

Kickstart Your Group with Club Contesting

Club contesting brings a team together for more QSOs, more time on the air, and more fun.

G. Scott Davis, N3FJP

When we first introduced the idea of team radiosport to our local club, the Northeast Maryland Amateur Radio Contest Society, some were skeptical, some enthused, and others confused — but teaming up has thoroughly reinvigorated our group. Together we're having tons of fun and building a sense of camaraderie. Best of all, we're sharing the excitement of working toward a common goal. It's done wonders for our club. Here's how you can do the same for your group.

Club Contesting: The Basics

Whether you just want to make a few contacts or you have serious competition in mind, there's nothing like a contest to get you on the air. Radiosport offers a great opportunity to speedily connect with lots of fellow hams, enhance your operating skills, learn about propagation, demonstrate the abilities of Amateur Radio, accumulate lots of DX entities, states, or sections in a hurry, and discover the strengths and weaknesses of your station.

That's more than enough incentive to enjoy the many fun radiosport events we can look forward to annually, but club contesting adds another great element — the team! When you contest with your club from your home station, every point that your station earns is added to the club's cumulative score, so everyone is pulling together to reach a common goal. The total score comprises points from all the individual home stations (and maybe a club station too, if you have one) in your club.

Because the club score is a total, not an average, there's no worry that anyone might somehow hold the club back by joining in. Everyone is helping and encouraging each other to achieve their individual goals, and the result is the club's total score.

Reinvigorating Our Group

If your group is like ours, when you first start club contesting, you'll likely have a few people who already enjoy radiosport, a few who are willing to give it a try, and some who are intimidated by it. Some

people worry about how the comparatively few QSOs they think they'll make will be received, compared to others who make 1000 contacts per contest.

The key to our success has been creating a no-pressure environment where every QSO is valued. The ham who's never contested before and makes a handful of contacts is appreciated every bit as much as the regular contester who makes more than 1000.

That fun and thrill is infectious for all of us. On our club e-mail group, post-contest recounts ensue, which in turn gives others the incentive to give contesting a try. With each successive contest, operators who started by tentatively putting a toe in the water are diving in, and new operators are often joining in for the first time.

Our cumulative scores are progressively improving, too. Because operators are having fun, they are spending more time on the air, making more contacts. Their skills are improving, and their higher QSO rates always add to the total as well.

Figure 1 — An example of a portion of the data included in the online contest upload, accessible to all team members as a web page that constantly updates automatically throughout the contest.

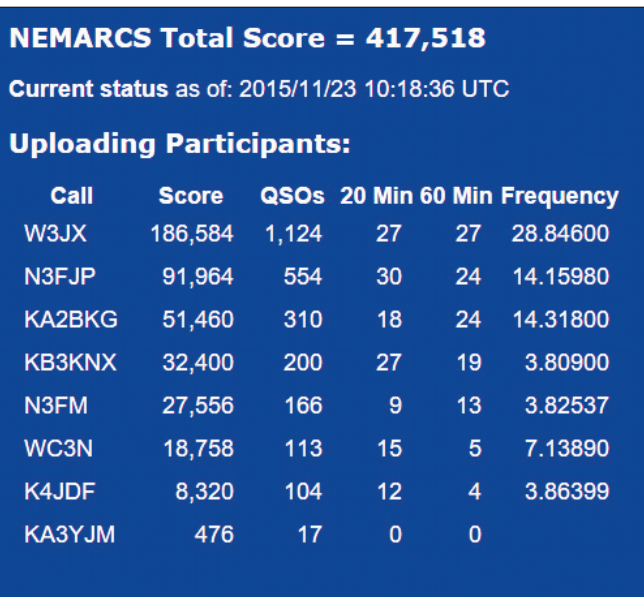
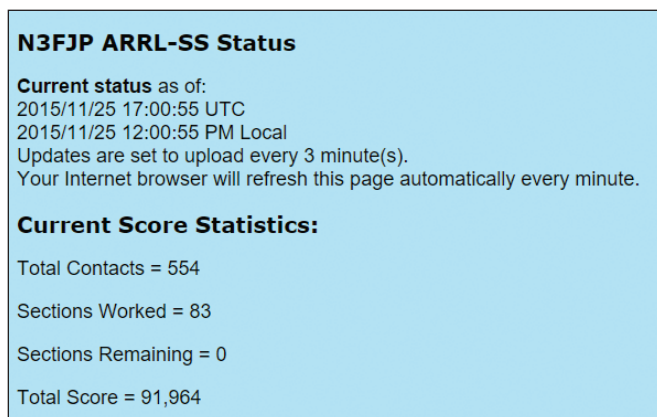


Figure 2 — The contest leaderboard display for the 2015 November Sweepstakes, which updated every 60 seconds throughout the contest.

Sharing the Contest in Real Time

Sharing our contest adventures after the event is great fun, but teaming up in real time as the contest unfolds has taken the excitement to a whole new level. We accomplish this in two ways. First, we set up the automatic status upload feature available in all my N3FJP software contest programs (from the program's menu options, click **SETTINGS > WEB UPLOAD**). With the upload feature enabled (see Figure 1), we can see everyone's current score and QSO count, which updates automatically every 3 minutes.

To make it even easier to monitor how our team is doing, I created a little club score processor program that summarizes our current club totals from our individual uploads and updates them on the web every 60 seconds (see Figure 2). That way, we can see minute-by-minute how everyone is doing, all on one page. By the time this article goes to press, you should be able to download the club score processor program free from my website at www.n3fjp.com.

Secondly, we've found using an online text chat room to be of tremendous value. Folks share how they are doing, ask questions, cheer each other on, and provide any needed help. It's great for new operators who might need a bit of nurturing or encouragement, and it's fun for all of us.

The chat room works particularly well because instead of stopping your run rate to answer a question on 2 meters, you can just bring up the chat window in your Internet browser when it's convenient for you, and contribute between contacts. Even club members who may not be operating a particular contest themselves will still sign in to help look for needed multipliers.

Recently we have set up a permanent virtual clubhouse on Discord (<https://discordapp.com/>). This is pretty easy to do, will let you stay logged in indefinitely, and will accommodate any number of members.

Of course, like DX spotting, folks will post exciting stations or multipliers that others in our group may be looking for in the chat room, so if your group uses the chat room, make sure everyone enters in the "Assisted" category when applicable.

Finding Contests for Your Club

There are many annual club contest eligible events, sponsored by a variety of organizations. As a starter, here are the major ARRL

The Club Gavel Competition

The ARRL Club Competition is a great incentive for members of all kinds of ARRL Affiliated clubs — not just contest clubs — to get on the air for ARRL contests. Competitive activity is excellent exercise for improving operating abilities, giving the radio equipment a good test, and building radio "know-how" in general.

In the nine different contests that allow Club Competition, there are three different levels of the Club Competition designed to accommodate all sizes of clubs: Unlimited (with 51 or more entries), Medium (from 11 to 50 entries), and Local clubs (10 entries or fewer). The winner of each category in each contest is awarded a highly coveted gavel. The full Club Competition rules are available at [www.arrrl.org/files/file/Clubs/Club Gavel Competition-V3.pdf](http://www.arrrl.org/files/file/Clubs/Club%20Gavel%20Competition-V3.pdf), or in the "Rules for All ARRL Contests" at www.arrrl.org/contest-rules.

Clubs across North America compete in many different ways. The largest clubs with many members try to rack up millions of points in order to win nationwide. Smaller clubs join the fun by challenging a rival to see whose members do the best.

By encouraging every member to submit a score, the clubs also encourage new hams and hams with new privileges to get on the air in a new way. They are often surprised at how many contacts they can make — and with so many states, provinces, and countries! What better way to chase Worked All States than in the November Sweepstakes? DXCC and the ARRL DX contests are natural partners, as are the three VHF contests and the VUCC award. Many clubs recognize the efforts of their members, particularly those new to contesting, with achievement awards — a great way to mentor and encourage on-the-air activity.

Every ARRL Affiliated Club is encouraged to compete by getting their members on the air and submitting every single score. Any eligible member should feel welcome operating and being a part of the club total. We hope to see your club in the Club Competition tables, moving up every year as more and more members join the fun. Bang the gavel — it's contest time!

and CQ contests that are eligible for club competition, but be sure to check out other information sources like the *National Contest Journal* for even more events.

January — ARRL January VHF Contest, ARRL RTTY Roundup, CQ World Wide 160 Meter Contest CW

February — ARRL International DX Contest CW, CQ World Wide WPX RTTY Contest, CQ World Wide 160 Meter Contest SSB

March — ARRL International DX Contest SSB, CQ World Wide WPX Contest SSB

May — CQ World Wide WPX Contest CW

June — ARRL June VHF Contest

July — CQ World Wide VHF Contest

September — ARRL September VHF Contest, CQ World Wide DX RTTY Contest

October — CQ World Wide DX Contest SSB

November — ARRL November Sweepstakes CW, ARRL November Sweepstakes SSB, CQ World Wide DX Contest CW

December — ARRL 160 Meter Contest,

ARRL 10 Meter Contest

Keep in mind that many of the contests that have both SSB and CW events, such as ARRL International DX, ARRL November Sweepstakes, CQ World Wide DX, etc, combine your club contest scores for both contests into one grand total in the club results listing. In addition, your log count is also added together, so if N3FJP operates both Sweepstakes SSB and Sweepstakes CW, for example, that counts as two logs submitted. The total number of logs submitted affects your club classification for ARRL contests.

Setting Up Your Club and Submitting Your Club Score

For contests sponsored by CQ, submitting as a club couldn't be easier. Each member should simply submit their contest results as usual, but also include the club name that you decide on in the Cabrillo file (most contest logging programs provide a "Club Name" field on the Cabrillo creation form). As long as your club submits at least four Cabrillo logs with the same contest name specified in the Cabrillo log file, your club results will be totaled and listed. There isn't any prior registration requirement or any-

2014 ARRL November Sweepstakes (SSB)														+ Scores Table Key		
Displaying entries for Club=Northeast Maryland Amateur Radio Contest Society																
Entries 1 to 7 of 7 listed																
#	Call	Score	QSOs	Mult	Class	Section	Check	Hours	160	80	40	20	15	10	Club	Ops
1	W3JX	147,258	909	81	U	MDC	71	22		296	123	193	24	273	Northeast Maryland Amateur Radio Contest Society	
2	N3FJP	97,774	589	83	ML	MDC	76	21		149	148	125	99	68	Northeast Maryland Amateur Radio Contest Society	(+N3HCN)
3	N3UR	52,822	343	77	Q	MDC	63	18		102	36	48	118	39	Northeast Maryland Amateur Radio Contest Society	
4	WC3N	8,960	80	56	A	MDC	71	9		38	2	37	3		Northeast Maryland Amateur Radio Contest Society	
5	N3OZT	7,380	82	45	B	MDC	93	4				82			Northeast Maryland Amateur Radio Contest Society	
6	KB3JQQ	4,088	73	28	A	MDC	03	7						73	Northeast Maryland Amateur Radio Contest Society	
7	K4JDF	1,824	38	24	A	MDC	91	3	3	18	5	2	10		Northeast Maryland Amateur Radio Contest Society	
Totals		320,106	2,114	394				84		550	363	455	280	466		

Select Entries to List			
	Class	Section/Division	Club
Select:	All	and All	and Northeast Maryland Amateur Radio Contest Society

Figure 3 — Results from the 2014 November Sweepstakes SSB for the Northeast Maryland Amateur Radio Contest Society.

More information is available at www.cqww.com/rules.htm.

Seeing the Results

While the accomplishments and goals of our individual members, lofty or modest, always come first, seeing how our club placed overall is fun, too. Both ARRL and CQ provide club results in their respective summary articles. For ARRL contests, go to the Contest Results Articles web page at www.arrl.org/contest-results-articles, click on the year, find the contest, and click on FULL RESULTS. For CQ contests, go to the respective results contest link (for example, the CQ World Wide link is www.cqww.com/results.htm) and click WRITE UP.

ARRL also has a results database with lots of details. Just go to the Results Database page (www.arrl.org/results-database) and select a contest. Then, at the bottom of the page that appears, select your club from the drop-down menu and click SELECT and SORT ENTRIES. An example of the results can be seen in Figure 3.

CQ doesn't yet have a score database online, but they do provide an *Excel* spreadsheet for many contests with similar details. From their results page (www.cqww.com/results.htm), click the CLUB SCORE SUMMARY (.xls file) link. After you download the spreadsheet, click on the + on the row by your club name to see everyone's individual details (make sure you enable editing in the spreadsheet first).

Conclusion

Want to breathe some new life into your local group, build a team, enhance camaraderie, and have a lot of fun? Setting your local group up for club contesting could be the answer. It certainly was for our Northeast Maryland Amateur Radio Contest Society!

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thing else you have to do. The rules for each CQ contest have more details in the "Club Competition" section.

For ARRL contests, you'll need to affiliate your club with ARRL if you haven't already. In addition to making your group ARRL club contest eligible, becoming an ARRL Affiliated Club has lots of other great benefits detailed here: www.arrl.org/affiliated-club-benefits. You can apply for affiliation at www.arrl.org/application-for-affiliation.

Once you are affiliated with ARRL, simply add your club name to your Cabrillo submission file. Because ARRL also requires members to be in good standing, when you enter as a club for ARRL contests, your group's contest coordinator must submit a roster of participants, within 30 days after the contest, to contests@arrl.org.

Club Categories

ARRL

ARRL organizes contest club categories by size, so you can more easily see your results compared to similarly sized clubs (see the sidebar, "The Club Gavel Competition"). ARRL club categories include:

Unlimited — 51 or more entries, all within

a 175-mile radius or one ARRL section.

Medium — 50 entries or fewer, all within a 175-mile radius or one ARRL section, and not qualifying as a local club.

Local — 10 or fewer entries all within a 35-mile radius.

More details and other criteria are explained in Section 4, at www.arrl.org/files/file/Clubs/Club%20Gavel%20Competition-V3.pdf.

CQ

For CQ contests, the club categories are:

A. US Clubs: Participation is limited to club members residing and operating within a 250-mile radius circle from the center of the club area (except for expeditions organized specifically for the contest conducted by members who reside within the club circle).

B. DX Clubs: Participation is limited to club members residing and operating within either the DXCC country where the club is located, or within a 400 km radius circle from the center of the club area (except for expeditions organized specifically for the contest conducted by members who reside within the club area).