

## **From Kansas City to Toronto—In-between and Beyond**

As you all are aware, D6 no longer mails TableTALK to every district member, but does print copies that are available through every unit, at clubs, and at D6 sectionals and regionals. This has changed publication dates, and in the case of my report following the Spring NABC in Kansas City, meant that this report is coming to you very late, just as Toronto—the site of the Summer NABC—is starting. I have, therefore, tried to make the news actually “new” and “newsworthy” and non-duplicative of information contained elsewhere in this or previous TableTALK publications.

### ***Special Happenings in Our District***

The names Bob Heller and Jay Whipple are known to many bridge players in our District. In his eighth year on the ACBL Board of Directors (BOD), Bob is this year’s ACBL President and long-time activist in bridge administration in District 7, our neighbor to the south and partner in the Mid-Atlantic Bridge Conference (MABC). Jay is the District 9 (Florida) representative to the BOD but is likely better known to more of you as the creator of Fast Results and The Common Game.

At my invitation, both Bob and Jay attended the Richmond Regional to give their insights into current ACBL strategy and policies, and to advocate for the inclusion of online events at regionals as an innovative way of expanding tournament attendance and enticing players who otherwise would not attend to play in a D6 regional tournament.

Online events are being tried at numerous regionals throughout ACBL-land this year with Jay at the helm—31 tables (30 of which were online and one of which was onsite at the Convention Center) played in an early-morning Fast Pairs on the first day of the Gatlinburg Regional in April, for example—and your D6 Board will vote at its next meeting in Hunt Valley on holding such an event during the fall Regional in Chesapeake.

### ***We Have a New CEO!***

After six years at the helm, Robert Hartman stepped down as ACBL CEO on July 1 and Bahar Gidwani stepped into that role. Robert inherited an organization plagued by an outdated technology infrastructure and failing software, a lack of vision on how to train tournament directors, a haphazard marketing strategy, and a rash of high-profile cheating scandals to mention just a few of the things he has dealt with since late 2011. Many improvements have been made, including a much more modern approach to infrastructure, new ACBLscore “modules”, a Tournament Director University (TDU), and the creation of a permanent Anti-Cheating Commission; however, success on all fronts is not ensured—numerous problems and challenges to the future of the ACBL persist. Bahar has tremendous energy, working tirelessly since his hire date as a consultant in mid-June to get up-to-speed on “all things ACBL” and Robert will continue as a consultant until July 31 to help manage the transition. The BOD is energized to continue its progress on more efficient and better governance and looks forward to working with Bahar. You can read more about Bahar at <http://www.acbl.org/gidwani-accepts-position-as-acbls-top-executive/>.

### ***Congratulations to D6 Members on Top NABC Event Finishes in Kansas City!***

KC D6 winners were congratulated in the May/June/July issue of TableTALK and more complete lists of all finishers in NABC events are on *pages xx and xx of this issue*.

### ***Kansas City as a Tournament Venue***

Reviews were primarily good if somewhat mixed due to the long hike—but all indoors through a glass-enclosed walkway—between the two tournament sites and the inherent confusion that reigns regardless of good signage, when two sites are needed. In addition to the tournament hospitality, which was offered at both tournament sites, there were several nearby restaurants and a downtown tram that offered access to many more just a short ride away. In the end game, players were for the most part able to find affordable accommodations fairly close by to make up for the early shortage of rooms at the two host hotels—limited more than usual by two Big 12 Basketball Championships. This NABC experience also featured long-awaited responses to repeated requests for cleaner bid box inserts and playing cards as well as board vulnerability inserts. I expect the “trend” started in KC will continue for future NABCs.

### ***Board Governance and Strategic Thinking—A Refreshing New Approach***

Last fall, the BOD enacted several new changes to the way the Board had been doing business for so long. We agreed to hold face-to-face meetings for only three days instead of four in the spring, which we did for an approximate cost savings of \$6000 for hotel rooms and per diems for staff and BOD. This summer in Toronto, and again in San Diego this fall (complicated by the intrusion of Thanksgiving into the mix for the latter meeting), we will be meeting for four days but the meetings will not start until the day before the tournament and extend through the first Saturday of the NABC. This means that no Board member may play in an event until Sunday but incurs additional savings of approximately \$18,000 per meeting. In Toronto, the BOD and the CEO will be discussing many options for future process and the meeting schedule may or may not be changed based on the outcome of those discussions. There are many possible alternatives, all of which include much more extensive advance Committee work and none of which includes returning to the past longer-paid-stay at the NABC site.

### ***Tournaments Task Force***

In the Feb/March/April issue of TableTALK, I described the President’s creation of a Tournament Task Force (TTF) for this calendar year to address a disturbing trend that, unfortunately, I expect many of you have personally experienced—declining tournament attendance. This trend is most visible at regionals where here in the East attendance is rarely “up” and is most often 3 – 15% lower (if not dramatically more-so, as with a sharp 28% decline in Norfolk in the fall of 2016 over 2014, which was the last time a regional was held there) than the same tournament the year before, with sectional attendance across the country holding almost steady from past years.

Bob asked me to select the members of and chair the work of the TTF and we have been focused since late last fall on defining the problem and hopefully developing a structure that will lead us to numerous potential solutions. Are there too many tournaments? What obligations do units and districts have to offer opportunities for you to win Silver and Red and Gold points? What inducements exist for players to join the ACBL and want to become Life Masters? Are there reasons for many to keep playing after becoming a Life Master?

We are looking both to personal anecdotes from players such as yourself made to “officials” like me at club games or in a tournament setting—which capture those of you who attend tournaments as well as those of you who don’t—and in your responses to the Fast Results Surveys you fill out after a tournament, which, of course, capture only the comments from

tournament-goers—and to detailed analyses of data from regionals and sectionals to help understand exactly what is happening and at what level. Stay tuned for some initial analysis results in my report after Toronto, which should appear in the Nov/Dec/Jan issue of TableTALK. In the meantime, in an effort to provide you with more fall color—Red and Gold, that is!—**D6** **has approved its first Non-Life Master (NLM) Regional to be held October 6 – 8** in conjunction with the NVBA Fairfax Fall Sectional at the Elks, a tried and true successful tournament location. All of you who are not yet Life Masters but who are striving to be and need Gold and Red points, should plan now to attend! *See the ad on page xx of this issue of TableTALK.*

### ***Win a National Championship in Toronto without Ever Being There!***

*“People worry that bridge is a dying game, but then object strongly when anyone tries anything innovative that might draw more players. I'm one of the "young" people the ACBL is in theory trying to draw and without these types of tourneys [robot] I may have stopped playing bridge before I ever got hooked...”*

The above statement is a quotation from a poster on the Bridgewinners website, about a nationally rated event that the ACBL is holding—an Online Individual—during the Toronto NABC that will pay up to 48 MPs with 1/3 Gold and 2/3 Red. This is a four-day, four-session Bridge Base Online (BBO) robot duplicate event beginning Sunday, July 23, and continuing through Wednesday, July 26, 2017. It is controversial with the pros and cons debated extensively on Bridgewinners, but for those of you not planning to go to Toronto and who enjoy online bridge, please participate in this first-time-ever event and then comment afterwards in response to the survey that will be sent to all participants. Pre-registration is required with discounted entry fee offered if pre-registration is completed by July 19, but available up to the start of the event on July 23. For complete Conditions of Contest, go to <http://web2.acbl.org/coc/NABCOnline.pdf>.

### ***Key Actions Expected in Toronto***

- Joint BOD – CEO discussions and preliminary action plan on strategic processes and tactical procedures to move the organization forward
- In-depth discussion of proposed motions for regulations concerning
  - Use of the “stop card” (deferred from Kansas City)
  - ACBL presence in and financial support of international bridge organizations (also deferred from Kansas City)
  - Reconsideration (requested by the Board of Governors) of the requirement **at an NABC only**, for a full entry fee from every member of a KO team even though masterpoints won by players on a five-or-six-person team are pro-rated based on time played
  - A substantial re-write of the Code of Disciplinary Regulations (the CDR)
  - Approval of the ACBL Elections (Exceptions) to the 2017 edition of *Laws of Duplicate Bridge*
  - When and how Tournaments Assistants can be used by host units/sponsors of sectionals and regionals—a key action for our district where we rely on TAs to supplement our dwindling supply of full-time and part-time Tournament Directors
  - Tighter controls over how NABC funds are provided to the local organizations and how regional events are scheduled and CoC are applied, This is not as ominous as it

sounds since NABCs with expected attendance over 10,000 tables (DC is in this category) will still receive the \$11.50 per estimated number of tables and the regional schedule will require more team games and specifically bracketed Swiss versus Compact KOs at earlier times, e.g., 10 and 3, with number of teams in each bracket and the number of boards played specified in the CoC.

As always, contact me with any questions at [margot10bridge@cox.net](mailto:margot10bridge@cox.net). Hope to have seen many of you at the Toronto NABC and the Hunt Valley and Chesapeake Regionals! .....*Margot*