



199er NiteClub

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Calling All Beginning Bridge Players



At our District 21 (“D21”) Board meetings, I regularly report on the status of the All Western 99er NiteClub association as its D21 liaison (and association Secretary). At the last Board meeting, it became apparent that some newer Board members aren’t familiar with this program. So I’d like to explain to the D21 membership what the program is and what we currently offer.

We currently offer two games for beginners on Bridge Base Online (“BBO”) each of four evenings (Monday through Thursday), with a 99er section starting at 6:30 PM Pacific Time and a 199er section starting at 6:35 PM. It is a 12-board game played at a pace of seven minutes a board. After each game

there a free lesson on Zoom where an experienced teacher answers questions from the players about that evening’s boards. The table fee is usually \$6.00, with over half of that amount being passed through to the player’s “home” club. Lately, we often haven’t been able to muster the three tables needed for a 99er section, so those players end up playing by registering for the later 199er game. We average about 13 tables a night, with the turnout increasing when silver points are available. Here’s a [link](#) to our latest flyer with instructions about registering. Eligible players receive daily invitations to play that evening that include links to the Zoom recording of the previous night’s lesson. One Board member familiar with the game characterized the tone of the players’ chat as very cooperative.



Keep reading if you are interested in a brief history of this game. When I, as then D21 President, was first approached in September 2020 about joining up with D22 and D23 in southern California to offer an online bridge game to beginners, I liked the idea. When the COVID pandemic halted face-to-face bridge in clubs in early 2020, the ACBL and BBO quickly established a system of virtual bridge clubs online. But the new network of virtual clubs left some players underserved. Few local clubs had enough beginners to consistently offer separate beginner sections. The solution to this problem was to cast a wider net for qualified players. Before the pandemic, Districts didn’t operate online clubs, but the ACBL made exceptions to allow some east coast Districts and other west coast Districts (initially 21, 22, and 23) to pool together and open clubs exclusively for beginners.

The All-Western 99er NiteClub was an immediate and surprise success when we opened our virtual doors in October 2020. We quickly moved from a large pool of volunteer directors and teachers to a smaller reliable rotating paid staff. Over time, we halted a weekly 0-20 section due to its lack of popularity. In January 2023 we added a 199er section for our graduating 99ers. Over time the association has grown to include six west coast Districts, 17, 19, 20, 21, 22, and 23. Despite the reopening of face-to-face clubs and the re-emergence of bridge tournaments, the 99er NiteClub has persisted, giving beginners a place to play their peers from the comfort of their homes while raising over \$10,000 a year for the players’ local D21 clubs.