

WRTC 2018 Father and Son Team VY2ZM/K1ZM (#1841) & KK6ZM Win SSB Only Trophy (Competing as Team NA-07 Representing CANADA from Prince Edward Island)

Overview

If you were lucky enough to attend the 8th running of the World Radio Team Championships which took place from 11-16 July in Wittenberg Germany, you already know what it was like! It was held in a small German town SW of Berlin with quaint local streets, some fine beer gardens and a great group of DL organizers led by Chris DL1MGB. It was a week of wonderful camaraderie among old friends and FOC mates coupled with many nights of seemingly all-night conversations with some of the best contesters and Dx'ers from all around the world.

For my son Patrick, KK6ZM, and I it was our second WRTC operating together as a unique father & son team. We decided to enter in the SSB only class this time out because, as a relatively new amateur, Patrick's CW skills are not yet proficient enough to keep pace with the young "rabbits" who we knew would easily outdistance us in the mixed mode category of the competition with me being the only one operating on CW mode. We had attempted a mixed mode entry in WRTC 2014 and quickly realized that we could not be competitive without a greater emphasis on CW as there is far more CW activity during an IARU Radiosport Contest than there is on SSB. A mixed-mode team cannot do well at a WRTC without a major focus on CW most of the time during the 24 hour operating period.

What the CW Only and SSB Only Categories are all about.....

The Single Mode categories in a WRTC are intended to focus specifically on one of the two available modes that are tested in the competition. To win the SSB category, for example, a team must make the highest number of SSB Qso's but there is a significant caveat along the way. The winning team must also operate CW mode and make at least 35% of the total number of QSO's made (eg: SSB and CW added together) in order to take home the prize. It turns out that this 35% CW requirement, while not impossible, is a bit tricky to manage – especially if you are sleepy and fail to do the calculations properly along the way. Please read on.....as we almost blew it...and would have lost the whole thing due to our initial confusion regarding the method of calculation!

Our Team & Site

At the site drawing on Friday morning, Patrick selected our envelope and we wound up with the most Northerly WRTC location. It was site JBG-3 at Juterbog which is at grid locator: JO61MX. Roberto, CE3CT, became our referee and is well known as one of the up and coming contesters from Zone 12 these days. He was a valued member of the team which also included Reiner, DK2OO as our site manager, ably assisted by Joshua, DM7JO, Wies SP1EG, and Pius DL1MDY who also provided our transportation to and from the site. It was roughly an hour's drive from Wittenberg which was quite convenient for us.

Contest Setup Begins

Upon arrival at our site we began unloading our suitcases in what seemed like +40C temperatures inside the tent with 100% humidity. I remember dripping sweat onto my laptop much of the time during setup it was so humid! We set up our K3's, established our WINTEST network, tested the required contest recording software and ensured the audio output to Roberto was working as required. We often refer to our hobby as "wireless" but the total "rat's-nest" of cables and jumpers that became connected together on our two operating tables looked like a disaster but it all worked as it should – and we declared we were ready by about 1600 that afternoon. Thus we were able to head back to town earlier than many teams and invited Roberto and Dale VE7SV over to our favourite beer garden for some schnitzel and relaxation.

1200z Saturday the Race is On!

At 1145z, Roberto opened our envelope and we then learned that we were Y87B which seemed like a great callsign on SSB, eg: Yankee Eight Seven **BRAVO!!**

Our operating strategy placed Pat on 20M and I elected to start on 40M despite the fact that it was broad daylight. Nevertheless, we had a respectable 216 first hour on SSB – even though we knew that the mixed mode teams would start with both operators on CW and they probably would have far better numbers as a result. No matter we thought, as we had made a good start in our track of the competition.

The first hours went very well for us with rates over 200. An hour or so before sunset, I switched over to 75M and Pat dropped down from 20M to take my place on 40M. Things continued to go well and at some point I did some CW as our SSB numbers versus CW were way out of whack at the time.

As expected, things slowed to a crawl around 0200 local time. 20M was pretty dead, 40M Phone was pretty fished out and the weak East Coast NA stations that were on could barely hear us with our 100w and low antenna. Pat took my place on 75M and even there the rates were abysmal. Our worst two hours – a 40 and a 50 hour were garnered during these hours.

To add to our misery, the temperature dropped like a rock and we all put on our jackets and sweaters to stay warm and I noticed Roberto covered from head to toe with a heavy blanket....I surely wished I had had one at the time! We started praying for sunrise and some warmth and when it started to get gray outside, the rates started to rise again.

Our Entry Almost Ends in Disaster!

About 0530z Patrick took a look one more time at the rules and started hollering at me to take my phones off. He had read that the rules said we had to have at least 35% of our TOTAL QSO's on CW mode and that by his calculations we were then only at about 28-29%. "What in Blazes I said...How in the Hell did that happen?" Well, in my haste and stupidity I had been tracking our CW Qso's over our SSB Qso's and by both of our two solar calculators, I had us comfortably at 40% - but boy was I misinformed!

I asked Pat – "What is the DELTA? How many Qso's am I short on CW?" Pat sort of frowned and really looked as if he did not want to tell me the bad news. He said, "We are short by about 365 qso's right now and 20M Phone is starting to open again for me and I am getting a pretty fair run!" This meant I had only about 6.5 hours to close the gap and, worse than that, Pat was moving out again on SSB – so my shortfall was a MOVING TARGET and it was moving AGAINST ME! What to do? What to do?

(My wife and daughter were also watching the live scores at the time from a hotel in Prague and they could see that we were way below the required hurdle rate on CW – and both were mortified as to what the two of us were doing. My daughter Lucy kept saying "Pat should stop making SSB Qso's!" but that would have also been a poor strategic move. The only thing to do was for me to go onto CW, stay there as long as I might have some rate and hope I could close the gap before 1200z when the contest would end!

"Oh Crap!" I said as I awoke from my morning stupor and I immediately switched over to 80M CW even though it was at least 2 hours after local SR. Surprisingly, the rate was still pretty good for about an hour but, before long, I was forced to QSY to 40M.

From 0530z-0630z I made about 165 Qso's (And Pat started to smile a bit).

From 0630z-0730z I made another 156 more Qso's on CW (I kept saying "You gotta believe!")

From 0730z-0830z The rate dropped to something like 140 CW Qso's and Pat was moving out on 20M.

From 0830z-0930z Something like another 120 CW Qso's

From 0930z-1030z Something like another 100 on 40CW – but the band was starting to go dry finally

From 1030z-1100z I think I stayed on 40M CW and when we checked our ratios we were now at 39% on CW mode – I breathed a BIG sigh of relief and felt it was safe enough to go over to 40M SSB for a bit. Pat had switched over to 15M SSB during this hour (which had finally opened for us) and before I knew it, we were back down at 36%. At about 1115z I asked Pat to go back to 20M SSB and I went to CW on 15M. There was no CQ rate on 15M but the band was pretty populated with contesters to my South so I just did S&P until the contest ended and with luck had managed to raise the CW ratio back to 37.46% when the clock struck 1200z and the contest was over. We figured we were “safe enough” even after dupe checking and log checking and it turns out that it was indeed enough.

Some Statistical Analysis...

A quick review of our Cabrillo log indicates that we made 3,625 total qso's of which 2,267 were on SSB and 1,358 were on CW. We had bested the WRTC 2014 SSB score of I4UFH/IK1JHS by more than 200 qso's having averaged 151 Qso's per hour for the entire contest. We had had 8 hours at 200 per hour and one 180 hour along the way. And, if you looked at the WRTC team point totals in the Final Results for WRTC 2018, we had finished in “DEAD LAST PLACE” on the basis of total points scored versus the other teams. However, we were not being measured on total points/total mults nor on total HQ stations worked, etc. Rather, we had achieved the highest SSB total among the 63 WRTC teams besting the nearest WRTC team SSB total by more than 700 qso's. For us, we had achieved our dream of actually getting to the podium at the Closing Ceremony and we were simply delighted to be a part of it all.

Epilogue

As far as I know, there have only been a handful of Father/Son or Father/Daughter teams that have competed in a WRTC to date. These are:

VY2ZM/K1ZM and KK6ZM (WRTC 2014 and WRTC 2018)

K5GO and N5DX at WRTC 2010 in Moscow

ZL3IO and his daughter ZL4YL at WRTC 2018 in Germany

(There may have been one or two more – for which I apologize if I have left any family team out!)

It was with a certain amount of pride that a father and son could make it to a WRTC and then to actually have managed to achieve our limited objective of winning one of the categories. I am sure the above family teams have all felt the same way - first to have qualified and then to have had the distinct honour to have been able to compete at this world class level of competition.

At the age of 72, I am looking forward to WRTC 2022 in Northern Italy – but **not** as a competitor – perhaps as a Referee – or maybe I will just come with my wife and “hang out” and drink beer or enjoy some good Italian wine while the “younger rabbits” enjoy their time in the contest – HI.

161 de Jeff Briggs, VY2ZM/K1ZM FOC # 1841

Email: K1ZM@aol.com