

## **News from NOLA**

*Report from District 6 Director Margot Hennings  
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We have tried holding North American Bridge Championships (NABCs) in New Orleans, LA (NOLA) in the Summer and in the Fall over the last several decades. This time, with more temperate weather in the Spring, table count exceeded estimates by almost 1500 with a total of 11,402. The local Tournament Committee created a festive air with purple, gold, and green beads galore at the Registration Desk for players to take and wear, and wear them they did! ACBL put on another terrific opening reception on the first Friday night, with local band Cuisine playing oldies, jazz, and blues in the finest NOLA tradition, accompanied by plenty of red beans and rice and King Cake. Nearby restaurants provided great dining between or after sessions, and the occasional parade en route back to the hotel—thought by some to be an aggravation but by most to be just more of the fun this city is known for—continued to let the good times roll. There is no NOLA NABC scheduled for the foreseeable future, but I, for one, can't wait to go back!

The ACBL Board of Directors (BOD) meetings were, as always, at times frustrating and at times most productive. A portion of our meetings is devoted to discussing and voting on new rules and regulations that affect bridge play, and I welcome your feedback. Based on the motions passed at the NABC in Providence, RI last Fall that have now been in effect for close to six months, please be sure to let me know how you like the following:

- The higher awards for Pair games in contrast to slightly decreased awards for Knockout (KO) matches;
- The new so-called “XYZ” stratified pairs at regionals (if there is a Gold Rush game also offered at the same time) where there are now three strats instead of the previous two, e.g., 0-1500/1500-3000/3000+, if the field is large enough to support the third strat;
- Ability to schedule a full seven days of gold point events at a regional, such that pair events as well as KOs can start in the afternoon and continue in the evening. Previously, because of the regulation limiting gold points events held at regionals, two one-session pair events have been held in the afternoon and evening at our District 6 (D6) and District 7 Regionals, and KOs have started in the evening and continued for three sessions the next day. You may have noticed that in the ads for the Reston, VA and Hunt Valley, MD Regionals being held in July and August of this year, respectively, you can play two sessions now of Gold Rush Pairs on the first day of the tournament. However, just because we can now start gold point events such as two-session pairs and/or KOs in the afternoon, does not mean this is what you, our players, want, so please be sure to voice your opinions on all these possibilities.

### **Congratulations:**

The good times rolled for many D6 players at the bridge tables as they racked up numerous high-level finishes in both NABC+ and NABC events: Beth Palmer—5<sup>th</sup> in NABC Machlin Women's Swiss; Gil Cohen and Marty Nelson—8<sup>th</sup> in Silver Ribbon Pairs; Robert Brady—9<sup>th</sup> in the Platinum Pairs; Helene Bauman and Mickie Kivel—15<sup>th</sup> in the Fast Pairs, and Rebecca Duty, 16<sup>th</sup> in the Life Master Women's Pairs. In the NAP Finals, Jian-Jian Wang and Hailong Ao were 9<sup>th</sup> in Flight A, Mel Yudkin and Deb Dhar were 5<sup>th</sup> in Flight B, while all three pairs representing D6 in Flight C had overall finishes. The winners of the President Cup Flight C NAP—yes, 1<sup>st</sup> place!—were Blake Schwartzbach and Adam Gann; Terry Klein and Myron Goldstein finished

8<sup>th</sup> and Rick Bingham and Dean Baird finished 12<sup>th</sup>, an excellent accomplishment for these new duplicate players in our District.

But this NABC clearly belonged to Sylvia Shi, who won over 200 masterpoints and garnered her first NABC+ win in the Lebhar IMP Pairs (after more than one full day of being 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and then 1<sup>st</sup> again as score corrections and committee decisions that did not involve Sylvia and her partner swirled around her); was 3<sup>rd</sup> in the Life Master Women's Pairs; and with Mark Dahl, also of D6, was 15<sup>th</sup> in the Mixed Pairs. This is a noteworthy achievement, and if indicative of things to come, ensures you will be seeing her name in the winner's column again and again.

### **ACBLScore+ and Other Technology Issues:**

In my report following the Fall NABC in Providence, I briefly discussed the creation of a new Management Technology Committee. The three external advisors—all bridge players and eminent software developers (Greg Humphreys/Google Chrome and Bridgewinners, Uday Ivatury/BBO, and Ralph Lipe/Microsoft)—have given freely of their time and expertise to help ACBL take a fresh look at its technology investments and to prioritize actions for the near-term. Their efforts culminated in an open Technology Forum on March 12, 2015, the final day of the BOD meetings. This Forum was attended by over 80 people, and started with several prepared statements followed by a free flowing Q&A session. The full video, almost two hours in length, is available on Bridgewinners, and those of you who are techno-savvy are encouraged to watch it as the explanations given there are far better than what I can provide you here. At the time of the Forum, the conclusions were the following:

- Terminating ACBLScore+ was the correct decision, as the finished product was determined by the advisors to be at least 18 months from completion at the time the contract was terminated; efforts are ongoing to salvage usable portions of it.
- ACBLScore, although a workhorse for 30 years, has reached the end of its useful life and will gradually be phased out over the next 18-24 months, although a specific replacement has not yet been identified.
- The BOD Technology Oversight Committee scaled back Management's capital expenditure requests for technology for Calendar Year 2015 from \$600K to \$130K that will be spent on “modular” applications that can be used now, and then transferred to the replacement Score software. The ability to salvage some of ACBLScore+ as part of this “modular” scheme is one reason for the reduction in capital expenditures.

In addition, this year's ACBL President, Suzi Subeck, has thoroughly reviewed the ACBLScore+ contract and her comments are posted on the D6 website together with this report.

The Committee is focused on moving forward, on identifying a suitable “new” platform that can accept app-like “modules,” and creating and improving “new” modular features such as ACBL Live, KO and Swiss start-up software, better entry fee payment processes, and the like, using the best of what ACBLScore and ACBLScore+ have to offer. The eventual goal is to replace the current ACBLScore program. In the short time since NOLA, the Committee arrived at five possible scenarios for this project, and after evaluating the alternatives, concluded that the best approach would be to build upon the ACBLScore+ framework and create a team to complete the project.

There are still challenges with some of the software that has been implemented and in addition to moving forward with new ideas, the Committee and ACBL staff are working hard to make the new software work better.

**Masterpoint Changes:**

The BOD is still fine-tuning how masterpoints are awarded to make the Masterpoint awards more equitable across different kinds and ratings of events—pairs, teams, side games, regionally-rated events, and the like—there were a few small changes made this time on top of the major reworking of the Masterpoint Chart voted on at the NABC in Las Vegas last Summer and at a second unanimous reading this past Fall in Providence. Easiest to report on here is that in regionally- or sectionally-rated KOs, players on teams with more than 4 players who are otherwise eligible for overall awards will now receive a “participation” reduction: For every segment (half a match) of a match that is won and where a participant sits out, the overall awards for that individual will be reduced by 5%. For example, if a player’s team wins a 4-session KO and that participant played only half of each match, that player’s masterpoint award will be reduced by 20%. Similar reductions apply if a player sits out an entire match. Please see the full BOD Minutes from NOLA on the ACBL website for details on these and other motions not specifically mentioned in this report.

**Privacy Issues:**

The effect of privacy issues on how local clubs and units are able to market their games and contact their players continues to be refined by ACBL. I am sure you all have noticed that any organization to which you belong and have signed up to receive emails or hard copy mailings from send you periodic notices about their privacy policy. If you have questions about what you can and cannot do, please contact your Unit President—I queried ACBL following our Charlottesville Regional to get some specific answers to sample activities in which I know many of us engage on behalf of our units and clubs, and sent those answers to all Unit Presidents and to the rest of the D6 Board.

**Strategic Project Updates:**

Several years ago, the ACBL BoD identified a number of strategic projects that we felt were critical for Management to work on over the next five years. In addition to upgrading ACBLScore, these projects include comprehensive recruitment and training of TDs, creation of an online Partnership Desk (see the article in the March 2015 ACBL Bulletin for specifics on this program—as of March 10, we already had over 10,000 hits with 1675 profiles having been created), and creation of an online bridge teaching program. We received reports on all of these projects in NOLA.

Especially here in D6 where we are facing imminent retirements on the part of our long-time directors, we need to know that there are new directors in the queue and that these new directors will be trained and capable of assuming sectional and regional Director-in-Charge (DIC) appointments. The Tournament Director University (TDU) developed last year has already had two classes of directors enrolled, one focusing on moving current directors up from working at regionals to being Regional DICs and the other on moving up sectional directors to directors capable of being Sectional DICs. Dan Plato from D7, newly appointed ACBL Manager of

Recruiting and Development, has a cadre of newer directors who enter information into Tourney Trax and answer questions on rulings (with review by more experienced directors for accuracy) that are submitted to ACBL by club managers. This is just one example of hands-on experience that TDU has introduced. In addition, special customer service training is being provided to every TD, whether new or just about to retire, to ensure that standards for customer service are understood and implemented. Overseeing this effort will be the new ACBL Manager for Quality and Continuous Improvement (yet to be named). All of this will be an ongoing process and immediate results may not be achieved in all cases, but players should notice an improvement in customer service in general over the next six months. If you do not, again, please contact me or your local TC about any issues you observe.

**Other Items of Interest:**

- **Grass Roots Events**—GNTs: A close vote (I voted in favor) now allows free entries to the first two days of play at the Summer National Final of this event, but ONLY to Flights A, B and C...NOT the Championship Flight. Although I almost voted against this motion due to the fact that it did not include free entries for the top flight, upon reflection I decided it would be better to at least get the other three flights' free entries in the regulations and hope to include the Championship Flight at a later date.
- **Grass Roots FUNd**: Immediately following passage of the above motion, another motion was discussed and amended to state that all of the Grass Roots FUNds raised by each district that are currently collected by ACBL and then returned in their entirety to each district, would be "taxed" by the amount of 20% of the total and the now free entries for the three lowest flights of the GNTs taken out of that and then the remaining monies distributed to districts based on their success in raising per-member Grass Roots FUNds. Mostly through the regionally rated games at sectionals, D6 has been working very hard to increase its revenues, and our efforts should be protected because our per-member FUNd-raising is continually increasing. But, it remains to be seen if the actual monies returned to D6 will be commensurate with our efforts—stay tuned as I fully expect this continuing saga to be again refined.
- **Changes to the General Convention Chart**: Two competitive bidding additions to the General Convention Chart were passed—transfer responses after overcalls where the call shows length or values in the suit of the transfer, and a direct overcall of 2 diamonds to show a one-suited hand in hearts of spades over natural notrump bids or overcalls are now both allowed.
- **Email blasts**: Many of us currently take advantage of the email blasts that ACBL will, at our request, send out to targeted audiences for our sectionals and regionals. A new contract will soon be in place that will allow each unit and club more flexibility in the number of emails it can send to market special events. More information will follow directly from Headquarters in the near future.
- **Conduct and Ethics violations**: Notices of decisions made by Unit, District or ACBL level disciplinary committees, and by the Ethical Oversight Committee are routinely sent to concerned parties, club managers, and all BOD members when Members are placed on probation, suspended, or expelled. In NOLA, a regulation was passed that the names of Members receiving probation or suspended will now be published on the ACBL website, and expulsions will be published on the ACBL website and reported in the ACBL Bulletin. It is hoped that publication of these decisions will increase player awareness of

the severity of conduct and ethical infractions and help serve as a further deterrent to such behavior.

- **Presidential visit:** Suzi Subeck of District 13 (Chicago), ACBL President for 2015, will be attending the Richmond Regional over Memorial Day weekend. I expect there to be several opportunities for players to interact directly with Suzi and her husband Stan and to ask Suzi questions concerning aspects of ACBL that interest you. If you have specific questions, please be sure to let me know in advance, especially if you cannot be there in person to speak with Suzi.

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