

Twenty Years of Contesting - from 2005 to 2025

Dr. Beldar L1AR (a.k.a. H. Ward Silver NØAX - copyright 2005)

(originally presented at the Dayton Hamvention Contest Dinner, 2005)

Close your eyes and imagine that you are transported to the Contest Dinner in 2025 as the evening's speaker unfolds his notes and begins his speech...

The early years of the 21st century have proven to be turbulent, but fertile, for radiosport contesting. Now one of the world's premier sporting activities, by what path did contesting ascend? The history of the sport is a rich one, but looking back, we can see that it was about twenty years ago that the Golden Age of contesting began. Tonight, we shall take a look back through the Contest Calendar of the past twenty years, identifying some of the high points of our favorite activity. Do you remember which are real and which fantasy?

Let's set the controls of the way-back machine to...

2005

- Following K7JA and K6CTW's stunning smackdown of the SMS champs on NBC's Tonight Show, Sony announced that pileup simulator PED would be included with the new XBOX game platform and the hams at Nokia added an iambic keying interface to the latest generation of mobile phones.
- California governor Arnold Schwarzenegger announces that "QRP is for girlie men" and declares 2006 will be the year of the California Kilowatt.
- Paris Hilton declares radiosport contesting to be "totally hot." Rap star CW Diddy goes platinum with "Loud is Good!" Parents forbid their children to get a ham license, ham radio is cool again and the demand for radios immediately takes off.
- Later that year, N6TR breaks 450 QSOs in the September CW Sprint, but then gets a brain cramp and has to spend two days recovering in a hyperbaric chamber.
- The CW prosign ***OJ*** (- - - - -) is created to represent backslash in Web URLs.

2006

- WRTC2006, held in Brasil, is conducted in a verticals-on-the-beach style, but the contest is disrupted when Gator N5RZ removes his shirt, causing the entire beach to go topless, including the visiting all-girl Samba orchestra and dance troupe. No one seems to mind, although QSO rates drop dramatically.
- N5TJ & K1TO achieve a 4-peat as champions despite RA3AUU and RV1AW changing their calls to RA3TJ and RV1TO.
- W8JI wins the 160-meter CQ WW with a new Top Band Sterba curtain strung between Georgia mountaintops.
- After the collapse of the BPL industry, students at Beijing University discover that by removing a diode, the salvaged sending units make great 20-meter QRP transmitters.

Using inexpensive short wave receivers and sound-card signal processing software, BA BD and BG call signs outnumber JA's for the first time in CQ WW. However, none are heard east of Colorado.

- As thousands of SMS-trained CW operators flood the air waves, the ARRL creates several new operating abbreviations, such as...
 - ARL 200 for "I am like so not!"
 - QMH? for "Are you hot?"
 - QMT for "Totally!"
 - QMD for "Duh!"

2007

- Bill Gates and Microsoft take up contesting, buying Alpha, Elecraft, and SteppIR. Within months, prototypes of a hand-held, kilowatt PDA known as "Pocket Rocket" are heard on 75-meters as testers ask, "Can you hear me now?"
- The first real-time on-line contest crashes after the master server suffers a denial-of-service attack from the Pig Farmers Hacker Alliance.
- K9DX counters W8JI's Sterba Curtain by leasing the HF rights on the northern Illinois power grid and driving it as a phased array.
- Keanu Reeves plays the part of Romeo Stepanenko UB5RR with Robin Williams as Bill Kenamer K5FUV in the hit Shakespearean farce, "Where Art Thou, Romeo?"

2008

- Congress passes the Spectral Purity Act, authored by Sen. Dick Norton N6AA. The fraud trial of BPL executives begins immediately following the completion of the Enron sentencing hearings.
- FCC Chairman Riley Hollingsworth relaxes Part 97 rules to allow corporate-run contests. Kimberley-Clark immediately assumes sponsorship of the ARRL 160-Meter Contest, renaming it the Depends Classic and introduces a new model of Depends named "The Chairmaster." The ad campaign slogan is "Hold Your Frequency Instead of Your Water!"
- K1JT releases software for the Pocket Rocket that can listen to a pileup and extract all call signs simultaneously. Jim Neiger N6TJ announces that it "Cuts the Mustard!" and applies for the WRTC Senior Division using the software as his teammate.
- The merger of the largest spotting networks, combined with nearly ubiquitous broadband use of real-time, on-line contesting servers, allows all stations to be spotted everywhere at all times, rendering spotting effectively useless.
- NCAA Division I rival Big Ten and Atlantic Coast Conference schools slug it out during Field Day to the highest category 18A scores ever. College recruiters begin to appear at high-school radio club meetings looking for operators.

2009

- Disintegration of the Central Asian and Caucasus states results in the creation of 42 new kingdoms in six months. Ukraine displaces EA8 as the optimum DX contest location and UB5 stations take the top three spots in CQ WW Phone with stunning 75-meter multiplier totals. OH2BH is seen in the Rome airport booking flights to the Orient and haggling over excess baggage charges.
- The “Lake Erie” virus infects all Morse-enabled mobile phones, permanently changing their keying mode to Vibroplex.
- Given the widespread and undetectable use of remote stations connected via the Internet, CQ WW creates a category for them. The initial competition is won by an entry consisting of the entire World-Wide Young Contesters membership who adapt SETI@home distributed computing software to link stations located in sixty-four countries around the world.
- A new 160-meter single-op record is set by K1ZM using K1JT software that synthesizes signals so that they are generated or received exactly on the grey line.

2010

- The theme of WRTC2010, held in Ft. Worth, Texas, is a Radio Rodeo. New events include the Pig Farmer Roping competition, a chili cook-off, and all contestants are required to ring a chuck-wagon triangle after every multiplier.
- The team of N5TJ & K1TO face stiff competition from the team of Argentinian radio gauchos, but prevail for the fifth time as K1TO cleverly selects I2UIY as his “lifeline” during the 72-oz. Steak eating event.
- Spread spectrum contests make their appearance, but nobody notices, since all they do is raise the noise floor a little bit.
- Nike jumps into the contest sponsorship arena by purchasing the CQ publishing empire, changing the WW motto to “Just Work It”. The contest adds the radio triathlon category where QSOs must be made from a kayak, a bicycle, and a hang glider.
- To deal with intentional QRM during contests, jammers and frequency stealers, the FCC opens the first radio penal institution near the existing maximum-security facility in Leavenworth, KS.

2011

- Solar cycle 24 peaks this year and releases a mega-flare during the IARU HF Championship, pushing the auroral curtain south to latitude 46 north. This wipes out all HF bands except for stations in Scandinavia, the upper U.S. West Coast, VE7, KL7 and the UAØ icebreaker fueling station in Pevek who sweep the top spots.
- In the aftermath of the flare, persistent ionization levels are so high that the words “rate” and “1296 MHz” are used in the same sentence on several of the VHF+ contesting reflectors.

- WA3FET designs a new, super-gain antenna with a front-to-back ratio so high that when installed at WP3R the first transmission snaps the forward guys and knocks the tower over backwards, crushing the new shack constructed entirely of wooden Sweepstakes plaques.

2012

- Retired admiral Scott Redd KØDQ is elected President and during his inaugural address announces plans to mandate a minimum height of 75' for all amateur towers and require that each subdivision be home at least one all-band, full-power amateur station. His impeachment is completed by the end of February.
- The FCC finally grants ragchewers contest-free zones, but simultaneously creates contest-only zones and cites several dozen ragchewers and net control operators for incursion violations.
- SETI claims that it has detected hostile signals from an extra-terrestrial civilization, but they turn out to be the long-delayed echoes of high-order intermodulation products from the first three hours of the 2011 Sweepstakes.
- MacAuley Culkin stars in the holiday hit video about a single-op bachelor, "Phone Alone."
- Florida approves the first ham-only cemetery. It's located on Silent Key.

2013

- The Amateur Radio Direction Finding World Championship attracts 25,000 competitors and 100,000 spectators. ESPN devotes a full week of coverage to the event, bumping the PGA Tour to the midnight time slot.
- NA Sprint is added to the Olympics as a demonstration sport after being renamed "Synchronized QRMing".
- Robot operators are finally allowed as assistants in the single-op categories. N6TR and K1EA collaborate on HAL-2001 software, but the prototype locks them out of the shack.
- Real-time WPX results are delivered one hour after the contest, resulting in a flood of complaints about the delay.
- Sponsored by Speedo, the first NCJ Swimsuit issue hits the newsstands. It is also the last NCJ Swimsuit issue.

2014

- WRTC is held in Hong Kong on 73 different floors of the Post, Telephone, and Telegraph headquarters building. N5TJ and K1TO refuse to go, but are kidnapped by the Chinese intelligence service and win again.
- MIT's Artificial Intelligence lab adopts Phone Sweepstakes as a test and development environment for artificial speech processing. They apparently could find no more challenging environment.

- A team of Unlimited Rovers finally reaches the theoretical limit of band-mode-grid point accumulation but nobody seems to notice.
- Amateur radio makes the news when during a VHF+ contest, the K8GP Grid Pirates deploy surplus lasers from inertial fusion reactor facilities and accidentally “terminate” a hot-air balloon regatta.
- Joe Walsh WB6ACU forms “E.F. Johnson and the Navigators” and has a smash hit with “Gimme Your Full Call, Baby!”

2015

- The headquarters station category of the IARU HF is won by the reconstituted Grand Duchy of Fenwick club that declared all stations within its borders to be HQ stations.
- The ARRL joined with the AARP in creating the Assisted-Living category with Single Op - 1 Nap and Single Op - 2 Nap classes.
- VHF+ contests adopt the three-dimensional Maidenhead Grid Cube identifiers for the new Sky-Rover Category, but grid corner orbiting is prohibited.
- A small meteorite crashes into the Atlantic and the resulting resurvey of state borders finally shows K3LR to officially be an 8.
- The rapidly retreating Antarctic glaciers reveal the continent to actually be made up of 16 isolated island entities, which are all immediately claimed by countries ranging from Norway to Jamaica. OH2BH is seen in Tierra Del Fuego just before CQ WW trying to charter an icebreaker.

2016

- The first Interplanetary contest begins with multipliers consisting of the 24 medium-earth-orbit Unlimited Parcel Service transfer stations, both of Virgin Spaceway’s geosynchronous resorts, the moon city of Brightside, all three of Asa-Brown-Boveri’s asteroid mines, the Indian colonies established at the fourth and fifth Langrangian points, and the Russo-Israeli mission to Jupiter. The exchange is serial number and relative Doppler shift.
- K1JT releases software that extracts synchronous, coded signals from up to 234 dB below ambient noise, making possible the first single-weekend WAZ on the new VLF band of 73 kHz. Each QSO takes 20 minutes.
- The integration of Europe is completed as the borders are dissolved between the enclave of the International Knights Who Say Ni and the Kingdom of Dan Marino. This reduces the number of European multipliers to one, decimating DX contest scores from the eastern half of North America.

2017

- More corporate sponsors discover ham radio contesting as the Topband Distance Challenge becomes the Stew Perrier and Jack Daniels creates W. C. Field Day. CW Sweepstakes is sponsored by A-1 Sauce.

- Climate change results in a permanent and violent cyclone over the New England states, centered on Newtown, CT. Black Hole stations sweep the Single-Op All-Band and Single-Band top spots for the first time ever. East Coast stations lobby vigorously for country quotas during contests.
- Morse code is conclusively shown to have positive effects on long-term brain health by stimulating neurons in rhythmic patterns.
- The first interplanetary contest is still under way as responses from contacts with the Jupiter mission are still being received and decoded at the Arecibo radio telescope.

2018

- WRTC moves to Japan and is sponsored by the radio conglomerate YaeKenCom. The competitions are held on a specially created man-made island in Tokyo Bay in the shape of CQ Kitty, the event's mascot and current teen craze.
- A Chinese team using hand keys finally dethrones N5TJ and K1TO as N5TJ learns about warm saki and K1TO is disqualified in the sumo wrestling competition for accidentally soiling his loincloth.
- A team of graduate students from W9YT run away with the VLF and LF single-band categories using notes from Nikola Tesla's research to design an antenna that shunt-excites the resonant cavity between the D-layer and the earth's surface.
- Logs are finally received from the interplanetary contest multiplier stations, although the Jupiter mission's log is submitted as a black obelisk in a format no one can translate. The second interplanetary contest misses its launch window and is delayed for one sidereal year.

2019

- Starbucks was implicated in a low-band contest stimulant doping scandal. Triple Ginseng French Roast is added to the International Radiosport Federation's list of banned substances, which also include inner-ear growth hormone, any form of "contest chili", and Beano.
- By being covered completely at high tide, the last of the remaining non-volcanic Caribbean islands was declared submerged by the World Geographical Society. This leaves only the Cuban Mountaintop Chain, Monserrat, and the Island of Windward in Zone 8.
- The Four Corners Off-Road Emissions Society's Battle Rover won the first running of the Baja 500 ElectroRove-In with an average speed of 47 QSOs per mile over the rugged desert course. The Battle Rover was built on a surplus self-propelled missile launch platform outfitted with Force 12's all-band "Fly's Eye" phased array antenna systems driven by fourth-generation Pocket Rockets.
- SteppIR introduces an inflatable discone. Development is sponsored by Viagra.

2020

- ARRL declares 2020 to be the Year of Contesting Hindsight and creates special entry categories for the long-disused modes of SSB, wideband FM, and RTTY.
- The number of entries in major contests has grown beyond the limit of individual log checkers to process. The ARRL and Nike-CQ jointly petition the government for emergency computing assistance and a contract is negotiated with IBM for the design and construction of a new contest server - Deep Q.
- The methods used by log checkers to determine unique, not-in-log, and busted QSOs are declared a national secret and the algorithm is sealed under court order.
- A United Nations inquiry is opened into why plaques from the first interplanetary contest have still not been received.

2021

- The United Mexicanadian States grants sovereign status to all native aboriginal tribes, creating the 127th ARRL section of VZØ, Baffin Island. KE3Q/VZØ wins all three modes of Sweepstakes.
- Radiosport finally becomes an official Olympics sport operating under the rules for Ice Dancing. The first competition is marred by scandal as the French judge is discovered feeding busted call signs to the Australian team.
- The floating island cities of the South China Sea are accepted into the IOTA program but not for DXCC since the antennas are not land-based. One city is blown onto Scarborough Reef during the ARRL DX contest, creating an uproar for several hours until high tide lifts it off again. No one is able to ascertain whether the city would be considered scaffolding and the late Wayne Mills N7NG left no instructions in his will in this regard.
- The TV show “The Call is Right!” is the highest rated game show on Monday nights.

2022

- WRTC returns to its birthplace in New Seattle, Washington, funded by the sale of founder K7SS’ world’s largest collection of Hawaiian shirts. Although the old Seattle was inundated by the Great Earthquake in 2018, several of the old sites are reused and the winners operate from the rotating restaurant of the Space Needle, now surrounded completely by salt water.
- In a first, a local team of Orca whales enters and sweeps all of the digital competitions, speaking directly into hydrophones. This has big implications for the IARU HF Championship, since aquatic mammals can now activate the so-called “water zones.” Instead of plaques, the Orcas ask for a nice salmon or two.
- The winning entry for CQ WW this year was submitted by the Sons of the VooDudes contest team operating from an aerostat platform at the focus of the equatorial anomaly - the correct height to have chordal hop propagation on all bands.

2023

- Alien ships appear in the skies during the frenetic transmissions of North American Sprint's code contest. They immediately leave at high speed after hearing the phone portion of the contest.
- The hot topic among contest administrators is how long raw contest signals are allowed to remain in memory for analysis by processing software. Consensus is reached that 1 nanosecond should be enough for even the slowest computers.
- Room-temperature superconducting aluminum is used to create the first all-band tabletop phased array.
- Fred Laun K3ZO finally purchases a CW filter.

2024

- A cache of vacuum tubes is discovered in the W1AW basement and a "hollow-state" transmitter makes its first appearance on the amateur bands in 15 years. It immediately receives a "chirp" report.
- YaeKenCom delivers a radio capable of sending CW without key clicks, although no one can remember what a "key" is.
- In the face of growing contest spectrum demand, all other communications services are relocated to the microwave bands and all frequencies below 1 GHz reallocated to amateurs.
- All contests merge into a single giga-contest that runs continuously on all bands and modes. Winners are tracked on the GoogleHoo portal and covered by Las Vegas-based Worldwide Casino. Recent top scorers include
 - a schizophrenic with 26 different personalities, half of which have chronic insomnia
 - robot operators running CTRateMaster Platinum version 6.7
 - a two-dolphin team named #\$\$%^&*()_!! from the Amazon river delta
 - and 14-year-old named Manu Franklin Chang, C71.2.TJTO from the 2nd Langrangian colony

That brings us to the current day, 2025. In order to fully appreciate our good fortune, we must acknowledge the contributions of those testers at the millenium that built the foundation of contesting.

A toast! Although their radios were primitive and their scores unimaginably puny, they opened the door to modern contesting - found on the bands at all times and followed by sentient beings around the world and from Venus to the Gas Giants. May we have the fortitude as they did to keep our butts in the chair and our signals in the air! Radiosport forever!