

From the Editor

Back in 1990, I wrote an article for *NCJ* called “The Joys of Field Day,” and in the ensuing 30+ years I’ve engaged in a series of sporadic debates on why Field Day is an operating event, not a contest. The short version of my argument is that because Field Day logs are not checked, it is not a contest. Just the way three-on-three basketball without a referee is not a basketball contest, it is an athletic event. A contest has rules and something in place to make sure the rules are followed.

In contesting, we are in direct control of most of the aspects that impact our ultimate placement in the contest: butt-in-chair time, operator skills, and station/antenna capabilities, even though local propagation and weather-related events occasionally blow up the best laid plans.

But in a real contest, there is one big factor that can have a major impact that contest ops don’t directly control: the rules. Someone sets the rules, and someone enforces them. Contests with radically different rules (for example, Sprints vs. Sweepstakes, or CQ WW vs. CQ WPX) demand very different strategies. Changes in rules may result in certain strategies or locations losing/gaining influence on score, or in higher or lower levels of participation.

A few examples:

- Rules that once made sense when a contest was first established (for

example, work once per band in Sweepstakes, or more points for low-band QSOs in WPX) may have unintended consequences as operating practice and equipment have changed.

- Technology changes (packet/RBN spotting, SO2R, FT8, remote operating, etc.) may impact scores very quickly, and rule changes may be made in haste that create secondary issues.
- Sponsors may make changes (moving contest dates, changing definitions of a club, etc.) for reasons that make sense to them but then results in inequities across entrants.

Contest operators don’t make the rules but can definitely have influence on them. Over the years, probably 75% of the traffic on CQ-Contest, and other contesting “watering holes,” has been complaints about rules and suggestions for rule changes. However, venting is not a very effective way to make your voice heard. It is kind of like yelling out the window versus writing to your elected representative to get a stop sign placed on that dangerous intersection near you.

Of course, there is one slight problem — the WA7BNM Contest Calendar (contestcalendar.com/alphabetical.php) lists close to 700 contests, though not all are active. Most operators don’t operate in anywhere near that number, but even if

you only get on for State QSO parties (as Dave, WN4AFP, points out in this issue), there are 47 of those alone!

To have influence, you must directly make your voice heard. Through the hard work and generosity of Bruce, WA7BNM, you can easily find a link to every sponsor website. The two biggest contest sponsors are:

- **ARRL:** You can find the email addresses of the ARRL Contest and Radiosport Managers, along with all members of the Contest Advisory Committee, at arri.org/arri-staff-cac.
- **CQ Magazine:** CQ recently announced it had to temporarily suspend publication, but the Worldwide Radio Operators Foundation (wwrof.org) operates CQ’s contest website and provides the infrastructure for log submission, log checking, and other services in support of the CQ contests. You can find a list of all CQ contest contacts at cqww.com/organization.htm — there are buttons at the top of that page for each individual CQ contest.

Make your voice heard! The next time you release a rant about the rules, send a copy to the contest sponsor. There will always be complaints about sponsors being non-responsive, but real live outcry from contesters has resulted in rule changes in the past and can again in the future.