D21 President's Report

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Teaching

I just came back from the Reno / Sparks Regional. It was a marvelous tournament, and I enjoyed it immensely. But a conversation with American Bridge Teachers Association President Jill Wallace strongly reinforced something that I already believe – that for bridge to survive and thrive, we need bridge teachers.

Our experience in Sacramento was that Covid was a huge hit to the Sacramento bridge community. First we lost members through the usual attrition, then there were the losses from Covid, then there were the losses from not being able to recruit and train new players due to the lockdown, there were the losses from players who never came back because they preferred online play and finally there were the losses because our bridge teachers were aging and less able to teach because they needed to retire from teaching. Our table counts were down over 50%. We had a disaster! One of our larger bridge clubs, Folsom Bridge Club, did not survive.

Initially, we hoped that things would just return to normal – they didn't. By mid-2023, it was clear to us that we needed to find a way out of this malaise else bridge as we know it wouldn't survive. Our solution was to look around and see who was doing better and see if we could do the same thing. We found the Matthewson Bridge Center in Reno was starting to turn things around through education. Our unit treasurer, Diane Strategos, reached out to them and asked how they were doing it. Jill Wallace, who is a member of the Matthewson Bridge Center in Reno, gave her some excellent advice that started with training new teachers and recommended the ACBL Best Practices Teacher Workshop.

We took the advice and set up a training course with Patty Tucker in February 2024. It turns out that by accident, we did something very good – we trained too many teachers! At least that was what I thought at the time, but it turns out that not everyone is born to teach. After some initial difficulties, we found a teaching combination that worked and am happy to say that we are producing students who have graduated to playing at our clubs.

There is a powerful incentive to take the ACBL Best Practices Teacher Workshop – besides training bridge players to be teachers, it is one of the requirements to use the Boost program. The Boost program advertises bridge courses on Facebook which is a tremendous help in recruiting players into classes. So, taking the ACBL Best Practices Teacher Workshop is really a double win for bridge teachers. So I want to encourage you to register for the ACBL Best Practices Teacher Workshop that will be held at the San Francisco NABC on November 28-30 which is the three days after Thanksgiving. If you are a club manager or a unit board member, please think of people who might be good candidates to become bridge teachers and encourage them to take the course.

Kindness

One of the things about being in bridge leadership is that people approach you to talk about many things. But one of them is truly saddening – I hear too many complaints about a lack of kindness at the table. Sometimes it takes the form of simple rudeness. Sometimes it is patronizing. Sometimes it appears to be an attempt to intimidate players, especially newer players. Sometimes it is entitlement. The list is endless, but the net effect is to create an unpleasant environment for players who came looking for some fun playing a challenging game.

ACBL Laws of Duplicate Bridge make this very clear – Rule 74.A.1 says, "A player should maintain a courteous attitude at all times."

When a serious breach of courtesy occurs, the best action is to immediately call the director. My experience as a director is that the faster the director is called the better. Arguing with misbehaving players solves nothing and only escalates the situation. Reporting the misconduct later makes it much harder for the director to do anything about it.

In tournaments, once the director is called, they have options including a simple warning or issuing procedural penalties resulting in the loss of matchpoints or imps depending on the contest. Club directors have similar options but rarely use the procedural penalty option. In extreme cases, the offender may be ejected from the game. I've seen only one ejection that occurred because the offender refused to accept the procedural penalty and continued to disrupt the game.

As players, there are two tools that allow players to report serious misbehavior:

1. At tournaments, misbehavior should be reported to the ACBL through the Player Memo on the ACBL website. The player memo is a tool of the ACBL National Recorder who is in charge of discipline in the ACBL. The website has a button that allows players to remain anonymous if they choose.
2. At clubs, report the misbehavior to the club manager. Clubs have the right to discipline players through verbal warnings, suspensions or permanent bans from their clubs. I strongly encourage club managers to discipline players as needed. In extreme cases, a Player Memo may also be filed. I belong to two party bridge groups. In both groups there are players who will not play duplicate because they have encountered "nasty" behavior. These are customers that we have lost due to misbehavior.

For the good of the game, please be kind.

Jim Coke
ACBL District 21 President