

GETTING MY FEET WET IN LOUISVILLE

Report from District Director Margot Hennings

This is my first report as your District Director, and no one knows better than I the huge shoes I have to fill in the wake of Nadine's departure after 18 years on the ACBL Board. I cannot tell you the respect Nadine earned with her dedication and hard work on so many issues. At both the introductory meeting I was invited to attend prior to the Fall NABC in Orlando and at my first formal meeting in Louisville, I was told again and again how indelible Nadine's stamp is on the way the Board does business and on many of their business decisions over the years. You should be proud of the manner in which she represented you for so many years—when you see her, be sure to tell her so!

I had never been to Louisville before, and was pleasantly surprised with the architecture, the number of very good and interesting restaurants, and the general ambiance of this city. In addition, the hotel staff was very accommodating and went out of their way to make sure guests were happy. Michael Bolton, "Les Miz," and Lady Gaga were even in town, in case you wanted something to do in the evenings besides play bridge! During my week in Louisville (four days of meetings and then the first weekend of the tournament), the weather was the only thing that dampened my spirits. So, with feet that were literally frequently wet, I set about getting my feet figuratively wet as well.

Unfortunately for the volunteers who put on a great show and who the ACBL honored at the traditional Volunteer Dinner on Wednesday evening at the Kentucky Derby Hall of Fame Museum at Churchill Downs, attendance was down about 800 from the formal estimate of 10,300. This Spring NABC is now the fourth NABC in a row with less-than-estimated attendance, as Reno last spring, New Orleans this past summer, and Orlando all failed to live up to attendance expectations.

The issue of declining NABC attendance is being looked at by two committees. I am fortunate enough to be a member of both, as this is an area to which I believe I can effectively contribute right away. The first is the NABC Advisory Committee, which serves, cleverly enough, as an advisory group to management in its selection of NABC sites and approval of hotel rates at those sites. Sites and rates are approved very far in advance to help ensure we can be in the locations we want to be in when we want to be there—however, this also means committing without knowing the full effect of future trends and tendencies such as the increasingly vast number of folks who rely on Priceline and other discount online brokerage organizations to help them obtain affordable rates so that they attend one or two instead of no NABCs every year. This is a major challenge and no one is sure of the right answer or even if there is one.

At the conclusion of the Louisville meeting, this year's President, Craig Robinson of District 4, established a second, very small committee to look at all aspects of NABCs—events, entertainment, advertising, entry fees, you name it—and to bring specific recommendations / motions to the relevant committee for further research and comment. A recommendation with cost implications will be referred to the Finance Committee for

its input. Similarly, input from the Bridge Committee will be needed if we want to introduce new events. We will seek input from the only-once-every-five-year Masterpoint Committee if we want to adjust current event Masterpoint awards or assign Masterpoints to a new event, and we will need input from the Marketing Committee to know how best to implement a new advertising idea—you get the picture.

In addition to the two NABC Committees, I was designated by the President to serve on the Marketing and Juniors Committee (an odd mix this year as the President decided to combine what had previously been two separate committees into one, but we hope to capitalize on the synergies that can be derived from each); on the Bridge Committee (responsible for such decisions for national events as seeding points, formats/conditions of contest, and event names—all of which were motions in Louisville); on the CEO Review Committee (which sets the goals for the year for ACBL as a whole and then gauges the performance of the CEO at the end of the year in accomplishing them); and on the Credentials Committee (where decisions are made about whether rules and regulations have been followed when members petition to play in certain events). Of these, the Marketing/Juniors Committee is by far the most time-consuming as we seek to figure out how to “get the most bang for the buck” out of limited dollars and what segments of the population to target and more importantly how. Baby-boomers are an increasing percentage of the ACBL population, but is just showing up at an AARP Convention enough? How can the latest crop of Juniors—Joel Wooldridge, Joe Grue, Shane Blanchard, and others—who have been so successful at such a young age, be “used” to whet the appetites of their peers, the so-called “gamers”, and turn them on to the game of bridge?

Speaking of the ACBL CEO, as I’m sure you have all seen or heard by now in the ACBL Bulletin or through the email blast sent out in early February, current CEO Jay Baum plans to retire in June 2012, and a Search Committee is in place to identify his successor. In addition to CEO experience and a willingness to re-locate to Horn Lake, Mississippi—the Search Committee is emphasizing the need for familiarity with the game of bridge and is hoping to hire “from within” our bridge community. Their goal is to cull through the applications received (application forms and position description/job criteria can be found on our District 6 website at www.districtsix.org), interview prime candidates by phone, and then bring a “final few” to Seattle to be interviewed in person by the full Board during the Fall meetings.

And, speaking of goals, it was a major goal over the past year to make the ACBL web site a “friendlier” place to visit. I’m sure that those of you who access this site frequently have noticed the re-design of the Home Page. The Technology Committee hopes that you find navigating to your favorite links from there much easier than in the past and welcomes your comments and suggestions for continued improvement.

By far the two most controversial issues at these Spring meetings concerned first, Internet Bridge, and second, the allocation of Junior Fund monies collected by the ACBL from Junior Fund games held during the month of February. Related to this second concern is the use of ACBL membership dues to support United States Bridge Federation (USBF)

and World Bridge Federation (WBF) activities. The Junior Fund monies were deferred until the summer meetings in Toronto, so I will report on that outcome in my next TableTALK report.

Regarding Internet Bridge, the two primary motions had to do with continuing to award masterpoints in games that include robots as participants, and the general rules for sanctioning all online games and tournaments. Emotions run high when the issue of non-human participants in bridge is discussed, and the subject of online bridge in general raises the question in many folks' minds as to what is really "bridge" in this modern era—see the District 6 President's column in the Apr/May issue of TableTALK, for example. In Louisville, although four District Directors voted NOT to allow masterpoints in "robot games," the remaining 21 Directors voted in favor of continuing to award these "un-pigmented points." With the aforementioned once-every-five-years Masterpoint Committee working hard between now and Toronto to categorize all changes to the masterpoint structure, you can rest assured that we have not heard the last of this topic, nor should we. I somewhat reluctantly voted in favor of this motion, largely because I knew that the number of masterpoints to be awarded in these games was being looked at carefully by the Masterpoint Committee, and that the general rules adopted unanimously at the Louisville meetings for online games would help "regulate" these games as well. One new rule was included and that is that "A player may not enter more than two ACBL-sanctioned online games of any kind in any 60-minute period." This is being "enforced" by Bridge Base Online (BBO), and will help placate those who favor a reduction in the number of masterpoints that may be earned annually in online play.

All other regulations regarding online bridge remain in effect as is, including the following:

- All online masterpoints continue to count toward a player's total.
- Online masterpoints continue to NOT count toward masterpoint races such as the McKenney and Mini-McKenney.
- Online races, as currently established, continue.
- Online masterpoints continue to be un-pigmented, with no online masterpoints needed for any Rank advancement.
- The regulation that no more than 1/3 of the total masterpoints required for Rank advancement can be attributed to online masterpoints continues. For example, to become a Gold LM (2,500 masterpoints required, with certain pigmentation), no more than 833.33 online masterpoints can count toward the 2,500 masterpoint requirement.
- Online masterpoints continue to count 100% toward strat and flight advancement.
- Robot games continue to run as an Individual event.

There were many issues discussed in Committee at the Louisville meetings and then brought forward to the full Board at the end of the four days. Although perhaps not as controversial as some of the issues above, I have listed below by Committee those items I thought would be of most interest:

Under ACBL Bylaws Changes (These motions all carried unanimously)

Regarding ACBL Officers: Wording changes were made to clarify 1) that a person may only serve as president of the ACBL if he is also serving as a member of the Board of Directors; and 2) that the Chairman of the Board of Directors shall be the immediate past President of the ACBL if he is the director from his district. If the immediate past President of the ACBL is not the director from his district, the most recent past President serving as a director shall be the chairman.

Amendment to the Certificate of Incorporation of the ACBL: The amended Certificate of Incorporation will be presented to the full membership at its 2011 Annual Meeting in Toronto (Board of Governors, Sunday morning, July 24, 10 a.m.). Amendments included the new location of the ACBL in Horn Lake and numerous other administrative changes.

Electronic Voting: The Board has joined the electronic era in now allowing motions to be approved by unanimous written consent to be voted on by email or facsimile. Electronic media must contain a fax or email copy of the voter's signature—no electronic signatures yet!

Under Marketing/Juniors

Regarding ACBL-Wide Games: ACBL-wide special games may not be conducted during any month that is designated as a special fund month. Currently, the months of February (Junior), April (Charity), and September (International) are designated as special fund game months. Management will select appropriate dates for the ACBL-wide events.

Under Conditions of Contest

There were motions to:

- Prohibit the use of the stop after the first round of bidding in a non-competitive auction—this motion failed.
- Add a 2-day Swiss Qualifying or Round Robin to the format for the National Women's KO (the thought was that this would make the event more attractive to those who wanted to play in it but has slim chances to win)—this motion was deferred to Toronto.
- For Barometer-style play, to require all players be seated before any cards can be removed from the boards and that procedural penalties would apply for any players not seated when the director called the start of the game—the motion carried with all but one favorable vote.
- Revise the seeding point formula for players with over and under 300 masterpoints, with a cap of 11 seeding points—this motion carried unanimously.
- Temporary seeding method for the Spring 2011 Louisville Vanderbilt only, with results reviewed and a permanent method submitted for vote in Toronto—the motion carried unanimously with one member absent.

Under Tournaments—The Platinum Pairs were re-named the “Norman Kay Platinum Pairs”—this motion carried unanimously.

Under Appeals and Charges

- The requests for readmission to the ACBL from Massimo Lanzarotti and Andrea Buratti were denied. Subsequent requests for readmission may be made subject to ACBL Board Regulation 073-04.
- Review of the Unit 532 Disciplinary Committee decision against Charles Johnson was upheld and the committee affirmed both the finding of guilt and the discipline imposed.

Finance—A net income of \$140,880 is projected for 2011, but footnoted to show an addition projected expense of \$24,000 in real estate taxes. Capital budgeting expenses will be \$681,000. This motion was approved with all but one favorable vote

For your reading pleasure, full meeting minutes and exhibits (Committee Reports) to the minutes can be found at <http://www.acbl.org/about/bodmeetings.html>.

I am anxious to hear from each and every one of you any ideas YOU might have on any issue. Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can help you, your club, or your unit in any way. Margot10bridge@cox.net, or 703-560-0245.