

Looking Ahead from Toronto to San Diego

Once again, as I did following Kansas City in the Spring, in this report, I will be looking forward from one NABC to the next in terms of ACBL Board of Directors (BOD) activity—this time from Toronto to San Diego. Your new CEO, Bahar Gidwani, is moving at lightning speed to look at all aspects of the ACBL from Membership to Marketing; from analyzing declining Tournament attendance to refining Tournament schedules and relaxing regulations to allowing experimental new events; from proposing strength-based ratings for players to simplifying the Masterpoint Award Chart. So, what happened in Toronto has in many instances been superseded by fast-paced activities that point to lots of decisions on the line in San Diego. Formal decisions affecting the rules and regulations of the organization are dealt with by the BOD at their three annual meetings held in conjunction with the three NABCs in the Spring, Summer, and Fall, and this Fall, our schedule is chock-full. For those less interested in the politics, rules and regulations, or finances of the organization, be sure not to skip the paragraphs at the end of this report that discuss proposed new ideas to work with clubs, creative experimental events that we are hoping to try in conjunction with regionals, and other tournament-related items. Ok, you can't quite ever get rid of the politics, but it should prove interesting reading nonetheless. ☺

Before I digress too much from what happened in Toronto, let's recap:

Congratulations to D6 Members on Top NABC Event Finishes in Toronto!

D6 winners and top finishers in NABC events are listed in the Honor Roll on page ___ of this issue of TableTALK. Special kudos go to Bill Cole, Ai-Tai Lo, Beth Palmer, and Bill Pettis in their four-handed win in the final weekend's three-day Roth Swiss—that's six intense sessions, playing every hand of every session. A very notable accomplishment!

Toronto as a Tournament Venue

I have long loved this city ever since spending two summers at UT studying Russian as an undergraduate. It has obviously changed vastly since the mid-1970s, but retains its ethnic character and pedestrian-friendly walkways, both contributing to a great network of terrific, inexpensive, and easily accessible restaurants near the Convention Center. And the Convention Center! This was one of the best if not THE best venue for an NABC in my memory, with spacious, well-lit playing rooms with windows and skylights for natural light. A contract for another Summer NABC is being worked on—the first available Summer slot is 2024, now that Chicago was approved in Toronto for Summer 2023 (along with Phoenix in lieu of Orlando in Fall 2022).

Toronto meetings plus a "Hail" and "Farewell"

As discussed and then voted on during the past several BOD meetings, for the first time these meetings were held on days that overlapped with bridge play. Board members arrived late Tuesday and met from Wednesday through Saturday, allowing no two-session play until Sunday, following the Board of Governors (BOG) meeting that morning. The net effect of this decision is that it cut the cost of our meetings from what had been seven days to only five. This is a policy that will continue to be examined for additional cost savings, albeit with exceptions such as the occurrence of Thanksgiving in the middle of our meetings in the Fall.

The beginning of the meetings saw a farewell reception for Robert Hartman, our outgoing CEO (paid for by those who attended), followed by a transition of leadership to Bahar Gidwani with a dynamic presentation to both the BOD and the BOG of an aggressive path forward.

Key Accomplishments in Toronto

- As of January 1, 2018, use of the “stop card” in the bid box is mandated to cease in tournament play. Although not incumbent on club owners to follow suit and extend this regulation to their games, many have already taken the stop card out of the bid box, so that you can get used to “practicing” waiting before bidding when a “skip bid” is made in front of you. **Alert:** Eliminating the stop card by no means allows fast passes or fast bids—you must maintain the table tempo.
- As you have been reading in your monthly ACBL Bulletin, a new series of convention charts currently designated as red, yellow, green and white in descending order of complexity was presented by Competitions & Conventions (C&C) Committee Members Danny Sprung and Tom Carmichael. Adopting these with whatever changes have been proposed following more Member review since Toronto is on the BOD agenda for San Diego and should go a long way in making duplicate bridge appear “easier” and more accessible for the social bridge players who have expressed that it is intimidating to make the transition from their social games to ours.
- Significant revisions were approved for the Code of Disciplinary Regulations (CDR) following months of hard work by Appeals and Charges Chair Georgia Heth and In-House Counsel Linda Duncan, with participation from the entire BOD. The CDR was overly complex and a daunting task to try and understand for anyone—primarily Unit and District Recorders and Appeals Committees. Changes were made to simplify the document (no more need for formal written motions, which are frequently detailed and time-consuming) to make it more “readable” as well as to include the use of negotiated resolutions, commonly known as plea bargains. If a reasonable agreed upon resolution can be reached, this will greatly reduce the work of HQ staff in supporting Units and Districts in this area and virtually eliminate all appeals. A few years ago, stipulations for the mandatory removal of masterpoints in conjunction with specific probation and/or suspension penalties were added. These have now been removed.
- Teachers may now use prepared lesson hands for regular club games with a masterpoint limit of 20 or less, and award ACBL masterpoints as long as a minimum of 6 boards are played in conjunction with the lesson.

Financial Matters

The ACBL expects to break even at the end the year. “New” expenses are being offset by budgeted items that have been cut:

- A new \$450K Customer Relations Management (CRM) system will replace the outdated AS400 servers and is much-needed to provide better financial recordkeeping, better customer service, and a long-overdue technology change.
- Penalties (\$80K) were incurred in breaking the contract to return to Orlando in 2022 but were deemed advisable to avoid further financial loss down the road.
- Despite its success, the Toronto Convention Center as a venue is expensive and the Spring NABC in Kansas City this year was not as profitable as estimated.

- The CEO Search Committee was able to save \$100K by working hard to find a new CEO without the expense of a professional search firm.
- Your new CEO has eliminated a number of planned expenses, including retention of an outside public relations firm, and is committed to “lean and mean” support for the BOD meetings at NABCs by bringing fewer ACBL staff members and working with the BOD to accomplish more in advance of each NABC.

World Bridge

Related to the above, the BOD narrowly passed a motion to require the three National Bridge Organizations (NBOs) comprising the ACBL—the United States Bridge Federation, the Canadian Bridge Federation and the Mexican Bridge Federation—to pay the \$167,000 annual dues (currently based on a commitment of \$1 from membership dues per ACBL Member) to the World Bridge Federation (WBF). ACBL will commit to increasing its fundraising efforts that would donate to these NBOs. Selection/election of representatives from ACBL to the WBF was left as is currently the case—with five reps elected by the BOD for staggered three-year terms—but creates a governance issue since this is now “representation without taxation” and something that the BOD will need to address.

More “Pajama Games?”

The first-ever Online Individual to be held during an NABC was run during Toronto as an experimental four-day, four-session Bridge Base Online (BBO) robot duplicate event. It was well-received, with the most criticism being levied against it the fact that it was one “open” event with no separate masterpoint-delimited events run alongside it. And then, of course, there are those robots—not everyone’s favorite partner or opponent. As an experiment, it went well with ACBL HQ and the BOD looking at how to improve and expand such games in the future.

Key Actions Expected in San Diego

- Continued joint BOD – HQ discussions on how the Ten Big Ideas address the three main strategic priorities of the organization: 1) Increasing membership; 2) Continuing to invest in technology to secure our infrastructure and establish the future architecture of ACBLscore[®]; and 3) Addressing anticipated Volunteer shortages and burnout. Previous years’ priorities—TDU, Finance, and Cheating—have been moved to operational status with many processes in place to help ensure they do not return to the level of a strategic concern.
- Potential changes to the Fall NABC schedule—The C&C Committee has been discussing for some time the inclusion of a KO event (named for Paul Soloway) at the beginning of the Fall NABC, so that there would be a prolonged KO event at every NABC. Whether and when to include it are different questions with the second being more complicated than the first. Jeff Meckstroth came before the BOD in Toronto to submit his proposed schedule, and there are other ideas that could be incorporated as well. Right now, if you want to play in the NABC Senior Mixed Pairs event, this precludes you from also playing in both the NABC+ Blue Ribbon Pairs and the Reisinger or the three-day Swiss on the final weekend. There is strong sentiment for starting the Soloway KO early in the schedule, but then it would overlap with the Senior KOs. Too many events? Need to make choices? Allow drop-ins? The answers are never easy.

Ten Big Ideas

- **The Email:** As an ACBL Member, you will have received an email from Headquarters summarizing “Ten Big Ideas,” many of which are subsumed under or address the topics listed in the opening paragraph of this report. That email asked you to rank these Ideas in preference order, which you may have found difficult to do. Most of us on the BOD are in favor of the Ideas in principle—such as “Redistribution of Tournaments”—although we view some as ill-advised at this time or simply although reasonably “harmless,” not actions that are likely to produce much traction in attracting new Members or better satisfying current ones.
- **Tournament Tactics:** Are there too many tournaments, too many special games? I don’t think anyone would argue with the assessment that there are—it is the implementation strategies for many of the proposed approaches HQ suggests with which many of us on the BOD disagree. The one that gets everyone’s blood boiling one way or another—eliminating sectional tournaments as we have come to know them—seems to be the most contentious. It is true that sectionals (and regionals and NABCs) conflict with club games and hurt the bottom line financially for club owners, especially those who run “full-time clubs” and have overhead expenses to pay. But, is eliminating face-to-face play at local venues rented several times a year to bring together friends and partners for the purpose of winning silver points the best way to “solve” this problem? Creative, out-of-the-box approaches are needed and in defense of what HQ is doing, putting those ideas out for the Members to think about and consider is one way to find out what the perspective is from different categories of Members—club owners, tournament sponsors, directors, players, everyone.
- **Experimental Events:** And I am willing to try new approaches, yet appreciate the hurdles that have to be overcome in making any trial experiment successful. There are many issues currently with STaCs, for example—uneven fields yielding skewed overall results, inconsistent application of rules—that should give us all pause before surrendering to the idea that sectionals as we know them should be totally implemented in a club environment. But, this does not mean we should be wedded to the “same old, same old” for fear of making a misstep. So...***it looks like D6 will be among the first to try out two new events:***
 - ***There is the very real possibility of allowing clubs to hold games that include the ability to win Gold points at the club.*** I have been working hard with Jay Whipple, the D9 District Director and creator of the Common Game (TCG) and Fast Results, to figure out a way to make this happen—on an experimental basis—in time to be tried in November in conjunction with our D6 Chesapeake Regional. The Regional would be held as currently planned, but clubs that belong to TCG would be approved to allow players to pay an extra fee in advance to play face-to-face—no robots, no tablets, no wifi connections needed—in one to five club games and compete for Gold in a Side Series Pairs event. That’s just one event with the ability to choose when you play just like in a Side Series at a “regular” Regional. Implementation details are too numerous to discuss here, but look to the D6 website within the

next weeks for more details and how you can encourage your club to join TCG if has not already done so.

- There is also a very real possibility of D6 being allowed to run one or two *experimental new KO-like events in Chesapeake* in lieu of the Tuesday or the final Saturday KO. It turns out that Bill Cole, a former D6 President, was creatively thinking along the same lines as several others in nearby districts. Participation in the final (Day 6) KO at a Regional has been dropping to the point where it is difficult to create appropriate brackets so that competitiveness is assured and players enjoy playing. Same thing to a somewhat lesser extent on Tuesday (Day 2). Players' reactions to being "forced" to play in the top bracket when they really don't "belong" there is increasingly vocal, and they (you!) are voting with their feet. No one has any fun—not the team with a player average of 2100 MPs who gets trounced or the team with a player average of 21,000 MPs that does the trouncing—and it is seen as a waste of money by many who want some chance of thinking they can do well in an event they enter.
- Restructuring of KOs is a top priority right now of the BOD Bridge Committee and is supported and even being spurred on its way by the Tournaments Task Force, of which I am the Chair. There are rules and regulations in place that govern the number of masterpoints that may be awarded in KO events, based on number of teams in a bracket and number of boards played within a session. These are things that have to be satisfactorily addressed—at least on a trial basis—before the final go-ahead is given, but by the time this issue of TableTALK reaches you, I am hopeful that all will be in place in time to be tried in Chesapeake. Stay tuned!

As always, contact me with any questions at margot10bridge@cox.net. Hope to see many of you at the Chesapeake Regional!—Margot