

**District 21 Director's Report**

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Contact Stu: stugo@sbcglobal.net**Providence:**

The next NABC is coming soon to Providence, RI. Are you planning to attend? If so, be sure to see the Water Fire display on the river just a couple of blocks from the playing site. I remember seeing it the last time I attended the NABC in Providence and can vouch it was worth the spectacle, even though it was late November and frigid cold outside. This time it is summer in Rhode Island, so you won't need fire water to keep you warm while you watch the Water Fire.

The ACBL Board of Directors (BoD) meets in person at each NABC, which occurs 3 times a year. These meetings are the regularly scheduled ones and take 3 ½ to 4 days, mostly prior to the start of the NABC. Lately, the BoD has been holding online Zoom meetings between these in-person meetings. There is often one a month, with the latest one taking 7 ½ hours over 2 days in mid-May.

Of Interest to Players:

ACBL management together with the BoD have been trying to promote more Face-to-Face (FtF) bridge, and also level the playing field among the very large consortiums online and the club-sized VACB games run by club directors. The BoD members have heard many complaints that a few super alliances have grown enormously over the last 2 years, mostly at the expense of local online clubs running their own VACB games, to the point of running them out of business. VACB online games were designed to help FtF clubs pay their rent and expenses until the COVID epidemic was over. Of course, no one expected a 2-year ordeal nor did they anticipate some highly enterprising individuals would take advantage of the situation and create large alliances and consortiums. (Or is it consortia? Major dictionaries suggest both are acceptable.)

Actions of interest:

To achieve the desired result above, there have been some immediate and impending actions:

- a) Masterpoints (MPs) awarded to overall winners at regionals and sectionals are increased 20% for the next year. This started with our Sacramento Regional and will end the week before it in May 2023. If you are looking for gold or silver points, now is the time to play in regionals and sectionals while picking up many more MPs.
- b) VACB online games had a maximum of 4.0 MPs for first place. This maximum is being reduced to 2.5 MPs. MP awards for lower positions follow the same scale, ie. 2nd place is 70% of 1st, 3rd is 70% of 2nd, etc.
- c) FtF clubs can run upgraded Club Championships the last week of June and the first week of July, then the first two weeks of November. These games provide significantly more MP awards than a regular club game.
- d) The visitor policy of limiting online games to 15% of guests not on the 'include list' has been enforced strictly since this last spring. However, smaller VACB clubs that may have just 5 tables are not able to have even one full table of guests with the 15% guest limit. No one really wants to impose such restrictions on small games, so the guest limit will not be enforced for VACBs with less than 50 total tables per week.
- e) FtF clubs will be able to participate in a Royal STaC between September and December 2022. Royal STaCs are an experimental attempt to improve regular STaCs (Sectional Tournaments at Clubs). STaCs traditional award silver points, just as you would get at a sectional, even though the game is played in clubs. There are overall awards across all the clubs participating in the STaC, and the MPs awarded can be substantial depending on the number of clubs and total tables in play at the same time. A Royal STaC awards 25% gold, 25% red, 25% silver, and 25% black



points instead of all silver. This is theoretically more attractive since players can get those elusive gold points. The experiment of a Royal STaC took place between February and April 2022. In March, I made a motion to make it a permanent fixture, but withdrew the motion in the face of a lack of supporting data and uncertainty by other board members. By withdrawing it, the motion could be presented again at the next BoD meeting. Before doing so, we reached a compromise to extend the experiment and gather more data on attendance for a Royal STaC in the months between September and December. You can look for a Royal STaC run by our Western Conference in our December STaC week.

- f) In order to support traditional sectionals and regionals, the ACBL is limiting the special tournament games it has been holding online. There will be only two online regionals of 4 days each - one on Sept 9-13 and another on Dec 20-23. It was determined these online regionals did not clash with scheduled FtF regionals.

In addition to these short-term adjustments to support a return to FtF bridge, the BoD also has a Strategy Committee that is looking at the longer-term implications. The proposals of the Strategy Committee have been declared confidential, so the specifics cannot be disclosed ahead of the full board voting on the details. Suffice it to say the general approach is to examine how to grow the membership, which has been sinking in these times of COVID, and also to balance the field of FtF and online games in the longer term. I have made a proposal on the latter issue and it is the leading choice on the committee right now. Hopefully, I will be able to explain the details in the near future without violating the confidentiality of the matter.

Governance:

There was a most unfortunate event just prior to our March BoD meeting in Reno. Mike Kovacich, the Region 6 Director, passed away unexpectedly in February. There are no longer 1st and 2nd alternates to fill in for a Director who cannot attend a BoD meeting. As a result, a special election was held in Region 6 to elect a replacement, and Barbara Heller is the new Director.

For many years, the ACBL President was elected by the BoD and traditionally served for one year. After that term, the former President became the Chair of the Board, a position that was the backup for the new President. If the past President retired from the BoD or was not re-elected to the BoD, this posed a problem which the bylaws addressed by assigning the Chair position to the most recent past President still on the BoD. In recent years, many Past Presidents left the BoD right after serving as President, making for an awkward situation in some years. Additionally, the title itself was not indicative of the duties of a traditional Chair of the Board. Consequently, there is a motion to replace the Chair of the Board with a Vice-President, one that would be elected by the BoD along with the other elected officers, namely the President and the Treasurer.

To effect such a change requires an amendment to the ACBL Bylaws and also the ACBL Codification. As Chair of the Bylaws Committee, I was assigned the task to write the motion to amend the bylaws, and do so on short order so the amendment would appear on the agenda before the deadline for the Providence meeting. Normally, bylaws are not changed often, but this year alone we have had two amendments put forth and we are only halfway through 2022. Hey, if you have any ideas changing how the ACBL is run and they require an amendment to the bylaws, just let me know. There's always room for one more!

A General Problem:

This paragraph appeared in my last column, but the problem persists and bears repeating.

The biggest problem in ACBL operations is the IT department. They have difficulties doing even small changes requested by staff or the BoD. In turn this causes backlogs in requested changes made by the BoD and other management departments. No sooner do new people get hired in IT than someone on their staff resigns. ACBL IT does not seem like a good career path for your average programmers, especially for those who have no involvement in the game of bridge. They regularly find better offers elsewhere and leave. Then it takes months to get a new hire up to speed.



D I A M O N D I N T H E R U F F

If you or someone you know has a possible solution or is willing to help, let me know. We have a lot of software talent in our District, and it may just take a bridge player, even if only a committed volunteer, to get some productive work accomplished.