

Retrospective on Reno and Deliberations in DC

Like the ACBL, District 6 (D6) has been diligently looking for ways to cut costs and better serve you, its members. Starting this year, based on the results of a district-wide survey, the number of issues of the D6 TableTALK publication was reduced from six to four, saving D6 approximately \$7000 per issue. This decision to publish only quarterly has caused delayed publication of the District Director reports in the magazine, to the point that, in this issue, you can read the report from the March NABC in Reno, but this August-September-October issue went to the printer before the July ACBL Board meetings even began. The timing of this third issue means that any decisions or actions taken by the ACBL Board of Directors (BOD) at the Summer NABC in DC cannot be reported in TableTALK until November, when the Orlando NABC will start. Therefore, in order to try to get the July BOD meetings decisions out to D6 members in a timely manner, a full report on the DC NABC BOD actions will be posted on the D6 website in mid-August.

Reno as a Tournament Venue

Reviews were mixed with smoke-filled casinos contributing to player discomfort. Not only did players have to pass through the casinos to get to the three hotel playing sites, but smoke often filtered through the hotel ventilation systems into some of the playing areas (notably those downstairs in Circus Circus) as well. Even the one excellent playing site—the Convention Center—could not be accessed except by traipsing through the hotel casinos in order to get there, unless one chose a much more circuitous and lengthy route outside. Attendance fell slightly short (5%) of 12,000 tables projected (compared to the 13,500 estimated for DC this summer) as some players left early. It seems evident that we cannot contract with this hotel/playing site configuration again in Reno unless this problem can be fixed—unlikely in a casino town. However, Reno is an attractive venue overall with low room rates, good food at low prices, and a convention center with some of the best playing space I have ever seen, so it will be a challenge to see if Management and the BOD can find a way to return to the “Biggest Little City in the World.”

Key Actions in Reno

President Ken Monzingo started our year by recognizing that the difficult decisions facing this year’s ACBL BOD deserve significant blocks of time set aside at each of our three meetings for in-depth discussion of specific issues that can impact the success or failure of our Strategic Plan. The strategic priorities that formed the basis of our initial Plan three years ago were revisited by the BOD in Reno and re-prioritized in an updated Strategic Plan to: 1. Increase membership acquisition and retention; 2. Develop and accelerate tournament director training and recruitment; 3. Build the confidence of ACBL members through dealing effectively with cheating and maintaining financial health; and 4. Upgrade technology and secure our infrastructure while establishing the future architecture of ACBL Score. As part of this re-prioritization and in support of it, issues discussed in-depth in Reno included Finance, Technology, Strategic Planning in general, and ACBL’s commitment to International Bridge, with Finance, Technology, Strategic, and International along with Board Composition to be the focus in DC. Many of the committees established for this year—most notably perhaps the Committee concerned with Board Restructuring/Composition—plus actions coming out of the Reno meetings reflect the fruits of open over motion-driven discussion that can effect real

change in organizational structure, membership recruitment, technology, and advances to encourage ethics and confront cheating. Brief summaries of key actions, in no particular order, are below:

- **Finances:** --The 2016 budget, conditionally approved last fall but requiring final approval this spring, was carefully reviewed and slashed to get from a \$60,000 deficit to approximately a \$100,000 excess of revenues over expenditures, again representing BOD commitment to reducing unnecessary expenses and focusing finances on projects that will help move the ACBL forward in concert with its strategic goals. --Some actions will be ongoing while smaller steps are being taken at every meeting. Example: In Reno, the President's budget was significantly reduced by substantially cutting travel to attend meetings at regionals, sectionals, and world or zonal competitions outside Zone 2 (Canada, Mexico and the US) and social activities in the President's Suite, including players from throughout ACBL. Additionally, an annual reduction of \$15,000 was achieved by BOD action that revised the way that the key NABC Host Committee Volunteers are honored by Management and the BOD. Volunteers are still the recipients of appropriate appreciation (e.g., discounted entry fees, a suite in which to relax between shifts attending to player needs) but the large-attendance (often 100 folks) Volunteer Dinner the night before the start of an NABC is now a thing of the past. --The desire to project annual expenses accurately given a number of uncapped commitments in our current regulations resulted in actions detailed in the following two bullets.
- **Cooperative Advertising Reimbursements:** --Prior to Reno, ACBL covered 75% of eligible advertising expenses incurred by teachers, clubs, units and districts for date-specific programs and lessons designed for beginners/newcomers and/or to recruit ACBL members, with a ceiling per program of \$500. Following an almost unanimous vote in Reno, Cooperative Advertising Program (CAP) reimbursements will be funded at 50% and still with the \$500 per-program ceiling. This action helps reduce the total amount of expense that is completely unpredictable at the time an annual budget is set, while still offering generous support to Member entities.
- **School Bridge Programs:** --In a move similar to reducing the high uncertain costs of CAP expenditures, the BOD voted unanimously to better define the guidelines under which ACBL will support/provide materials to School Bridge Programs: 1. Students must be younger than 26; 2. High school graduates must be enrolled full time at a two-year or four-year college; 3. It is recommended that classes have at least 12 students, but they must have a minimum of four; and 4. Students may not be charged for a teacher's time.
- **Effectiveness:** --The aforementioned Board Restructuring Committee with members from Management, the BOD, the Board of Governors (BOG), and at-large (including Daniel Korbel of D6) is looking at ways to increase the effectiveness of the BOD. This Committee was created in Denver last fall and wide-ranging suggestions are being entertained in an effort to find "a better way" to meet our organization's daily needs as well as its strategic goals—should the Board be smaller, should it comprise distinct skills needed by the League (e.g., legal, technology, tournament experience, club representation) in lieu of geographic representation? How big or small a Board is needed? How will Board members be elected? What mechanism can be developed that will allow the current districts to voice their concerns if geographic representation is eliminated?
- **Encouragement of Newcomers and Social Bridge Players:** For a separate stand-alone "newcomer game" for players with fewer than 20 masterpoints, players may now ask for

advice, refer to notes, and have help on any hand. This game is intended to acquaint new players with duplicate bridge and to encourage participation by inexperienced and/or social bridge players. Teachers, club managers and administrators of programs such as *Learn Bridge in a Day?* or *EasyBridge!* should find this a perfect enticement or follow-on to lessons for players uncertain about entering the world of duplicate bridge.

- **NABC Events:** --At the request of the non-BOD Competition and Conventions Committee (C&C), the BOD entertained a motion to create yet another 7-day KO during the Fall NABC, so that there would be consistency in the scheduling across all NABCs—there are already NABC+ KOs starting on Monday in the Spring (the Vanderbilt) and the Summer (the Spingold). Many unanswered questions remained as to how such a new event would impact existing events in the Fall, such as the first weekend’s two-day NABC+ pair event and the Open Board-a-Match Teams (BAM), the mid-week three-day Blue Ribbon Pairs, and the three-day Reisinger BAM on the final weekend, so voting on this recommendation was deferred until DC.
- **Cheating:** --A number of high-profile hearings scheduled to be held by the ACBL Ethical Oversight Committee (EOC, current composition listed on the ACBL website) were postponed at the request of the defendants. In the interim, decisions as to guilt and penalties imposed have been taken by the defendants’ cognizant National Bridge Organizations (NBOs) and/or the World Bridge Federation, all of which will be taken into consideration when these cases are heard by EOC and reviewed by the Appeals and Charges Committee (A&C, of which I am a member) later this year.
- **Legal Services, Standards, and Policy:** --Based on the recommendation of the Legal Services Review Committee, the position of League Counsel was eliminated and a full-time in-house Legal Counsel, Linda Dunn, was hired after extensive search and interviews of highly capable applicants. --Although it sounds semantic, prompted by the many international cheating scandals, the standard of proof in cases involving severe discipline was changed from “preponderance of the evidence” to “comfortable satisfaction.” --And, in a major change of policy, attorneys, never before permitted to represent their clients at hearings, will now be permitted in A&C hearings, but not in Unit or District hearings.
- **Player Appeals Committees:** --“ACBL Tournament Directors will now hear and rule on all appeals for NABC+ events at NABCs. All Conduct and Ethics or Disciplinary matters shall continue to be referred to and heard by the NABC Tournament Committee or to its assignees.” This process has been in place at Regionals and for non-NABC+ events at NABCs for well over a decade. Prior to the narrow passage of this new regulation (14-11 with one abstention and one absent), NABC+ appeals were heard by Committees composed of expert players. With good arguments on both sides—those favoring rulings by players versus those favoring rulings by Directors—from world-class players, this is the third time in the past ten years this proposal has been made—the third time being the charm. The “correctness” of these rulings will be monitored closely by reviewing them after-the-fact, and also including input from expert players before the final ruling is made.

Motions for Consideration in DC

As noted above, I can only guess at the outcome of the numerous changes to ACBL regulations that might be forthcoming (or have happened by the time you read this) from the meetings in

DC. What I can do with conviction is detail the categories and some specifics of the motions that I know will be considered even if their outcome is unknown:

NABC Event Entry: Clarification of ability of players who have suspension hearings pending with their own disciplinary bodies to participate in ACBL events or to partner with known co-conspirators.

NT Openers: By partnership agreement, a notrump opening or overcall is natural if it contains no void, at most one singleton, which must be the Ace, King, or Queen and no more than two doubletons. This is in addition to other existing regulations governing NT openings.

Player Recruitment: Creation of a Player Recruitment Task Force that would include the ACBL Director of Marketing and two club owners as non-voting members.

Electronic Participation in Regionals and Sectionals: Furthering the progress made with a Phase I “electronic section” on June 6 at the Tampa Regional with clubs in NC, NY, and FL participating through Bridge Base Online, **ACBL would like to** conduct a Phase II electronic horizontal two-session Gold Rush Pairs event at the PGA Regional in FL on August 23 and 24 with clubs in NC, NY, and FL again participating.

Conditions of Contest: For the 2016/17 Collegiate Bridge Bowl, reinstating the eight-team face-to-face final at the Summer NABC; changing the methodology for team matchups in Women’s NABC Team events; requiring 50% participation in each matchup for NABC events in which four-ways are needed; allowing American Bridge Association (ABA) members to play in ACBL Sectionals and Regionals without paying the non-member surcharge; encouraging High School Bridge Championships to be run under existing regulations for Youth and Junior Sectionals and Regionals.

Tournament Assistant (TA) Accreditation for Work at Sectionals: In order to work at Sectionals, TAs must pass the TA accreditation exam and be approved by the Director-in-Charge of the tournament. Local Directors may no longer work at Sectionals without having passed the TA accreditation exam.

Bridge Play Apps for Mobile Devices: A Feasibility Study requested by the BOG for “capable competent Volunteers” to develop interesting applications for mobile devices as a means to entice younger folks to try their hand at bridge.

Major Revisions to the Recorder Regulations: At the recommendation of the Bridge Integrity Task Force, proposed revisions to parallel strides being made by the Anti-Cheating Task Force to both encourage reports of ethical violations and to protect both the reporter and the person allegedly committing the infraction.

Miscellaneous: --Videotaping/live-streaming of BOD and BOG meetings; --A two-year term for the ACBL President; --Indemnification of Anti-Cheating Task Force Commissioners; --Day-long robot tournaments; --Decrease in cost of Junior Memberships from \$15 to \$5, continuing all current benefits with the exception of a mailed Bulletin—encouraging more school bridge participants to become Members, thereby enabling ACBL to contact them via email.

As always, contact me with any questions at margot10bridge@cox.net. Hope to have seen many of you at the DC NABC by the time you read this!*Margot*