

Lights on Las Vegas
Report from District Director Margot Hennings
Margot10bridge@cox.net

It was hot, hot, hot at the North American Bridge Championships (NABC) held in Las Vegas this summer, both in terms of temperatures and card play by D6 members. Although attendance was slightly below what the locals were hoping for, 16,616 tables was still the largest by far in recent years—well, since the last time Las Vegas hosted an NABC! District Directors Bonnie Bagley from Colorado Springs and Ken Monzingo from San Diego not only attended four days of ACBL Board of Directors' meetings before the NABC even started, but were also the Tournament Chairs and involved with the myriad of last-minute details of hosting an NABC at the same time. Their efforts resulted in a constant party atmosphere with great registration gifts and entertainment that helped take away some of the tired look of the host hotel. We can now all look forward to the Cosmopolitan Hotel and Casino, which will be the gorgeous new site for NABCs in Las Vegas, booked already for the Summer of 2019 and again for the Fall of 2024.

Congratulations:

Top 20 finishes in National events in Las Vegas by District 6 players were many and included: Steve Robinson, Peter Boyd, Bill Cole, Bill Pettis, Beth Palmer, and Steve Landen—3/4th in Championship Flight GNTs; Steve Robinson and Peter Boyd—5/8th in the Spingold; Robert Brady and his team tied with Beth Palmer, Robin Taylor, Alan Sontag, Bill Cole and their team for 2/3rd in the Mixed BAM; Steve Robinson and Peter Boyd—7th in the Open Swiss; Ellen Cherniavsky, Bill Pettis, Bill Cole, Shawn Stringer, and Eugene Kales—7th in the Senior Swiss; Brian Hartwig—18th in the Wernher Open Pairs; Sylvia Shi and Stephen Drodge—3rd, and Tom Musso, Barbara Ames, and Ellen Cherniavsky—18th in the new 10K Mixed Swiss; David Milton, Stan Schenker, Barry Falgout, Rusty Krass, Barry Bragin, and Diane Walker—16th in Flight A GNTs; Michael Berard, Murat Berk, Hakan Berk, and Peter Van Zijl—20th in Flight B GNTs; Murat Berk and Hakan Berk—15th in the 0-5000 LM Pairs; Barry Spector—9/16th in MiniSpingold I; and Jeffrey Schwartz—5/8th in the MiniSpingold II.

Also, there was terrific representation by D6 at the Youth NABC in the Youth and Cardroom games, especially from Jim Davis' (Unit 110 in Williamsburg) students—Isabella Babb, Lauryn Boone, Summayah Borders (just completed third grade in June!), Ashley Botkins, Hailey Botkins, Andrew Burrows, Madison Rickard, Mykala Mudahy, Elizabeth White, Bernadette Williams, and Elijah Williams—as well as Jackson Miller from Vienna, VA.

Masterpoint (MP) Changes:

You may recall that a significant overhaul of the masterpoint system in use today—one that has been cobbled together over many years with the addition of new events at NABCs (10K pairs and teams) and the addition of more and more special games to clubs and sectionals—was reviewed a couple of years ago under the title “Strength of Field.” That was a well-thought-out but controversial set of new rules for allocating masterpoints across all levels of play, and it failed to capture the support of enough Board members to pass. A new Masterpoint Committee, chaired by CEO Robert Hartman, has worked for many months now to try once again to revise the masterpoint formulas, and the long hard committee effort paid off in a unanimous vote by the Board to accept the new formulas. Masterpoint changes (among other items) require approval at

two consecutive meetings, so they will not become final until after the Fall NABC in Providence, RI, and will take effect on January 1, 2015. I personally find all of the factors confusing, but know that many of you will be interested in what changes are being made. A fellow colleague on the Board, Russ Jones, presented the changes in a very understandable way at the meeting, and at my urging, developed a paper to include as an addendum to our reports. Russ' four-page paper is available on our D6 website under Business, attached there to this Report. The short story is: Pair games will pay more MPs in comparison to Team games than they used to, three-session KOs will award more MPs than previously, and subordinate tables for events that are not similar in type—a one-session Swiss held at the same time as a pair game, for example—will no longer be counted and/or weighted as heavily, depending on the event.

In conjunction with the changes in masterpoints, there are two new ways for regionally-rated Pair games to be structured. As long as these games are being run at the same time, a new stratum can be added to the Open Pairs game that is often held on top of the Gold Rush games, and where the lower strat is up to 3000 MPs, such that there would be two separate flighted games with three strats each (2x3), OR there can be three flighted games with two strats in each (3x2). Both structures allow players who have surpassed the 750 MP limit and do not feel ready to play in the Open game to have a strat in which to play. These new structures are also explained in Russ' paper that is posted online at www.districtsix.org.

NABC Schedule Changes:

A provisional new schedule for the three NABCs was approved by the ACBL Board of Directors at our Spring Meeting in Dallas—I voted in favor of the final schedules, but many votes were taken on individual pieces of the schedule, and the one change I was most against—moving the three-day North American Swiss in the Fall to the Summer and substituting a two-day NABC Swiss in its place—did manage to be approved by the full Board. This left a gap after the conclusion of the Blue Ribbon Pairs, which just seemed silly, and I guess a lot of you thought so, too, since after many comments and much input, the three-day Swiss was restored in the Fall, while a three-day Swiss remains on the final weekend in the Summer as well. In addition, there will now be an NABC+ Mixed Swiss Teams added to the Fall schedule, to be played the second Saturday and Sunday. Three 10K events were also added in the Fall: an IMP Pairs on Monday and Tuesday, a Fast Pairs on the second Thursday and Friday, and a Swiss Teams (previously approved for the second Saturday and Sunday) was moved to the first Saturday and Sunday. All of these events and the schedules for each NABC will be implemented in 2015 on a trial basis, so your input is needed as to whether you like the new schedules or not—it is difficult to satisfy everyone, but I think the revisions will go a long way in making all of the events more fun to play in for players at all levels. The new schedules are posted on the ACBL website under “About,” then “Administration,” then “Board Meetings and Minutes,” and finally “Las Vegas Exhibits.”

Screens at NABCs and Increased Entry Fees:

Several years ago, the Board authorized more extensive use of screens during the latter stages of specified NABC and NABC+ events where practicable—mostly meaning, where space permits. ACBL has gradually obtained more and more screens and as new contracts for sites are signed, they are done so with the need for additional space in mind. In Las Vegas, the Board approved screens for use in the Flight B GNTs at the same point as they are used in the Championship and

A Flight GNTs. Also approved was a surcharge of \$20 per pair or \$40 per team for each session that screens are used in NABC+ events. This surcharge will cover not only the cost of the screens, but also the Director time that, particularly in the final days of the big team events or the final day of the three-day pairs events, far exceeds what is covered by the current entry fee. This motion was discussed at length before it was passed, and rather than increase the entry fee for all NABC and NABC+ events, we determined it would be more appropriate to allocate the increase in fees to those who benefit the most from the amenities provided—the screens and the Directors.

NAPs:

For a number of years, the top three pairs from the District Finals have been eligible to represent the District at the national finals held at the Spring NABC, with a fourth pair allowed based on club participation. District 6 has never had enough participation from its clubs to qualify that fourth pair. In Dallas, I presented a motion to allow a fourth pair to represent districts where participation in the district finals was the qualifying criterion, but this was defeated. The motion came back in Las Vegas in a different context and passed: Now, in Flights B and C only and in all districts without restriction of club or district-level participation, the fourth-place pair from the NAP district finals will be eligible to play in the national finals. This is effective immediately and means that the fourth pair in the lower two NAP flights will be eligible for the finals next March in New Orleans. However, adding a fourth pair to the mix for the national finals in Flights B and C means that the districts need to figure out how to fund these two new pairs. ACBL provides a base amount for each of the top three pairs and districts add to that if they have the means to do so. The fourth pairs, although eligible, will not be funded from ACBL Headquarters—all prize money must come from the districts. So.....

Fund Games:

This means that the recently established Grass Roots Fund Month is now even more important—funding to offset costs of both the Grand National Teams (GNTs) and the NAPs can be raised by clubs in holding qualifying games during the qualification periods, as well as during Grass Roots Fund Month, and by those units and individuals who host sectionals by running up to two sessions that offer regionally rated games (more masterpoints!) for \$1 more per person. In an attempt to make the Grass Roots Fund Month at a time when it would garner greater participation, it was yet again moved—you may recall that it started in December and then moved to January—to May. This was to allow the money raised in the districts to benefit those representing their districts. When the Grass Roots Fund month was in January, many members were spending time in other districts to take advantage of warmer weather (the so-called “snowbirds”), and the colder districts were having trouble raising money. Other Fund Months were changed as well: Junior Fund month is now January instead of February, giving it 31 days instead of 28 or 29 on which games can be held; the Charity Fund Month is April; and the International Fund Month is September. In addition, the ACBL-wide International Fund Game #1 will be on Super Bowl Saturday, regardless of the month in which the Super Bowl is held. This date was requested by the Board of Governors due to the small number of tournaments run on Super Bowl weekend. I argued against this since the Maryland Bridge Association has long held one of its sectional tournaments on that weekend, but, my voice was small in an overwhelming sea of votes in support of this change.

ACBLScore+:

After our spring meetings, I reported that ACBL had made the decision to transition the new software program that has been in the works for several years now—ACBLScore+—from the external developer to in-house development team. After much hard thought and analysis, a working group consisting of Board members, internal staff, and outside experts determined that the efforts to develop a completely new system had fallen short of what was required to work for ACBL members. Therefore, the difficult decision to discontinue the ACBLScore+ project was announced to the Board of Directors in Las Vegas. ACBL is now moving forward with plans to enhance the features and benefits of the existing ACBLScore software, which will extend the life and functionality of the software for a long time to come. This approach will reinforce the confidence that our tournament directors, club owners and operators, and members and players have in the reliability and accuracy of the existing system. The ACBL user community knows how ACBLScore works on their computers, they are comfortable with what they know, and they will be able to run games on their existing computers without expensive upgrades or complicated new lessons. ACBL is already enhancing the scoring software to give it more features such as real time result display features on the web and to integrate it more easily into complimentary systems, including TourneyTrax. The total capitalized costs of the ACBLScore+ project are in excess of one and a half million dollars and by the time of our meetings in the fall, we should know what portion of the ACBLScore+ product can be repurposed into the enhanced ACBLScore.

TDU:

As part of the new Tournament Director (TD) structure that I reported on after Dallas, the new “Tournament Director University (TDU)” kicked off in late August. The curriculum includes a two-week intensive course at ACBL Headquarters in Horn Lake with modules on everything from rules and regulations to how to handle director calls at the table. This latter component of a large part of what is required to be a successful Director has long been missing from the ad-hoc training new Directors received mostly through mentoring. Customer service, an increasingly frequent complaint by players, is the focus of a number of modules and should result over the next few years in a visible difference once enough Directors have received this kind of training. The course work in Horn Lake will be followed by several days on the floor at the nearby Tunica Regional for hands-on experience with close evaluation by the course instructors. Please join me in congratulating Hank Meyer in being one of the five Directors selected ACBL-wide to participate in this first TDU session. Emphasis in selecting participants was on newer Directors who work at sectionals, with the hope that this program will increase the ranks of those experienced and eligible to run sectionals and then move on to regionals after a few years.

The Longest Day:

Again this year, the ACBL and the Alzheimer’s Association partnered to sponsor another successful day of bridge play in the clubs on June 21, The Longest Day of the year. Last year, over \$750,000 was raised and this year more than \$500,000, with over 140 clubs participating. Yuen DeAnda a bridge player in northern VA, led a well-run campaign throughout the district to engage teams in all sorts of fund-raising activities, and her efforts resulted in more than \$10,000 raised by Bridge Heroes United alone. Congratulations to all for your hard work and generosity!

As always, I welcome your feedback—my email address is at the top of this report.