" and the second as the "S&P Exchange."

See you in the NS and the Sprint!

73, Jim George N3BB

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If you are interested in knowing more - here are some other resources to check out.

[Sprint Rules](#) - from the NCJ Web Site.

[The Sprint Survival Web Page \(kkn.net\)](#) – a complete “how to” and other information by N6TR

[Official NCJ Contest Web Page](#) - includes records and e-mail addresses of the editors.

More information:

[How to finish a QSO in the CW Sprint](#) - N6TR

[CW Sprinting - Beginners Guide](#) - W4AN (RIP SK)

[Some Sprint CW Practice](#)- K5TR

[Two Radios in The Sprint \(a \*TRLog\* perspective\)](#) - N6TR

[Sprint Tips for \*NIMM\* Logger Users](#) – N2IC