

Correspondence from Chicago

Report from District 6 Director Margot Hennings
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By attendance count, Chicago was a success, exceeding its table count estimate by almost 700 tables. The city of Chicago was a terrific venue, with lots of good restaurants and good weather. On the facility side, due to a glitch on the part the Hilton, some of the ballroom space got double-booked, and many of our games were relegated to the lower floor “salons” where access to the restrooms was, shall we say, much less than optimal. Restroom access from the second floor ballroom was also limited due to the inability to “cut through” another ballroom that was being used by another group; and even the Spingold had to be moved down the block to a second “host hotel.” On the bridge side of things, online entry sales were much smoother, and national-level games got started much more “on time” than in the past, with players buying entries earlier as requested to help meet the “start time.” Once the national-level events are sure of continued “start-up” success, ACBL needs to turn its attention to the regional games as well, and of course, players can help here just as much by buying entries well in advance of the cut-off time for sales. Technology improvements are still in the works—ACBL-Live should be even better by the Fall NABC in Denver, and plans are in place to implement Swiss and KO “team matching” software by 2016. Hopefully, by the time of the DC NABC in the Summer of 2016, most of the “things in the works” will have been worked out and our D6 NABC will be a great showcase for them.

Congratulations:

A full list of players who placed in the overalls in national-level events can be found on **page _ of this issue** of TableTALK. I would be remiss in not recognizing a few of the winning D6 players here, though, especially since it gives me an opportunity to urge you to buy DC NABC t-shirts so that you, too, can practice the winning ways of D6 GNT Flight A Team Members Stan Schenker, Stephen Drodge, Barry Falgout, Rusty Krauss, John Miller, and Mark Laken (pictured below).



Team Schenker, after each purchasing t-shirts in both navy and red and wearing them on the opening day of the 2015 GNT National Finals in Chicago and in the Finals, went on to win the

event! Coincidence, luck, or the power of the t-shirt? You tell me, but if you don't buy and don't win, the opportunity was there!

Seriously, it was a great effort by this team, whose members come from three different units within the district. Other great GNT efforts included a proud second-place finish by Shiang Chen, Myron Goldstein, Blake Schwartzbach, Adam Gann and Terry Klein in Flight C, and a 3rd/4th spot in the Championship Flight claimed by Bill Cole, Bill Pettis, Sylvia Shi, Alan Schwartz, Ai-Tai Lo, and Beth Palmer. And, last but certainly not least, was the NABC+ win by Bill Pettis and Ai-Tai Lo in the Wernher Pairs, making it a truly fine time in Chicago for them!

ACBLScore+ and Other Technology Issues:

Many meetings were held in Chicago regarding ongoing technology challenges faced by the ACBL. Mitch Hodus, the new ACBL Chief Technology Officer (CTO), spoke both to the full Board of Directors and to the Membership Technology Meeting held on Thursday, August 6. His message? A pretty blunt and bleak report on technology and especially the lack of an adequate infrastructure in place in Horn Lake to support any new program upgrades. Unfortunately, Mitch's point about lack of adequate backup was driven home only too well just two days later when a lightning strike hit ACBL HQ and knocked out a number of systems that had no—you guessed it—automatic backup. Among other items, ACBL Live results sent out to players and appearing on the ACBL website were directly affected and were unable to be restored for several days.

Mitch's priorities—even before the lightning—were to hire more programmers and shore up the IT infrastructure, and the ACBL Board of Directors (BOD) voted an additional \$100,000 out of capital funds to help him accomplish this. Improvements to ACBLScore will take a back seat to these key priorities for a few months, causing more delay in catching up technologically to where we think we should be in being able to provide customer service in a manner deserving of the 21st century, but enabling us to get back on the right track.

Special Reports:

CEO Robert Hartman gave a "State of the League" Report to the Board of Governors at its Sunday meeting in Chicago. In this report, Robert detailed membership trends (average age now over 72) and efforts to recruit Juniors and 'Boomers,' with total membership over 168,000 for the first time since 1997. (I am happy to provide a copy of this report to any of you who would like a copy.)

A second special report was presented to the BOD, the CEO, and League Counsel by Paul Street and Bobby Hamman entitled "Ensuring the Future of Bridge" with four key points: 1) Bridge is facing an existential crisis, a "demographic time bomb;" 2) ACBL is facing an organizational challenge; 3) suggestion of a range of options to reverse the decline; and 4) the outline of an "action program."

#1 has been a topic of concern from the early 1970's, and dire predictions back then that by the 21st century, ACBL would have no more than 30,000 members, have clearly not proved to be the case. However, our new members continue to be over 50 rather than under, and that is something that will be difficult to reverse, particularly with more and more 'Boomers' happily joining our

ranks, so that marketing strategy is clearly working. It is also important to understand that how we target younger folks who have less time to devote to learning/playing bridge—by developing phone apps, allowing shorter (18-board) club games, and shorter online games—is key to capturing some of what little time people in their 20s and 30s have for recreation due to work and family constraints.

#2 is true in many ways, not just in the size and composition of the Board of Directors, which is the primary suggestion the “Hamman Report” makes, but also in how the ACBL leverages expert players, skilled industry folks, and other key volunteers who have much to contribute in helping to shape our organization in the coming decades. Changing BOD focus from the micro (a regulatory, motion-driven environment) to a more macro perspective and adding outside business skills and project management capabilities will augment the skill set the Board already possesses plus provide more people-power for hard data analysis that can guide subsequent decisions.

#s 3 and 4 included creation of a strategic planning or Working Group, and that is certainly an idea that marries well with changing how the BOD does business. ACBL has a Strategic Plan—indeed, has had one for a number of years, and the goals put forth in that plan are evaluated annually and the tactics and practices to accomplish these goals are tweaked as needed to encompass new and different issues that deserve attention as they arise. Including outside bridge-playing experts in addition to the Board was done with the CEO Search Committee in 2011 when Bob Blanchard and Steve Beatty, both CEOs and top bridge players, were asked to join the Board to select the next CEO, and what is being done now by adding Greg Humphreys, formerly from Google; Uday Ivaturi of BBO; and Ralph Lipe, formerly an original member of the Microsoft team to the Technology Committee.

The Longest Day (TLD) Wrap-up with Kudos to District 6:

A special reception hosted by the President of the National Alzheimer’s Association for major contributors to this year’s *The Longest Day* joint fund-raising activity with the ACBL was held on Tuesday night during the Chicago NABC. Bridge Heroes United, under the very capable leadership of Yuen DeAnda from Northern Virginia, was honored for its \$25,000 effort. Adam Gann, who helped Yuen in this effort and is currently leading the Bridge in Schools program for the WBL, was there to accept the honor in Yuen’s absence. Last year, the Mid-Atlantic Bridge Conference (MABC) gave ten regional free plays in drawings throughout the MABC (D6/D7 tournaments) for any team or club or unit that raised over \$250 through raffle tickets. This year, District 6 continued that policy, and can be proud to have fostered momentum for player contributions through this means. Seven different teams/clubs received the free plays this year.

Board Actions of Interest:

A number of miscellaneous items were **APPROVED** in Chicago, among them some minor changes to Non-Life Master Regionals and STAC regulations (check online for the full Minutes from Chicago to view the specifics); allowing “Instant tournaments” as a format for online club games; broadening the “electronic device” policy to include any device capable of sending or receiving electronic signals—e.g., Apple i-watch must not be visible; changes in the way ties are broken in a three-way KO match when all three teams have tied both of their matches; and a better definition of “replacement” versus “substitute” in NAPs.

A number of more substantial motions were also **APPROVED**:

- A new process for Appeals Committees where the Tournament Director's determination will be taken as the basis before any change in the decision is made upon appeal (composition and even the existence of appeals committees continues to be a very controversial topic and one that promises to continue as bridge play and ethics decisions become increasingly entangled).
- Rescission of the decision made at the Fall NABC in Providence, RI last year to charge \$20 per person in NABC+ events in the rounds/sessions where screens are used. There is a Management Action Item to re-do the analysis that was done when this charge was approved and to distribute a screen charge fairly across ALL level events where screens are used. Flight B and C NAP and GNT players, 0-1500 LMs, Mini-Spangold finalists, etc., were originally not charged extra to play behind screens. A new screen charge will be a motion at the NABC in Denver this fall.

Motions that were **DEFEATED** were:

- Motion for BOD term limits (four consecutive three-year terms). I initially intended to vote in favor of term limits because I think that new blood is good for the leadership of any organization. However, I ended up voting against this motion based on the fact that individuals at all levels within the ACBL are elected by the membership of the level of the organization that they represent. The argument that finally swayed me was that if the National Board imposed term limits on its own members, they were effectively taking away each district's right to elect whoever they wanted to represent them. I would encourage the D6 leadership to consider whether or not it wishes to impose term limits on any of the individuals it and its constituent units elect—the District Director, the First and Second Alternates to the District Director, and the Board of Governors (BOG) representatives. Vote was 11-13-1.
- Request for reduction in MPs for persons on four-session KO teams with more than four players for those players who play fewer than all of the boards in the match. This action was perceived as anti-pro, but there were also a number of us who felt that it is anti-volunteer. Vote was 10-15-0.

A number of motions were **DEFERRED** until the fall meetings in Denver:

- Changing the BOG meeting day from Sunday to Saturday. The intent was admirable—to save costs associated with having the BOD and ACBL HQ staff stay an extra day—but most of us thought this would be better coming from the BOG and not from the BOD, and in fact at its meeting after the conclusion of the BOD meetings, the BOG voted in favor to stick with Sunday. I am sure the BOD will honor this vote and defeat this change-of-day motion in Denver.
- Changing strat limits in general to allow locals to set the upper limit (within reason) of the X strat according to its population needs
- Removing the process whereby all ACBL membership payments are made directly to the WBF and requiring that all dues should be paid by and all representatives to the WBF be elected from the USBF.

And, finally, my personal favorite, a series of motions that addressed whether or not online MPs should be included in published LIFETIME MP lists were, in a presumably logical order,

DEFEATED and APPROVED. The net effect of all of this was that online points will NOT (for the time being anyway) be listed separately. This was, as it is every time it is brought up, hugely controversial, with the final argument this summer being made that reporting/listing separately online points of any “color” calls attention to those points in a negative way. They ARE different, but so are points earned at other venues—how do we solve this? Stay tuned—I am sure we are not done here, and in fact, the person who provided the impetus for the original motion calling for separate lists, asked at the BOG meeting for the BOD decision to be yet again reconsidered. It is a shame that when online bridge first became popular and masterpoints started to accrue in astonishing numbers, the discussion of whether different lists should perhaps be created was never conducted. Now, it is difficult to make any one case for how these points should be treated.

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