

## ***June 2020 Special Meeting Report from your District Director—***

I wanted to bring you up-to-date on some of the latest news from ACBL just prior to our “regular” Summer NABC Board of Directors meeting—things are happening so quickly, that it is difficult to keep current. My Report from the “Montreal NABC” Meetings will be posted to the D6 website by the end of July.

The ACBL Board of Directors (BOD) met officially on June 17 for the third time so far this year. In normal times, we meet face-to-face (FTF) for four-five days in the week preceding the three NABCs. All meetings this year have been and will be virtual.

- During Columbus (we still use the intended location of the NABC to differentiate the meetings, even though all on-site NABCs have been canceled for 2020), we met for five days for four-six hours a day, depending on the number and length of Committee meetings in addition to the four hours of daily full-Board meetings.
- Since the end of March, we have had dozens of Task Force and Committee Meetings as well as one six-hour and one four-hour full-Board meeting, the first in May (Thursday, May 28 and Saturday, May 30) and the second on Wednesday, June 17.
- The next BOD meeting will be for five days, July 13-17, on the same days it would have been during the start of the Montreal NABC. In addition, at least one more Special Meeting will be scheduled in late August/early September.
- Special Meetings must be called and noticed to the members 30 days in advance with a published agenda in order to be able to submit motions to be voted on. During this uncertain time, the ACBL President decided it was important to meet more frequently than just three times a year, since events are moving at such a rapid pace. Hence the Special Meetings.

Here are key decisions made/issues addressed in June, both at our Special Meeting and since then.

### **1. Observations on Management’s June Report:**

- a. By now, you know that the ***ACBL decision not to staff face-to-face tournaments*** for the remainder of 2020, was the most momentous action to come out of our recent Special June Meeting.
  - i. This was precipitated by the sudden D7 decision to hold a FTF regional at the end of July, and another over Labor Day weekend. Management had not been told that they would be required to staff a FTF tournament so soon, and after the first eight TDs that the Executive Director asked to work said no, it was critical to evaluate whether FTF tournaments would be possible this year.
  - ii. It had been expected that data from the course of the coronavirus over the next several months plus the recommendations of the new “Future of Bridge/Online Task Force”—due by the end of August—would be in-hand before having to

make such a decision, but this was not the case. Health and safety concerns for both staff and players are paramount.

- iii. Financial planning—staffing, online events, etc.—can now proceed under the assumption that FTF bridge will not be played during 2020.
  - iv. As one of my colleagues wrote, *“We all hope that a vaccine or treatment will emerge that will allow us to get back to the bridge table. We miss our friends. A few minutes with them online is not the same as that face-to-face smile and hug, but we have an obligation to our volunteers, employees and players to keep them safe...”*
- b. The **current financial status of the ACBL** following the success of the first regionally rated online and Silver Linings games is much improved.
- i. Six of the 23 furloughed TDs returned to work at the beginning of June to assist with the increased workload generated by the magnitude of online play and the planning and running of the upcoming special online games (see #4 below) through the end of the year.
  - ii. Most furloughed HQ personnel will return to work in August.
  - iii. Management (notably ACBL Director of Bridge Services Greg Coles), with the help of Jay Whipple of The Common Game, and working together with BBO, has done an amazing job of moving virtual bridge clubs online and running both regional rated tournaments (Red and Gold points) and Silver Linings events so that our players can get the pigmented points that they seek. These special events, coupled with increased club game play and major cuts in expenses should bring the ACBL into a profitable position at year end. An update will be presented in mid-July at the time of the Montreal meetings.
- c. Also significant is the **tremendous amount of customer satisfaction** that has been expressed—to Management, to the ACBL President, to me, and I am sure to many of you—with the opportunity to achieve Rank advancements that many players had despaired being able to attain once FTF bridge stopped. The Endless Summer regionally rated online event had terrific turnout—just over 13,000 tables in four days, with Gold and Red points being awarded. The addition of the two “time tracks,” mid-flight and lower level games, and several “ballrooms” during each track for the Gold Rush allowed everyone who wanted to play to do so. Each time these massive events are run, there is a learning curve as new and challenging issues arise—not the least of which was the error BBO made in programming the hands that were played on Friday yet again for the first session Saturday!—but BBO has effectively addressed the capacity problems and ACBL will be working on team games and “friend groups” where local sectional and regional cohorts can be approximated for the planned special online events where appropriate.
- d. One of the biggest concerns remains **security and the integrity of online events**. The July ACBL Bulletin contains a number of articles that address, well, **cheating**: The Bulletin Editor, Paul Linxwiler, on page 6; Georgia Heth in her President’s column on

page 9; Matt Koltnow, Moderator of Ruling the Game, on page 26; and Robb Gordon, the National Recorder, on page 27. Both player-reporting and BBO algorithms continue to produce more cases than we would like. These are being investigated as to whether the “C” word (more politically correct to say “unethical behavior”) is actually applicable or if instances reported are simply bad bridge that worked out favorably—you’d be surprised as to how many suspected cases have been subsequently attributed to simply spectacularly bad bridge play! 😊 There is understandable reluctance to hold prestigious events online until these concerns can be adequately addressed. Zoom rooms where “screen mates” are able to see and converse with one another, the requirement to “self-video,” and delayed vugraph via Twitch will all be used in top-level online team games, such as the upcoming North American Online Bridge Championships (NAOBC) Premier KO and Pairs events at the end of July.

- e. **Nancy Boyd**, after moving in 2018 from CA to Horn Lake to serve as Director of Field Operations and being an integral member of the Executive Team at HQ, is returning to CA and to her first love—tournament directing—once FTF bridge begins again.
- f. Below are several **interesting tables and charts** for the data hounds among you with info that was provided by Management to the BOD in mid-June about online play:

### Online Play 2020 vs Face-to-Face Play 2020 Analysis

Points Won By Pigment		Players Winning Points					Points Per Player		% Change – May 2020	
		2019 Mo. Avg	April 2020	May 2020	2019 Mo. Avg.	April 2020	May 2020	2019 Mo. Avg.	May 2020	Points
<b>Black</b>	207,081	150,465	172,211	88,098	31,152	38,091	2.4	4.5	-16.8%	-56.8%
<b>Gold</b>	12,222	427	1,554	7,124	363	1,352	1.7	1.1	-87.3%	-81.0%
<b>Online</b>	10,111	25,347	28,526	10,009	25,067	28,263	1.0	1.0	182.1%	182.4%
<b>Platinum</b>	854	0	0	473	0	0	1.8	0.0	-100%	-100%
<b>Red</b>	37,698	887	5,979	18,662	800	4,382	2.0	1.4	-84.1%	-76.5%
<b>Silver</b>	40,263	0	72,547	21,398	0	31,759	1.9	2.3	80.2%	48.4%
<b>Total</b>	308,230	177,126	280,817	145,764	57,382	103,847	10.8	10.3	-8.9%	-28.8%

**Key Takeaways:**

**Online Points** - Players winning points in BBO games (unpigmented) has almost tripled but the points per player has not changed. More players but not playing more.

**Black Points** - Approximately 43% of players won black points compared to an average month. Players are playing more than normal as evidenced by table count being about 2/3 of a typical month despite 43% of players playing.

**Silver Points** - In May we awarded 80% more silver than an average month, but we awarded 0 silver in April. June will also award no silver. In May, silver points were won by almost 32,000 players. This is over 10,000 players more than an average month. Players won an average of 2.3 points as compared to the typical 1.9 points.

**Red/Gold** - Less than 2000 gold points won during the Regional@Home, less than 1/6 of an average month. The average award per player was about 1/3 less than an average month.

### Comparison of Online Play to Face-to-Face Play Patterns

2020	Total Members	# Playing on L4C	% Playing on L4C	NLMs Playing	LMs Playing	NLM %	LM %
January	162,650	101,210	62.23%	64,253	36,774	63%	36%
February	162,439	106,397	65.50%	67,919	38,285	64%	36%
March	162,347	93,319	57.48%	58,076	35,093	62%	38%
April	162,328	36,397	22.42%	21,265	15,125	58%	42%
May	162,063	48,487	29.92%	29,605	18,881	61%	39%
June	161,275	49,806	30.88%	30,740	19,066	62%	38%

- g. **Motions** [Note: Four of the six motions we were asked to vote on were deferred rather than voting them down, which is what would have happened to all, based on the discussion that ensued. Procedurally, once a motion has been defeated, it cannot be brought back in essentially its same form until after at least six months have passed. Therefore, the same motion can be brought back if it is deferred, with the addition of "friendly amendments" to bring it into a position where a definitive vote can be cast.):
- h. **Item 20S2-01—flight/stratum designations for winners of Grand-Life-Master-eligible events**—was a cleanup motion from the wording of the motion passed at the May Special Meeting. This motion passed unanimously.

- i. **Item 20S2-02—regulations to decrease the percentages of pigmented masterpoints awarded during online non-club events**—was deferred (18-7-0, I voted in favor of deferral) after considerable discussion to the next Special Meeting after Montreal. This will give an appropriate amount of time for the popularity of online play to settle down and the work of the “Future of Bridge/Online Task Force” (see #3 below) to be finished and their recommendations taken into consideration. This motion came from the non-Board Masterpoint Committee—established several years ago and comprising TDs, HQ staff, and BOG members in addition to two BOD members—through the Bridge Committee.
- j. **Item 20S2-03—regulations decreasing the number of masterpoints in all games based on 24 boards for 100% award**—was deferred (20-5-0, I voted in favor of deferral) again after much discussion to the next Special Meeting after Montreal. Similar reasoning for deferral as Item 20S-02 immediately above, but in addition, instead of treating all numbers of boards from 18 and above (in pairs games) as “full-length games,” all games—**whether virtual or face-to-face**—of fewer than 24 boards would be given a proportional reduction in masterpoints from those awarded for a “base game” of 24 boards. This motion also came from the non-Board Masterpoint Committee through the Bridge Committee.
- k. **Item 20S2-04—Conditions of Contest (CoC) for online play**—was deferred (24-1-0, I voted in favor of deferral) until the Montreal Meetings. These regulations were thought to be a much-needed addition to our regulations, but the overwhelming consensus was that they were incomplete. The Competitions and Conventions Committee—a non-Board committee chaired by Danny Sprung—was asked to make these CoC for online play more detailed, based on the longer period of time for extensive online play that will have been had in the coming month since they were first developed back in early May.
- l. **Item 20S2-05—Guest Membership**—was approved unanimously with one abstention (I was not the abstention). This motion phases out the current \$7.99 Temporary Membership established several years ago and establishes a free up-to-120-day membership for anyone who does not have or has not had an ACBL membership previously. This is a marketing effort to encourage all of the new online players who have not been ACBL members before to join and enjoy certain benefits. It is expected that the Temporary Membership will no longer be available but that Guest Memberships will, after appropriate programming changes have been made. In the meantime, Temporary Memberships have been extended to 120 days to cover the time between now and when the Guest Memberships will first be available.
- m. **Item 20S2-06—approval of Memphis as the site of the Spring 2025 NABC**—was deferred unanimously until the Montreal Meetings. The BOD has grave reservations about committing to a new NABC contract with hotel rates, room blocks, attrition, and guaranteed hospitality minimums that require 9000 tables to break even. Management has been asked re-negotiate the cancellation clause so that there would be very little to lose should we decide to commit in late July and then cancel or downsize the commitment within the next 12-24 months.

2. **Important Actions:**

- a. The ***“Future of Bridge/Online Task Force”*** that the President created at the May Special Meeting will report and put forward recommendations in advance of the late August/early September Special Meeting regarding all aspects of online bridge (including masterpoints awarded per the above deferred motions).
  - i. TF Committee Members include Jay Whipple (Chair, The Common Game), Greg Coles (ACBL Director of Bridge Services), Susie Cordell (ACBL Director of IT), David Moss (ACBL BOD), AJ Stephani (ACBL BOD), Pete Misslin (Gatlinburg Regional TC and D7 President), Lamya Agelidis (Palm Springs Regional TC and D22 Regional Tournament Coordinator), Nancy Strohmer (BOG), Silvana Morici (Owner, Sagamore Bridge Club on Long Island), and Donna Compton (Owner, Dallas Bridge Academy)
  - ii. At the first TF meeting, five subcommittees were subsequently created:
    1. Teaching/Membership Growth/Promote the Brand
    2. Types of Bridge (e.g., Robot Teams of four, “synthetic” events where “sectionals” can be created by grouping participants)
    3. Social Issues (how to make online play more “fun”)
    4. Point Pigmentation/Levels of Competition
    5. The Long Term (FTF, Online, “Hybrid”)
    6. Platform Options
  - iii. I lobbied strongly when the Subcommittee Leads were asking for recommendations for subcommittee members that David Rodney be included on the “Long Term” Subcommittee. A number of other well-qualified folks now comprise that Subcommittee, as well as the other subcommittees that have been augmented with additional BOG and other members. The “Long Term” Subcommittee has formed Focus Groups comprising even more members ACBL-wide to help ensure that varied cross-country opinions are all taken into consideration when formulating the TF recommendations to the BOD. I am sure David will send you an update as soon as there is something to report. As always, there is more work to be done than there is time, and priorities continue to compete, but I expect that this TF and its Subcommittees will be able to produce some meaningful recommendations when it concludes its research in late August.
3. Below is a ***tentative*** Special Events schedule for the rest of the year that was provided by Management at our June Special Meeting, and recently revised—you probably received some of these dates in emails from ACBL during the second week of July:

**ACBL Calendar of Proposed Special Events: June – December 2020**  
*(Note: Current Calendar is on the ACBL Website)*

Month	Date	Event	Masterpoints	Fees	Comments
June	20-21	Longest Day	2xBlack	Extra \$3/table	
	25-28	Endless Summer (Regional-rated Event)	80% Regional rating	\$15pp	
	27-28	NABC Robot Practice	Per BBO Contract	Free	These events have been run immediately prior to the three NABCs for the past 3-4 years.
July	4-5	NABC Robot Practice	Per BBO Contract	Free	
	11-13	NABC Robot Individual	Per BBO Contract	\$50/3 days	
	12-18	Youth/Collegiate Tournament	TBD	Free	
	23-26 and 30-8/2	North American Online Bridge Championships (NAOBC) Premier Knockout	1 <sup>st</sup> place = 200 MPs (all Gold), by formula for remaining OAs. National Online Title.	\$200/team/day. No entry fee for Round of 32/ later for teams that install and use over-the-shoulder cameras.	56 boards. Similar to how the “Reynolds Teams” are currently being run online. Possibly Zoom Rooms for screen-mates.
	27-8/2	Silver Linings Week	2x Silver	Extra \$4/table	
August	1-2	NAOBC Premier Pairs	80% NABC rating, by formula. If 100 pairs enter, 1 <sup>st</sup> place ~ 55 MPs (all Gold).	\$100 for the event per pair. 50% who qualify pay no entry fee for the final day.	24-board sessions. Must be Platinum Pairs-qualified or who entered NAOBC KO and did not make second weekend
	27-30	Regional-rated Event	80% Regional rating	\$15pp	
September	7	Labor Day 1-Day Event	2x Black	No Extra	
	21-27	Upgraded Club Championship	2x, 25% Gold, 75% Black	Extra \$4/table	
October	15-18	Regional-rated Event	80% Regional rating	\$15pp	
	26-Nov 1	Club Appreciation Week	2x Black	No Extra	
November	7-8	NABC Robot Practice	Per BBO Contract	Free	These events have been run immediately prior to the three NABCs for the past 3-4 years.
	14-15	NABC Robot Practice	Per BBO Contract	Free	
	21-23	NABC Robot Individual	Per BBO Contract	\$50/3 days	

	<b>23-29</b>	<b>Upgraded Club Championship</b>	2x, 25% Gold, 75% Black	Extra \$4/table	
	<b>29-Dec 5</b>	<b>Team Event(s) (Open)</b>	MP awards / rating / titles? /(Regional / NABC), point colors, etc., all TBD. Not definite—numerous concerns.		
<b>December</b>	<b>18-21</b>	<b>Regional-rated Event</b>	80% Regional rating	\$15pp	

Currently, all events are planned to benefit clubs and the ACBL. The continued trend in online play and its accompanying financial success suggests that some distributions to Districts/Units *may* be considered later this year if online play remains strong. However, the first priority is to help ensure solvency of the organization, and the fact remains that units and districts have few expenses during this time of virtual play. (I shared with District and Unit officials the results of my query as to whether any penalties had been imposed as a result of cancelling tournaments throughout D6, and thankfully, neither D6 nor any of its units incurred any; very few units/districts have had cancellation penalties, and most negotiations with hotels are ongoing for any tournaments that have not yet been cancelled). The emphasis in the coming months will be on such techniques as “pooling” by ZIP code/unit to create known subsets for sectionals, hopefully with overalls to simulate FTF sectionals. Regionals already are somewhat “pooled” by two tracks, the first geared for Eastern and Central time zone play, and the second more conducive to Mountain and Western (and Hawaii) players. Many of us also want 21 boards, at least in the open events, but it is amazing to me how many want to retain the shorter 18-board session. More can be done, but most important is to ensure the capacity for and integrity of online play.

Once the technological challenges associated with making tournaments “more like we are used to” in terms of who we play—and once the recommendations of the “Future of Bridge/Online Task Force” regarding long-term prospects for a hybrid world of both online and FTF have been made—we will all understand much better what 2021 will look like; what financial obligations the ACBL, the Districts, and the Units will have; and how and how many tournaments will actually be held. More information will be forthcoming at our July “Montreal” meetings, and I will update you yet again after that.

I welcome your comments and questions. This is all very fast-moving with many pieces, and it is likely that some of what I have reported above may already have changed a bit. One reason why it has taken me several days longer to get this report finalized is because of many new bits of information that are continually coming my way. ACBL continues to send out all-member, district/unit official, and club-teacher notifications as appropriate, and I will update you again at the end of July.

Stay safe...--Margot