

A contester since his early days in ham radio, Gator, N5RZ, is accustomed to running state-of-the-art gear at the biggest superstations. Elecraft K4D, Icom IC-7851, Alpha amps, automatic rotator systems... the works.

So how cool is it that for the 2025 ARRL CW Sweepstakes, Gator dusted off Collins twins and a Collins amplifier from the early 1960s and jumped into a ham radio time machine? He'd lusted after the Collins twins during his 1970s origins in the hobby.

"About 15 years ago, I picked up a 75S-3B receiver, 32S-3 transmitter and 30L-1 amp," Gator says. "After sitting in storage for years, I finally got all 'new' tubes, rebuilt the 516F-2 power supply with solid-state components and did some minor work.

"Voila! It all worked."

Since then, he says he's played with the setup from time to time but never did a serious contest with it. The 2025 CW SS would be its turn.

"Takes up a whole table, but what fun to operate! A good space heater as well," he says.

Of course, a time warp to the early 1960s means leaving most of the modern conveniences behind. Without a way to inject frequency information into the logging software, the software can't track band changes, which means needing to switch both when changing bands. (Despite going old-school with the radios, a return to using dupe sheets and pencils was a leap too far, he says. N1MM+ was his software of choice.)

Tubes, tank circuits and separate RX and TX meant "lots of knobs" to change bands, so that didn't happen often, Gator says. He started on 20 Meters (14.035, actually) and stayed on that frequency for five hours despite interlopers he was able to chase off. His stay on 20 netted 441 QSOs.

His goal was lofty: 1,000 QSOs and a sweep, "but sleep seemed a better alternative," so with 18 hours operating time, he ended with 931 QSOs and 83 sections. "Never heard VO. Heard VE9DX with a mob and blew it off. Never heard him again."

After log checking, his 921 QSOs and 83 sections was good for 152,886 points, about 25,000 points out of the Top 10 for Single Operator, High Power, but No.1 for retro cool.

As for the nickname, it goes back to the days of the Texas superstation N5AU. In 1985, he helped build a sloper system for 160 Meters. It got out well but was a bust for reception. At one point, Gordon, N5AU, was operating on 15m and hearing from Europeans how loud, but also how deaf, was the 160 Meter station. After the fourth or fifth time asking if Ralph (Gator's given name) had worked so-and-so, Gordon finally asked if it was another "Gator" report. The nickname stuck.

### **Single Operator, High Power**

Build a massive station and put it in one of Canada's rarer sections and it just might be a recipe for success. At least it was in 2025 for Ken, K6LA, a.k.a. VY2TT.

“This is a bucket-list item for me that I never thought I could achieve,” Ken writes. His 1,154 QSOs and 84 sections was good for 193,872 points. “I thought I had a sweep but must have busted one of the rare ones.”

Ken’s six-tower station has directional antennas on all bands from 160-10 although, arguably, the higher antennas are better suited for DX than domestic. He’s also got some good ears, either the ones on the sides of his head or through quiet reception abilities, as he picked out the author’s pipsqueak signal from a heavy pileup. (Certainly, the VE4 prefix is always good for a couple dB in a pileup!)

He’s quick to credit those who helped him land on top. “Thanks to RAC for making PEI a section. Thanks to N2IC, N9RV and N6TV, among others, for not competing seriously.” For their parts, Steve, N2IC, and Pat, N9RV, were on for limited hours and Bob, N6TV, was piloting Hawaii’s KH6YY as KH6J.

Familiar faces rounded out the rest of the Top 10: Mark, AG9A, (@NØNI) took second, Dave, K5GN, Tree, N6TR (@W7RM) and George, K5PI, (operating another George’s station, K5TR) round out the Top 5.

### **Single Operator, Low Power**

Minnesota is represented very well in SS, yet Pat, NAØN, (@WØZT) managed to edge out NP3A to win with 925 QSOs and 84 sections to Eric’s 908 QSOs and a sweep. It highlights the value of getting every multiplier you can: with a magic number of seven (any combination of fewer NAØN and more NP3A QSOs) it would have been Eric taking top bragging rights. Puerto Rico fielded just two stations, combining for 1,059 QSOs. Eric was in demand.

Pat credits “working the second radio hard,” and a good station for the win. Not bad from a section with 41 stations combining for 14,379 QSOs.

“Yeah, there’s nothing rare about Minnesota. We joke about the vanishing pileups that we get here where you start with two guys calling, work the first one and then there is nothing left.

“That’s why I ended up making about 36 per cent of my QSOs via S&P on the second radio.”

His missing section is one a lot of stations missed, Newfoundland and Labrador, which was exceptionally rare given the only station to enter a log, VO2AC, recorded 69 QSOs and 30 sections.

“I heard a very weak VO2AC on Sunday, but so many guys kept calling that I could never hear who he was answering and I decided to move on. I was kicking myself later when it dawned on me that I probably never pointed the stack directly at him, and that I sometimes do surprisingly well in pileups for the far-off Canadian sections.

“I thought that blunder probably cost me a great opportunity to take top spot. With the news tonight (the author’s email about his win), that will no longer haunt me.”

Steve, W9SN, from his nicely appointed Tennessee station, took third, with 153,680 points.

### **Single Operator, QRP**

Brian, N2MF, ran away with this category, with, interestingly, the exact same score as his New York counterpart, Vic, N2PP, who was operating in Single Operator, Low Power: 639 QSOs and 84 sections for 107,352 points.

Gary, N7IR, a usual suspect in this category, came in second with 579 QSOs and 83 sections for 96,114 points.

Certainly, handing out SF as the section will get some attention, and Frank, W6JTI, made good use of a relatively rare section, taking third place with 498 QSOs and 84 sections.

Pat, KØPC, (514 Qs, 80 sections) and Tom, K3TW, (488 Qs, 80 sections) round out the Top 5.

### **Single Operator Unlimited, High Power**

Maybe the thin air of the mile-high city doesn't scrub velocity from RF signals as much as at lower altitudes, but it must be something, because it seems rare is the year Randy, KØEU puts in a serious effort in SSCW that he's not winning Single Operator Unlimited, High Power.

Randy and Marko, N5ZO, both secured a sweep, but just 27 more QSOs gave Randy the title, 1,111 QSOs to 1,084. It's instructive to compare the scores by band: Randy ran away with 80, 106Qs to Marko's 58, but Marko used 10M from California to great advantage, beating his Colorado rival 212Qs to 35. Randy's strong showing on 80-15 was the difference, with 106, 300, 340 and 330 Qs to Marko's 58, 268, 305 and 241. Says something about a central location a mile above sea level.

### **Single Operator Unlimited, Low Power**

Just 12 QSOs made the difference in this category: Malcolm, KI1G, beat Don, N4ZZ, 979 QSOs to 969, or 166,430 points to 164,390. Both had sweeps. The difference largely came down to Malcolm's small but clearly important work on 10 Meters. Aside from Malcolm's 46 QSOs on 10 Meters to Don's three, Don was ahead by 31 QSOs on the other bands.

It was a similarly close fight for third between Cip, N2YO, and Ed, K1TR. Despite missing a section, Cip edged out Ed with 870 QSOs to Ed's 849. The final scores were tight: 146,160 to 144,330. Squeezing 11 more QSOs out of his 18.1 hours would have been enough to move Ed up a notch.

Charlie, N9CO, made two more QSOs than Ed, but just missing the sweep by one left him in fifth place.

### **Single Operator Unlimited, QRP**

Does sending U for Unlimited, despite whatever power levels are in play, pose a disadvantage to SOUQRP ops? The author, as I'm sure a lot of operators do, regularly takes extra effort to pull out Q stations, cognizant of the difficulty running five watts or fewer.

It's an interesting question to ask, since the scores in this U category seem to suffer more than in Unlimited Low Power or Unlimited High Power relative to the non-assisted categories.

Tom, K2TW, beat runner-up Gary, WR3R, by nearly 13,000 points: Tom recorded 474 QSOs and 79 sections while Gary racked up 388 QSOs and 80 sections. A three-hour difference in

operating time in Tom's favour helped, but he also beat Gary on every band but 10, where Gary had 9 QSOs to Tom's zero.

Jim, NØUR, beat Gary by one QSO but missed one more section, for a score only 618 points shy of second place. Four more QSOs, or one more section, would have been enough. Now that's a tight race!

Scores fall off considerably behind Jim: Don, K6GHA, and Mike, K5NZ, round out the Top 5.

### **Multioperator, Single Transmitter, High Power**

The team at Ken's N6RO superstation edged out former ARRL author and technical whiz Ward, NØAX, and his team at NØAX by 19 QSOs. Both stations had sweeps.

Ken teamed up with Chris, N6WM, and Dave, WD6T and put 1,004 QSOs in the log, while Ward joined Steve, KG5VK, Jim, KKØU, and Mark, N5OT, at Ward's growing rural Missouri station.

Once again, low bands were superior inland but this time, high bands from the coast made the difference: Ward's team beat Ken's on every band but 15 and 10, where Ken's ran away with a combined 359 QSOs (238 on 15 and 121 on 10) to Ward's 87 QSOs (83 and 4).

Bob, K8IA and Mike, KC7V, partnered up at Bob's Arizona station to take third, and while they beat Ward's team by one QSO (986 to 985), they missed a sweep by one section.

At WW2Y, John, N2NU, and Pete, WW2Y, teamed up to take fourth, with 976 QSOs and 84 sections from Northern New York. Lee, KY7M, and Brian, W7JET, teamed up at KY7M for fifth place, 927 QSOs and 84 sections.

### **Multioperator, Single Transmitter, Low Power**

This is an amazing category for introducing amateurs to the joys of contesting. You get lots of seat time, Elmers close at hand and a level of pressure as high or as low as the team wishes.

The winners, KT4XA operated by Laura, K4CNY, and Chris, NV4B, didn't take this assignment lightly, with 865 QSOs and 84 sections for 145,320 points from the Renegade Rovers Amateur Radio Club station in Alabama.

In second place, not far behind, was the team at N4QS, operated by Dan, K4FN, Jerod, N4GO, and David, N4QS, at his nicely appointed Kentucky station. They racked up 843 QSOs and 84 sections for 141,624 points.

Third place, with 799 QSOs and 83 sections, went to John, KRØP, and his crew of Randy, KØNC, and Paul, NØGN, from John's station in Nebraska.

From Nova Scotia, and featuring Ron, VE3VN and the dearly missed Cary, VE4EA (SK), was VA1EET, where 768 QSOs and a sweep put them in fourth place. Cary, an avid contester for many years, died unexpectedly Dec. 4, 2025, leaving a big hole in the Radiosport Manitoba family.

Tom, W8TK, gathered three friends, Paul, K7AZT, Larry, KE2VB, and Roger, W7ES, to fill out the Top 5 with 692 QSOs and 84 sections for 116,256 points.

## **School Club**

This is a category that is often overlooked, but is also an excellent chance to mentor new people into contesting. The rules to qualify as a school club are fairly simple: any college or university, technical school or secondary and other schools qualify. The trick is that only current staff and students may run the station. Alumni can operate as well but the spirit of the rule is that alumni would mentor students and staff new to contesting.

The station must be on the school campus, with an exception to allow an off-campus station only if no campus station exists. There are no sub-categories, so low and high power, and the use of spotting assistance, are all fair game. Importantly, participants are allowed, if not encouraged, to use social media, live streaming and internet chat rooms to help drum up interest.

So, with that out of the way, it's unfortunate there's no Top 10, only a Top 2, as there were only two stations in S: KØHC, the Hesston College campus station in Heston, Neb., helmed by Bob, WØBH, and K9IU, the Amateur Radio Club at Indiana University in Bloomington, Ind., operated by Joe, K9UR.

Bob won this category, as he nearly always does, even when there are more stations. His score would be impressive in any category: 797 QSOs and 84 sections for 133,896 points.

Joe's score reflects his limited time on the air: 218 QSOs and 78 sections in 6.3 hours.

Notably absent were some previous combatants in this category, namely W1AF at Harvard and W6YX at Stanford. There must be other club stations at campuses in the U.S. and Canada, so perhaps a challenge cup would help inspire schools to jump on board. Worth some thought.

## **2026 November Sweepstakes CW**

Dust off that paddle and update your log files: the 2026 running of CW SS takes place Nov. 7-9. See you there!