

Nothing Provincial about Providence
Report from District Director Margot Hennings
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One very sad introductory note: On December 29, 2014, ACBL lost one of its most devoted employees. Jeff Johnston, Senior Director of Bridge Operations, died suddenly from a heart attack on December 29. Affectionately called “Mr. NABC,” Jeff was really “Mr. Everything.” He oversaw a number of key projects and departments including Club and Membership Services, Meeting Services, Bridge Administration and the tournament directing staff. Those of you who attend NABCs may know who he is since he often stood in high-traffic areas greeting players, handing out Daily Bulletins, and answering questions. But he was also responsible for oversight of all facilities-related activities, including the logistics of transporting, setting up, and then tearing down everything from card tables and screens to bid boxes, duplicated boards, and the copious paper supplies we use. I knew and worked with Jeff for close to 20 years in my role as NABC Tournament Chair—he is as close to irreplaceable as anyone could be.

On to Providence:

By all accounts, Providence was a terrific venue for a bridge tournament—not only were there multiple hotels within a two-block area to accommodate bridge play at the convention center attached to the Omni, there was a three-story shopping mall with indoor access from the Omni and a food court with many choices on the top floor. There were several farm-to-table restaurants within walking distance and Federal Hill, a short cab ride away, was the Italian food-lover’s dream come true. Add to this the Johnson and Wales Culinary Arts School and a nearby culinary arts museum, the Rhode Island School of Design, the Providence Bruins ice hockey team, and the lovely “Gilded Age” Newport mansions—all made for lots to do for those accompanying bridge playing family members or even for bridge players if they chose to take a break. Providence will definitely be on the “return to” list for an NABC as soon as an opening in the schedule allows.

Congratulations:

With some of the toughest events on the NABC calendar including the Reisinger BAM and the Blue Ribbon Pairs (both increasingly drawing the very best international players from all corners of the world), D6 player names were not as prominent in the Top 20 list as they often are, but many of our players still did very well, with the following achieving a place within the top 20 in National events in Providence: Ai-Tai Lo and Bill Pettis—15th in the Mitchell Open BAM; Beth Palmer 1st and Lynne Schaefer 6th in the Marsha May Sternberg Women’s BAM; Mark Laken and Ed Lazarus 20th in the Super Senior Pairs (notably, Ed has won this event an incredible four times from its inception in 2010 through last year, including twice with Mark); Ellen Cherniavsky and Gene Kales 3rd and Mary and Alan Tenenbaum 20th in the Senior Mixed Pairs; Barry Bragin and Mark Laken 5th, Ron Kral and Mike Spooner 6th, Monique Smith and Linda Marshall 15th, and Bob Levey and Marty Graf 19th in the 0-5000 Blue Ribbon Pairs; Robbie Hopkins and John Miller—12th in the North American Swiss; and Cecily Kohler and Margot Hennings 6th and Ron Kral 11th in the 10K Swiss. *Please see page __ in this issue of TableTALK for a complete list of Overalls in Providence.*

Masterpoint Changes:

You may recall from my report following the summer meetings in Las Vegas that a new Masterpoint Committee, chaired by CEO Robert Hartman, worked for many months to revise the current masterpoint formulas and the long hard committee effort paid off in a unanimous vote by the Board in Las Vegas to accept the new formulas. Masterpoint changes (among other items), however, require approval at two consecutive meetings, and passed again with a near-unanimous vote in Providence. These changes took effect on January 1, 2015. All Tournament Chairs (TCs) received a description of the new rules in late 2014. For those who would like a refresher, a four-page paper is available on our D6 website, attached to my Las Vegas District Director Report.

New Opportunities for 750-3000 MP Players:

There are now two new ways for regionally rated Pair games to be structured. The changes were not in effect when the schedule for our January 2015 D6 Regional in Charlottesville was developed almost a year ago, so the first opportunity for you to experience these new events in D6 will be in Richmond at the Memorial Day Regional. As long as there is also a Gold Rush game with 0-300/300-750 strats, a new stratum can be added to the A/X game that is held at the same time so that there are now three strats—0-1500/1500-300/3000+---instead of just the previous two. Also, if the field is big enough to support three totally separate flights, these flights can each be divided into two strats each. All of these new options are just that—options the TCs can choose among to develop a schedule right for players at each regional location.

Gold Point Events at Regionals:

Until changes were passed in Providence, regionals were limited to 6½ days of gold point events—those of you who play in regionals throughout the Mid-Atlantic and other areas know that the schedule generally has two single-session pair and/or Swiss team games on the first day and a KO that starts the first night and continues for three sessions the following day. This is still an option, but now a regional MAY have seven full days of gold point events as long as the first event starts no earlier than 1 p.m. In addition, all single-session events AND the first session of all two-session, gold point events (both KOs and Side Series) on the first day of a full seven-day regional MUST be run for the benefit of the ACBL Charity Foundation, the ACBL Educational Foundation, the ACBL Junior Fund, the International Fund, the Grass Roots Fund or the Canadian equivalent of these. The second session of all two-session, gold point events on the first day of a full seven-day Regional MUST be run for the benefit of one of the above-listed funds OR a local charity. Another option is that a one-session event may be run for any of the ACBL funds named above on any day of a Regional. Whenever these foundation or charity games is held, a minimum of \$7 per table per session must be charged.

Online Masterpoints:

A controversial motion concerning the printed display of online and face-to-face masterpoints posed by the Board of Governors in Las Vegas was brought to the Board in Providence for a vote. The new rule is that on all existing lifetime Masterpoint lists issued after December 31, 2014, online Masterpoints will be included next to the total. As an adjunct to this, ACBL now has a new function on the ACBL website—click on the heading “Masterpoints” and then on “Pigmented Masterpoint Races.” You can then select any number of ways to view masterpoint leaders by pigmentation (Platinum, Gold, Silver, Red, Black, or all colors combined including unpigmented online points), by points earned only online (Unpigmented), and by points earned only in face-to-face competition.

Privacy Issues:

By now, you all should have received an email from the ACBL explaining its privacy policy. This policy clarifies current ACBL privacy practices, including NOT publishing names and addresses in directories—something units have been doing for many years in violation of the policy. There is a great deal of confusion about this and in the next few months, it is my belief that ACBL will add another “OPT IN” button in your MyACBL profile so that you can specifically allow your name, address, and phone number (email still an issue to be decided) to be published in a hard-copy and/or electronic format. Under the terms of the policy, you must OPT OUT of receiving emails from the ACBL about upcoming tournaments and policy changes, etc. if you wish not to receive such emails. ***You have automatically been placed in an OPT-IN status unless you go to your MyACBL account and specifically OPT OUT.*** However, membership in the ACBL means that your name and city/state location may be published in Bulletins, on recap sheets, etc., by the organization—you may not opt out of these.

ACBLScore+ and Other Technology Issues:

Based on the termination of work on ACBLScore+, the Finance Committee recommended and the Board accepted a \$1.9M write-off on expenditures to date. But, ACBL is quickly moving forward to add features including enhancements to ACBL Live and the long-promised ability for NAP and GNT Coordinators to receive lists of all those who qualified at the club level in these events. 2015 calendar-year funding plus a new Technology Committee are in place to help ensure that appropriate changes are prioritized and can be implemented. This committee, chaired by CEO Robert Hartman, met in early January and includes as one of its three “outside experts” D6’s Greg Humphreys (known to many of you through Bridge Winners) along with BBO’s Uday Ivatori and Ralph Lipe, a fairly new bridge player and one of the original MS programmers (and for you techie types) known for his design of the VxD architecture critical to Windows through Version 9. Three ACBL staff and three Board members (Merlin Vilhauer, Jay Whipple—creator of Fast Results and the Online Partnership Desk that so many of us use, and Russ Jones) are also integral members of this committee.

General Financial Issues:

The operating budget for the upcoming year is always presented at the fall meeting and provisionally approved by the Board, with final approval coming the following spring. The 2015 budget showing a projected excess of revenues over expense of \$56,939 and the 2015 capital budget of \$700,000 were received in Providence. In an effort to keep up with rising costs, including salaries, tournament sanction fees will be increased by approximately 2% and TD session fees will be increased approximately 5% beginning April 1, 2015. Club short game (12-17 boards) table fees will be increased from \$.46 to \$.52 per table, also beginning April 1, 2015. Despite some major hits to the bottom line including the ACBLScore+ write-off, the final cost of the pension plan termination of \$1.7M, the \$50,000 deductible paid that ensured insurance coverage for the over \$1M in damage caused by the devastating flood at ACBL HQ, and other compensation issues, for a total change in net assets of \$4.1M, ACBL continues to maintain substantial investments and cash flow remains sound.

Other Items of Interest:

- Despite much active support including mine, a motion to allow B and C GNT teams that place second in their District Finals to compete in the NABC Finals was defeated.
- The Longest Day will again this year be a cooperative effort between the ACBL and the Alzheimer's Foundation. Because June 21 (the longest day of the year) falls on a Sunday this year (and Father's Day to boot), and not many clubs hold Sunday games, there will actually be two days—Sunday, June 21 and Monday, June 22—on which The Longest Day games may be held.
- Two new rules affecting new members and newer players are now in place: First, upon submission and verification of points won in clubs and tournaments, a maximum of 20 MPs will be credited to the record of a new first-time member. Second, Limited Sectionals (often called Non-Life Master Sectionals) are now defined as sectionals with a masterpoint limit of 0-500. They must be at least one day and no more than five days in duration, and no more than three Limited Sectionals may be scheduled by a unit or entity thereof in any calendar year. A Sponsoring Organization (individual, club, unit, district) may obtain approval from ACBL to run a Limited Sectional using directors who are not ACBL employees (e.g., Tournament Assistants).
- Additionally, two important “housekeeping” rules were introduced, In accordance with the updated Privacy Policy just issued, the Code of Disciplinary Regulations was amended to specifically include unauthorized use of private information, and the Conflict of Interest Policy that affects ACBL Board members was amended to include non-financial interests as potential conflicts.
- Tournament Director University (TDU) will continue in 2015. This new program will give both current directors who are capable of running regionals and newer directors who are capable of running sectionals the tools, training, and experience they need to be able to do so.
- Customer service training for all full-time and part-time directors began in Providence and will continue in New Orleans.
- ACBL membership through the end of October was 167,808, three fewer members than at the start of year,
- Average regional, sectional and STaC table counts are down 3%, 6%, and 4%, respectively, over a year ago. This appears to be a continuing trend and is worrisome, although in the case of regionals, actual table count was up 70 but there were four more regionals in 2014 than in 2013.
- Suzi Subeck of District 13 (Chicago) was elected ACBL President for 2015. Many of you may get a chance to meet her and voice any concerns or compliments as she attends tournaments across ACBL-Land during the year. She has not finalized her schedule yet, so I do not know if she plans to include a D6 tournament or not.
- Georgia Heth and Howard Weinstein were elected as the ACBL representatives to the World Bridge Federation (WBF) for three-year terms; Mike Carmen (D8) was appointed the Nadine Wood Volunteer of the Year; James Fisher (D14) was appointed the Aileen Osofsky Goodwill Member of the Year, and Eddie Kantar was appointed the ACBL Honorary Member of the Year.

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