

WRTC 2000 Slovenia

By John Devoldere, ON4UN

Four years ago I wrote my story about WRTC 1996 in San Francisco. It was the story of a competitor. I represented Belgium together with ON9CIB in 1996. This time I was invited as a referee. Mark, ON4WW and Peter, ON6WW, would defend the Belgian honors. They were selected on the basis of their results in international contests, obtained over the past years. This had to be a good Belgian team. What follows is my story of WRTC2000, also the story of a referee.

Organising WRTC 2000

In August 1996, Fred Laun, K3ZO, wrote that it would be almost impossible for the next WRTC organizers to do as well as Rusty, W6AOT, who was in charge of the event in the Bay area. It would be a formidable challenge, indeed. Exactly 4 years after the second edition of the "Olympic games of Contesting" it was the Slovenian Contest Club, guided by Tine, S50A, who organized WRTC2000. Slovenia, which is the far northern part of the ex Yugoslavian republic, been an independent republic since 1992, it borders the Austrian Alps to the North. Slovenia covers but 20,000 square km with less than 2 mi. inhabitants, but this was obviously no handicap for S50S to turn WRTC2000 into a huge success, and an unforgettable experience for every participant and visitor!



Part of the competitors of the various countries during the opening ceremony held in the center of the town of Bled.

As in the previous editions, not less than 53 teams formed by 106 of the world's best contesters would compete in this event. The number of teams per country was determined by the activity of the contesters in that country in the major international DX-contests. In addition there were a number of so-called wild card teams, where top of the notch contesters, who found no place in a national team could be recovered. In total, the US had no less than 13 teams, Belgium had just one, the same as the entire African continent. Most of the teams were proposed by world recognized contest clubs or national organizations.



Most members of the US delegation during the opening ceremony.

The major phase of the competition took place during the weekend of July 7/8th, during the IARU HF Championship contest. Contrary to previous editions, the competition started two days earlier, when all teams had to listen to the pile-up tapes (5 minutes of CW and 5 minutes of phone) and try to recognize as many calls as possible. This "simulation" test was administered to 6 groups with a maximum of 20 competitors, and counted for 10 % of the total score. It turned out to be a fine idea to start early with the competition since the tension had already started growing.

The final score calculation would be totally different from what was done during the previous WRTCs. Every team should work as many as possible QSO and multipliers on the 5 bands (10 through 80), in both modes. This means there would be 3 sub-competitions, one for the highest number of SSB QSOs, one for the most CW QSOs and one for the most multipliers. The

winner in each of these 3 categories would receive 300 points, the other teams would score proportionally. A team which works half the number of QSO's as compared to the winner, would score 150 points. To round off the total score to 1000 points, 100 points are added from the pile-up tape competition. I consider this as a very interesting and certainly innovative way of scoring!



Some of the referees during the inauguration ceremony.

Besides the 103 competitors, 53 referees were invited, one of which would join every team during the contest to insure compliance with the rules. These referees were expected to listen to the entire contest and to log any observations they might have. They also had to check that at no time power would be higher than 100 Watt, and that, once the contest was started no communication was made by any of the operators using any kind of telephone. All the invited referees were experienced contesters, many of them ex competitors of WRTC. Heading the referees was Dave Sumner, K1ZZ. Let me just quote a few of the referee's calls, to show what a good company I was in: N6AA, W0UN, K4VX, DJ6QT, DJ2YA, UA2FZ, JE1JKL, VK2IA, EA1AK, HA0DU, N5KO, K1KI, K1VR, K6NA, W6OAT, OH0XX, PY5EG, UA9MA, RU1AA, YT6A, YT3T, S57AW together with 10 other well known contesters from Slovenia. As for myself, I had volunteered as a referee, as this time Belgium had a young though experienced crew of operators. It appeared that I was selected to be the referee for the "team Africa", composed by Chris, ZS6EZ and Bernie, ZS4TX. Chris told me he had planned to converse with Bernie in Afrikaans during the contests, jokingly

adding that the referee would not understand that language anyhow. They were not counting on me, who understands South Afrikaans 100%, which is just like a dialect of Dutch, which is my mother tongue!



The QTH of “my” Africa team. All stations used an identical 3 element 3-band yagi and a duaband 80/40 m wire antenna, both approx. 12 m high. All station, without exceptions, were located on top of a mountain, ranging between 500 and 1500 m high.

The center of WRTC was the small town of Bled, about 20 km from the Austrian border, or about 50 km North-West of Ljubilana. For me it was a 1200 km drive from my home town, all on perfect highways, a drive that took me less than 12 hours. Bled is a very attractive little town located on the borders of a small lake, and it has a large number of hotels and a perfect and affordable tourist infrastructure, just what was needed to organize WRTC2000 and turn it into a huge success. Tine, S50A, and his friends have organized these games in a very professional manner. To give an example: all visitors, arriving by air to Ljubiana airport were collected at the airport and driven to Bled by the military! What a service! It is clear that Tine has some good relations with the top-level military officials in his country. By the way, all lodging and food costs for both the competitors and the referees were fully paid by the organization! In total, the budget for WRTC2000 was around \$300,000, all covered by sponsors and donations.

The first guests arrived Tuesday afternoon, causing quite a crowd of happy faces at the Astoria hotel where the WRTC2000 headquarters was installed, and where everyone had to check in. It all went smooth and soon many friends seemed to be having a good time over a good beer (the Slovenian beer WAS good) and at nearly 30 degrees C. Needless to say this all went on until the wee hours of the morning!



View to the West from the Africa team QTH, located on top of a 650 m hill about 20 km East of Ljubiana. We can see the city in the distance.

On Wednesday evening, there was a meeting of the referees to clear up any points of discussion that remained. The same evening dinner was served for the first time at the Ice Hall (a small Ice Hockey stadium in rest during summer months). On Thursday morning there was a meeting with all competitors to give final contest details, rules and to answer any remaining questions.

The pile-up tapes

The first part of the competition, the tape test was held on Thursday afternoon in the Festival Hall. In a large room, 20 PC's were installed, and in 6 groups with a maximum of 20 members, all teams would listen to the CW as well as the phone tapes, trying to recognize and log as many correct calls as possible. Being there all the time as an observer and photographer, I noticed that most competitors logged between 50 and 60 calls, of the approx. 100

calls to be recognized. Some, but very few, copied even over 70 calls, but clearly all these were not correct.

The inauguration ceremony.

The official inauguration ceremony was held after the pile-up test in the center of Bled. As is the case with the “other” Olympic games, all teams walked down the stairs into the arena, applauded by hundreds of visitors. This was really an unforgettable experience. A music band and a few dancing groups helped to warm up the atmosphere. After speeches by the mayor and by Tine, S50A, all the guests were invited for dinner at the Ice Hall.



The field-day style QTH of the winning team S584M (K1TO / N5TJ)

On our way to the contest sites.

Friday morning we all gathered once more in the Ice Hall for the final briefing. The leader of each delegation drew an sealed envelop, containing the callsign to be used, and gave it to their referee, who would open the envelope 5 minutes before the start of the contest. Fifty three special callsigns were reserved for the WRTC2000 competition. In San Francisco, we all had received a “one by one” call (I had K6S). Tine, however, went the opposite way: a long and unusual call. All teams were to receive an S5 call whose suffix would exist of two figures and 1 letter! The combinations were chosen

so that they would be of approximately the same length in CW, and awkward sounding calls (like S555H) were avoided.

Around 11 AM the first teams left for their contest site. Some were quite close, others were more than 200 km from Bled. Lucky participants were lodged in a restaurant on top of a hill, others had to go on a fieldday. But all stations had an identical 3-element triband yagi at 12m and a 40/80 Windom antenna at the same height.



A view of some of the competitors during one of the 6 pile-up test sessions.

Friday night I was able to visit two more locations East of Ljubljana, and it must be said they were all three as equivalent as possible, all being located on a hilltop between 600 and 700 m high. To me these were all dream QTHs. At our Africa-team hilltop our host was Damian, S57DA. Damian and his XYL runs a café-restaurant with his father and mother. The place also serves as a local club station (S53DZZ) and has a nice shack and workshop.

While the teams were setting up Tine had organized a special dinner on Friday night for the CQ Contest Hall of Fame members that were present. Not less than 15 were in Slovenia. S50A, K1AR, N6AA, DJ6QT, PY5EG, K6NA, G3SXW, N6AA, K3EST, AI6V, N2AA and myself went to that dinner, which was very enjoyable. W2GD, who was to be a competitor himself preferred not to come and spend all the available time preparing for the competition.

N6TJ (of ZD8Z fame) and K4VX who were also there had excused themselves for this dinner because of other engagements.

Upon my return at the African hilltop, around 23:30, a party was swinging under the antennas, where ZS6EZ and ZS4TX were joined by PY2NY and PP5NR, who were “camping” on a nearby hilltop for the competition.



Peter, ON6TT during the SSB pile-up test. About 95 % of the competitors copied the calls on paper first, and then logged them in the computer. The remaining 15 % logged directly on the keyboard.

After my departure for the Hall of Fame dinner, Chris and Bernie had moved the 40/80 meter Windom antenna to improve SWR on 80 and to have it broadside NW/SE. The only thing that was left to do was to solve a noise problem. It appeared that the CDR rotator injected noise into the mains (K6NA said this was a commonly know problem due to a diode in the circuit). Another minor problem was that none of the on hand 12 volt power supplies were quiet! Eventually a battery was removed from one of the cars to serve as a “quiet” 12 V power source for the auxiliary equipment!

Whereas Tine had gone all the way to make sure the 53 stations were as equivalent as humanly possible, there still were many differences between the stations. One example is the height of the hill tops varying between 500 and 1500 meters, as well as the exact location, ranging from almost at the Adriatic coast to almost 300 km further East near the Hungarian border. But

it's a good thing these QTH's are not mathematically identical. That gives the competitors at least one excuse for not having won the competition!

Some QTHs seemed to have stubborn noise problems, while others had problems with the mains. The organizers had, however, placed a 2 KW generator at each of the 53 competition sites! When the supply dropped out it was a matter of minutes to have the station back on the air using the generator. During the summers there are often thunderstorms in this country, and it is understandable that locations on the top of these hills are very prone to power mains failure caused by lightning strikes. This is exactly what happened with the Belgian team about 30 minutes into the contest! The fact that Tine went as far as buying 53 identical yagi antennas in order to equalize stations as much as possible proves how thoroughly and professionally this whole competition was planned.



The hall of fame members that were invited to a special dinner on Friday night, while the competitors were supposedly setting up their stations and watching propagation (one of the advantages of not being a competitor).

The contest starts

Saturday noon had come, and at most contest sites the operators had spent the time observing the band conditions and propagation. Things would soon

be getting serious! Some competitors went the extra mile and even installed radios in their hotel room to be able to check propagation over a period of several days!



Bernie, ZS4TX and Chris, ZS6EZ, operating S572L during the competition

At exactly 11:55Z 53 referees opened the sealed envelope containing the callsign to be used. My ZS-team was happy with their call: S572L, which sounded good in SSB as well as in CW. The Belgian team was not so fortunate with S539D, where the D is always a cause of confusion with a B on CW. At 12:00 exactly all hell broke loose in Slovenia! Over the next 24 hours the 53 SWRTC stations would make over 90,000 QSOs! Many of the stations participating in the IARU HF Championship must have been felt assaulted by the sudden emerging of all these S5 stations with these strange calls, and it must have taken some time for some to realize the significance of these awkward calls.

The competition had just started when the weather turned bad. That was the end of a whole week of beautiful sunny 30-degree C weather. Came rain, wind, thunder and lightning. Well there was at least one positive side to it: it would not be uncomfortably warm during the contest!

One half hour into the contest Chris and Bernie of the Africa Team decided to switch off as the thunderstorm came frighteningly close. This was the start of

their first 1-hour off-period. The rules stipulated that all competitors had to take a total of 4 hours off during the 24 hours that the contest lasted, and each off period should be at least 1 hour.



The Russian team composed by RA3AUU and RV1AW were operating the contest in the very luxurious environment of the home of S57M. Their judge (in the foreground) was W1FJ.

After one hour the worst was over, but QRN kept being hectic, and it continued raining very heavily. At least the lightning danger seemed to be over. Later in the afternoon the Africa Team was confronted with another kind of problem. In the restaurant just above the shack, a birthday party, with about 20 dancing and singing people had started. On top of the QRN this was the kind of QRM Chris and Bernie were now confronting! Fortunately, the party was over soon after midnight, just about the time Bernie said he was getting used to the noise and the music. From now on it was just the QRN to bother them.

Fifteen meters was now well open into the USA, and it seemed like Chris was running a good pile-up just like with a long yagi and a kilowatt. The bad weather was still in the area and we could see the skies lightning up now and then.

Twenty meters remained open all night long, as well as 15 in most directions! Forty meters seemed to be a little more difficult, and I think the simple low wire antenna and the 100 watt must be to blame. Around sunrise things seemed to slow down. My team Africa was already extrapolating their actual score, and they expected 1400 to 1500 QSOs by the end of the contest. In San Francisco the better teams made nearly 2500 QSOs and that was at the bottom of the sunspot cycle, but than the contest lasted 22 hours instead of only 20 hours now.



On Sunday morning POP TV, a national 24 hour TV station came to interview Marko, S51KK at the Africa team QTH.

It turned out that, on the average about 10% less QSOs were made as compared to 1996, which is strange. Maybe there was more local publicity made in 1996 for the event, which, I remember very clearly, resulted in overwhelming activity from the US-stations on the bands. It appeared now that the European stations were not all that interested in the event, which probably is the reason for the lower number of QSOs.

On the other hand, the location of WRTC200 in the middle of Europe, as well as the band conditions, made the competitors work about double the number of multipliers as compared to 4 years ago (400 vs. 200).

After 16 hours of almost continuous rain, the bad weather cleared and on Sunday morning we again saw a blue sky. The static level was way down as well. It looked like eventually we would again have nice weather AFTER the

contest. In the mean time, ten meter was wide open for Europe on sporadic-E.

Many competitors seemed to use the strategy of “reserving” most of their off-time for the end of the contest, in order to have off-time at their disposal should the bad weather force them to go temporarily off the air. With the end of the contest approaching many were forced to take their off-time now, often against their own will as 10 meters was wide open for short skip in Europe!



The podium: the overall winners are K1TO and N5TJ (who were already winners in 1996 in San Francisco), 2nd place went to the Russian team composed by RA3AUU (also ON9CIB) and RV1AW, and third came K1AR and K1DG (winners in Seattle in 1990)

Reluctantly, Chris and Bernie had to close down for an 1.5 hour off-period at 09:00UTC. AT that time they had approx. 1400 QSOs and 291 multipliers. With less than 1 hour of operating time, not much would change...

In mid morning a TV crew made it up our mountaintop for an interview with S51KK as well as Chris and Bernie. They would be on the evening news at 7:30 PM.

At 11:03 UTC Chris and Bernie started their last 57 minutes of the contest on 10 meters. Some USA East coast stations came through, but only the strong ones could be worked. Less than 1 hour later it's all over: 1495 QSOs and

300 multipliers. Chris and Bernie estimated they would be somewhere in the middle of the pack. Wait and see, was the message now!



The happy and proud winner team, Dan, K1TO and Jeff, N5TJ showing off all their trophies. Congratulations.

Back to Bled

After a solid meal prepared by Damian's XYL, we were off to Bled, where in the early evening all the teams returned one by one. Rumors started floating. Some teams were said to have made over 2,500 QSOs, and with no less than 400 multipliers. Chris and Bernie didn't really know what to say or what to think.

Shortly, ON4WW and ON6TT arrived. Their score seemed to be a little higher than the one of "my" African team. They appeared to have about 150 more QSO's, mostly on SSB.

Dave (K1ZZ) and Dick (N6AA) were now ready to get cracking and start checking the 53 logs plus some check logs, in order to have the results ready by Monday afternoon.

Sunday night it was almost too quiet in the Ice Hall. It looked like the exuberant atmosphere that we witnessed before the contest had been

replaced with a rather quiet one of almost fearful and anxious waiting for the results. For some it may have been the fear of maybe just not winning, of just missing the podium, for others it may have been the fear of ending up at the end of the pack...



The Belgian competitors Mark, ON4WW and Peter, ON6TT, with Tine, S50A, proudly holding their trophy for the highest number of SSB QSOs.

The same evening a small ceremony was arranged at the Ice Hall for the official introduction of Walter Skudlarek, DJ6QT, into the CQ Contest Hall of Fame. Walter (together with e.g. DJ2YA and myself) is the founder of the RRRDXA, one of the two major Contesting Clubs in Germany. After a short intro by DJ2YA and myself, it was Bob Cox, K3EST, who handed the Contest Hall of Fame plaque over to Walter.

For many, Sunday night was the first early night in almost a week...

Monday: truth's day

The organizers of WRTC2000 had arranged for a whole day's excursion to the Western part of the country, including a visit to the world's second largest caves near Postonja, and later a wine and Parma-type ham tasting in a beautiful and remote village in South Western Slovenia. About 150 booked the tour, and it was well worth it. It was obvious that this was meant to keep us busy while Dave and his friends were compiling the results. Similar trips

were also organized the previous days. These were especially aimed at the YLs who wanted to visit beautiful Slovenia, or even Venice!



ZS4TX and ZS6EZ during the 7:30 evening news on national TV.

At 7 PM the results would be announced during an official ceremony which would be held in the city center, at the same place where the inauguration took place. There seemed to be a number of rumors now, but nobody seemed to be certain, and some of the top teams appeared to be very close to one another.

The first team called to the podium was the team ending in third place. It were K1AR and K1DG reinforcing their first place from 10 years ago by an excellent third place in Slovenia. The European Russian team, composed by my friend RA3AUU and RV1AW ended overall runner up, and the winners were K1TO and N5DG, who also won the previous edition of WRTC in San Francisco (N5DG was then KR0Y)! These results confirmed that the winners of the previous editions were not “just” lucky!

Asking Dan (K1TO) how it felt being “world champion” once more he said *“Well, it was nice that it happened again. Truly, any of a bunch of teams could have won. We just had the right circumstances again this time. The more important thing to me was staying up late every night to visit with so many great guys!!”*

The Belgian team with Peter (ON6TT) and Mark (ON4WW) ended up on a very nice 18th place, while my Africa team ranked 33rd, all that out of 53 competing teams. The Belgian team did 8 places better than what I did four years ago together with ON9CIB (RA3AUU), but was so kind to leave some room for still further improvement at the next edition.



ON4UN, DJ2YA, K3EST and DJ6QT during the introduction of DJ6QT in de Contest Hall of Fame.

Besides the overall score, there were trophies for the winners in each of the sub-competitions: for the highest number of CW QSOs SSB QSOs, multipliers and for the winners of the pile-up tape tests.

To their big surprise, it was the Belgian team that won the trophy for the highest number of SSB QSOs. They really did not expect this, that's why they were still in bed at the time of the ceremony! The Russian team which ended overall second, also won the trophy for the highest number of multipliers, while Dan and Jeff took the two remaining trophies, the CW trophy and the tape-test trophy!

To round this off, "my" African team also achieved a competition's best. They had the cleanest log of all, with only 0.4% of errors, as compared to 0.7 % for the overall winners (and by the way they also made the highest number of QSOs with African stations, but I guess that does not really come as a surprise).

Afterthoughts

Now the tension was over, came the time for reflection, for the stories, and for the excuses, although I only heard a few. But the general opinion was that the Olympic saying “competing is more important than winning” certainly applied. This is not fully true, because I know all teams came to make a good score. A good contester is a winning type. But being part of the best 106 contesters in the world is an accomplishment by itself, and being allowed to spend almost a week together with this eminent crowd is a certainly a recognition by itself.



ON4UN with the Belgian team (ON4WW and ON6TT) who won the SSB QSO trophy, and with RV1AW and RA3AUU, who ended up overall second and also won the multiplier trophy. All four have operated from ON4UN's contest station on several occasions (Arno only once, but he was part of the Russian team who won the 1996 CQ WW CW contest MS as OT6T)

Being part of the referee corps is an honor as well, and a unique experience. Dave, K1ZZ, put it so correctly during the preparatory meeting of the referees by saying that the only ones that learn something in this competition are the referees. They can observe a whole day long the tricks of the trades of their team, and maybe learn from it. Too bad the referees cannot move around during the competition and observe several teams!

Tine went all the way, as far or even further than could be imagined, to level the field for all competitors. The only things he could not level were the mountains. It is true that heights varying between 500 and 1500 m must play a role in propagation, and even more, the sloping terrain around the hill-top location. This may be the reason why at a certain time one station was heard working a solid pile-up to the US, while another one could not hear the US-stations at all. But maybe, a half hour later the situation would reverse. I also have been told that even in Europe, signal strengths of the competitors could vary a great deal, tens of decibels. That can only be because of angle of radiation, which is determined by height and more so the hill slope and the configuration of the terrain at the Fresnel reflection zone. I have been told that, in order to also eliminate these variables, the organizers of WRTC2004 will put all teams on a boat on the open sea. What about the guys that get seasick even from just looking at water?



A view of the Bled lake with the little island in the background, and in the foreground the rowing boats that can take you to the island.

Not everyone was lucky to be lodged in a luxurious mountain top vacation house, with or without a restaurant! Some did it from a camper, but it did not seem to keep K1TO and N5TJ from winning the competition! But all of the teams, without exception, were on a mountaintop, with slopes in all directions. This was the very best the S50s could have done. With all these mountain

tops and gentle slopes, I now understand why the S50s do so well in the contests!



If you go on a tourist excursion one day after the contest, this is what happens with most of the competitors...

Maybe it's time now to copy K3ZO's statement from 4 years ago by pondering that this time it really will be very tough for the next organization to do better than what Tine and his crew did in Slovenia!

The complete results and lots of other data concerning WRTC2000 can be found on the WRTC2000 Web-site: <http://wrtc2000.bit.si>

A CD with nearly 1500 photographs on WRTC2000 can be obtained through the WRTC2000 organization (see their Web site).

During my 6-day stay in Slovenia I have discovered a very attractive vacationing country, with extremely nice people. The Slovenian hams, especially those involved in the WRTC2000 project, have really impressed me. I can only comment favorably with respect to every detail of the organization, and I must congratulate Tine, S50A and his entire team for making this experience possible. But WRTC is not only the organizers, it is the competitors, the referees and the visitors as well, and all together they make it happen. Because they all love it.

After having lived WRTC96 as a competitor, this experience, as a referee was very enriching as well. Most of all, on both occasions, I enjoyed the mere company of the big guys in contesting. Being out there together on a 6-day vacation in a beautiful country with friendly hosts, what else could we want?

It is not without a certain pride that I like to mention that not less than 7 competitors and 5 referees at WRTC2000 have been operators at my contest station over the years. Of the 7 WRTC2000 trophies, not less than 3 were won by teams composed by such operators (2nd place overall, most SSB QSOs and most multipliers).

What a wonderful experience! See you in 2004 (or earlier?) for WRTC edition # 4!

73

John Devoldere, ON4UN