

CQ WPX SSB 2024 Briefing Note

Likely propagation conditions

A week ago, the solar flux (SFI) reached around 200 and the Kp index peaked at 8. However, the Sun has been quite settled in recent days, and these characteristics are likely to continue over the coming weekend. SFI, presently at 173, will likely fall a little, owing to the large and complex sunspot group AR3615 rotating around the Sun's western horizon over the next couple of days. On the plus side, the risk of coronal mass ejections and attendant geomagnetic storming will dissipate following AR3615's 'disappearance.' Only a low level of geomagnetic instability is likely for the 30th and 31st; the largest Kp index to be reached over the weekend is forecast to be two. All up, the higher HF bands will be very active on paths to the east, west and south. Ten metres should be open to the USA and to the western parts of the former USSR, and points beyond.

CQ WPX contest quirks

Unlike the CQ WW DX contests, held each autumn, WPX does not require that you work entities far, far away to attain a decent score. Yes, there are bonus points for intercontinental contacts, but the multipliers do not discriminate by location: a prefix worked in Europe will result in just as much multiplier credit as one worked in the Philippines – and there are plenty of possible 'mults' in Europe, all within single-hop range of England.

Something else that's important to note about WPX: the multiplier credit applies only when a particular prefix is first worked during the contest, *regardless of band*. For example, when the prefix E74 is first worked, and that QSO happens to be, say, on the 40m band, a multiplier is recorded. However, if the next QSO with an E74-prefixed station happens to be on 20 metres, there will be *no* multiplier credit granted in this case – despite this being the first time that E74 has been worked on this particular band. What this means for your contest strategy is that you can earn multipliers on bands that you are comfortable with. For instance, you can attain the mult relating to PA3 (in Holland) on 40m, and not feel compelled to also work PA3 on, say, 15m, which would be difficult for such a short distance.

The table below, taken from G5O's log for the 2019 WPX CW contest shows just how many multipliers (and QSOs) are available in regions that are within easy reach of UK stations. Germany ('DL') is a particular standout, with plenty of prefixes, and plenty of stations to activate them. DL will be able to be worked easily on 20, 40 and 80 metres; QSOs on the latter two bands earn double points. Although a bit distant, the USA is another 'multiplier mine;' the 15-metre band (at least) should get you to the station-packed eastern states in the afternoon.

	QSOs (% of)		Multipliers	
Totals:	3772	(100%)	1145	(100%)
USA	472	(13%)	187	(16%)
Germany	459	(12%)	86	(8%)
Italy	185	(5%)	58	(5%)

0000-0559UTC

To Western longitudes

Looking westward, the pre-dawn hours will provide plenty of opportunities to work US stations on 40 metres (and, perhaps, on 80m), as the Atlantic will be darkened. Twenty metres should be available for sometime after 0000UTC.

The Caribbean and South America will both be available on 40m, with the latter also reachable on 20m, too.

Keep an ear out for western hemisphere stations attempting to work Europe on 80 and 40 metres via sunrise enhancement from 0400UTC, as our nearest star rises over European horizons. (UK sunrise will be at about 0545UTC.)

To Eastern longitudes

Ionisation will be low across Europe. (It will be at its lowest level at an hour before sunrise in a particular location.) MF bands will, therefore, rule the roost across the continent at this time.

Twenty metres becomes active, to Russia and the Middle East from about 0500UTC.

0600-1159UTC

Following sunrise, the higher HF bands become useable.

To Western longitudes

Twenty metres takes over from 40m as the main band for the USA from midmorning. (Note that the initial skip point from the England to the USA remains in darkness for two hours after UK sunrise, facilitating 40m contacts until at least 0800UTC.)

Fifteen metres becomes dominant on paths to Latin America; 10m will be open to South America.

To Eastern longitudes

Intra-G (NVIS) contacts should be able to be made from 0700UTC at the latest.

Ionisation peaks for intra-Europe contacts from about 1000UTC (lasting till around 1600UTC), facilitating paths to Germany, eastern Europe and western former USSR on 20, 15 and 10 metres, respectively.

Circuits to East Asia and Australasia start opening up on 15 and 10 metres, with 10 metres dominating on the more southerly and equatorial locations.

1200-1759UTC

To Western longitudes

For paths to the Western Hemisphere, the higher HF bands will be at their respective peaks. Fifteen metres will be a consistent performer to the USA during the entire afternoon, and will be joined by 10 metres in the midafternoon. Both of these bands will have paths to Latin America during the entire period.

To Eastern longitudes

Peak ionisation for intra-Europe paths (commencing at about 1000UTC) ends at about 1600UTC, after which the chance of making QSOs to Europe on the higher HF bands declines significantly.

For East Asia and Australasia, the 15- and 10-metre openings will continue, but with 20m taking over from these bands as the segment progresses, especially in NE Asia.

1800-2359UTC

To Western longitudes

For circuits to the USA, 15m will be active until about 2100UTC; whereas 20m will be available for the whole period; 10m to the east coast may end by 1800UTC, but should be available for the Midwest and the West until midevening. Forty metres to east coast USA starts at about 2100UTC.

For the Caribbean and Latin America, twenty metres dominates the Caribbean, with 15m the ideal band for South America.

To Eastern longitudes

UK sunset will be at about 1830UTC, and ionisation across Europe will be dropping at a quick pace from that point (until midevening). Twenty metres should be open to eastern Europe for a further couple of hours; intra-G (NVIS) on 40 metres should continue until 2100UTC.

Ionisation across Europe should bottom out at about 2200UTC, making this time the best time for making contacts on Top Band and 80m.

Paths to Asia and Australasia will be open on 40 and 20m and, for the early part of the evening, on 15m, too.