

CQP Strategy for Little Pistol Stations

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When it comes to the California QSO Party, there are only two strategies – in-state and out-of-state. Whether your station is a Derringer, a Colt 45, or a Magnum 44 the strategy is the same. If you are in California, you should be trying to run stations (e.g. calling CQ) until you have a sizable number of multipliers and your rates have fallen to a low level. If you are out-of-state, you should be searching-and-pouncing (e.g. S&P) unless you feel like you have already worked everyone you hear calling CQ on that band/mode.

The only difference between the little pistols and big guns will be rates and scores. Stations with amps and beams can hold a frequency in the midst of lots of adjacent signals; the 100 watt/no-gain antenna stations need to move to quieter sections of the band. But, the out-of-state ops will find you because they are looking for you and they need you. Non-CA stations have no point or multiplier value to them.

CQP 2006 will take place near the bottom of the solar cycle. That means, most likely, 10 meters will be useless for all or most of the contest. It also means that 15 meters will be marginally useful. Most of the action will probably start on 20 meters (both modes) and gravitate to 40, 80 and 160 from late afternoon through early morning. If a little pistol station has antennas that cover 15, 20, 40 and 80, it should do reasonably well.

In most other contests, little pistol stations typically spend most of their time S&Ping. And, that's logical. In CQP, however, it makes no sense. The great majority of stations calling CQ will be CA stations. After you work one of them, and get the CA multiplier, every other one you work counts just for points. In contrast, every out-of-state op you work, especially during the early hours of the contest, is likely to provide both points and a multiplier. To better understand why that's a much better choice consider that you hear 10 CW and 10 SSB stations calling CQ. Nine of them on each mode are CA stations; one on each mode is from Texas. You S&P and work all 20 of them. That gives you 2 multipliers – CA and TX. If you were CQing instead, on 20 meters, you might end up in the same amount of time with 10 multipliers.

Now, on CW, those 10 QSOs were worth 30 points in both cases, and on SSB, those QSOs were worth 20 points in both cases. But if you were S&Ping and got only two multipliers, then your score would be 100 points (e.g. 50 x 2). If you were CQing and snagged 10 multipliers, your score would be 500 points (e.g. 50 x 10). When you hit about 40 multipliers, start seeing a high percentage of already-worked multipliers with each QSO, and your rate drops way down, then and only then does it make sense to start S&Ping. That's because both in-state and most out-of-state QSOs will only get you points, so there is no strategic difference. Before you've garnered those 40 multipliers, though, you are really doing your score a disservice by going to S&P.

For little pistol and big cannon stations that are out of California, it makes no sense to try running stations early on. Most of the savvy CA stations will be running stations, too. So, go with the flow and do S&P. It only makes sense to switch to CQing if you run out of

“running” CA stations to work. If you are looking for an illusive county, you stand a much better chance of finding it by S&Ping than by calling “CQ Lake” or whatever. If it’s a rare county, those ops are going to be running from bell to bell, and won’t be S&Ping.

Like the other contests of 2006, CQP will most likely be concentrated on fewer bands. This will tend to lower overall scores because you won’t be able to work the same station on six HF bands. Unless the number of participants increases to compensate for the loss of usable bands, QSO number and point scores will be lower. However, multipliers are not really affected. You get one regardless of band or mode for a total of 58. So don’t be disheartened by a dead 10 or 15 meters. Even a little pistol station could achieve a sweep on just 20 and 40 meters.

Unlike most state QSO parties whose rules encourage in-state QSOs, CQP encourages out-of-state QSOs. This is good news for out-of-state participants because it tends to ensure there will be CA operators working the long-haul bands during the daylight hours looking for just such stations. It’s also good news for CA stations because it means there will be more out-of-state operators hunting them down.
