

## **Ned's report on the Spring Nationals ACBL Board meeting (3/27/2020)**

As I write this, my wife and I are “sheltering in place” along with so many others and wondering how soon this crazy pandemic will run its course. We are thinking often of our friends and families and how their lives have been impacted. And we think often about our extended bridge family, whose lives are also disrupted as well as their primary access to the game they love.

As you know, ACBL cancelled the Columbus Nationals. The actual decision went down to the wire, as the coronavirus reports were changing daily, and the State of Ohio was re-evaluating its position on having group meetings. Ohio decided late the week before the Nationals to mandate that there would be no large group meetings, which superseded ACBL obligations for the hotel room block. In some of the desired cities, many tournaments must commit to a block of rooms in order to secure either room or convention space. ACBL was fortunate that this turned out ok financially; had the timing been different, it could have been a major financial loss for us. In other words, the hotels were not willing to let us out of our commitment until they had to; on the other hand, one can imagine that they took quite a loss themselves. A difficult time for all!

Around the time that this happened, a tidal wave of cancellations hit, concern about safety grew and local clubs and units took appropriate actions to safeguard their membership, which ultimately resulted in closing clubs and canceling tournaments.

This in turn caused a financial crunch for everyone, clubs and ACBL especially. Your ACBL board knew they had to meet at this critical time and decided to have a first-time online board meeting. We had formal meetings last Monday through Friday, while also interacting with Joe Jones and his executive team throughout the week on the major issues.

After our first priority of everyone being as safe as possible, the immediate focus was to work with BBO, the primary online bridge company, to accelerate online bridge as soon as possible in a variety of ways. Club Managers and Unit Presidents have been getting regular updates from ACBL on this. Our objective is to get a lot more people playing online with the primary financial beneficiary being our clubs. A “virtual club” format is being tested so clubs can run their games this way. BBO and ACBL management have been moving mountains to make this happen in a short period of time. Thanks to them we have made great progress and we anticipate much more as soon as BBO is able to increase their capacity.

### **Highlights from Joe Jones, ACBL Executive Director report:**

ACBL Membership as of January 1, 2020 is around 162,000, a decrease of 1% in the past year, and new member enrollment is down over 5%. Face to face club tables are down 2% in 2019, on lone tables increased 6%. Together they are up 1%. Face to face table counts are now twice the size of online tables.

The ACBL NABC team is working on the possibility of the Spring 2025 NABC returning to Memphis.

NABC table count increased 22% thanks to a favorable comparison with San Francisco dramatically outperforming Hawaii the prior year.

Total tournament table count was down 1% from 2018.

Regional table count for 2019 was down 2%, with average tables per tournament down 6% from the prior year, partly due to a higher proportion of Intermediate/Novice Regionals.

Sectional table count decreased 3% per tournament, also partly due to an increase in the proportion of Intermediate/Novice and cruise Sectionals.

STAC attendance decreased 3%.

ACBL had a strong financial year, with an unusual gain from operations of \$1.1 million, about 60% of which was strong return on the investment portfolio.

Mary Stratton has joined ACBL as Director of Marketing. This is an important area for us and one that we are looking for traction from in the coming years.

Greg Coles has been named Director of Bridge Services, overseeing Club and Member Services.

Live for Clubs technology platform has been successfully rolled out. Over time this will enable us to improve the technology experience in a number of ways that benefit clubs.

Square Readers to collect entry fees will be used in all open Regionals in 2020.

ACBL has done a major upgrade to ethics documentation processes and resources available to Districts. Unit disciplinary functions have been eliminated.

“Best Practices Teacher Certification” is being rolled out replacing the previous “Teacher Accreditation Program” (TAP) and is a major upgrade as it focuses on how to teach rather than what to teach. 8 workshops were held in 2019 and 6 so far have been scheduled for 2020.

### **Board meeting report**

Before we started the BOD meeting a motion was made to delay until Montreal. It was defeated 23-2. (While I respect very much everyone’s right to an opinion, I was surprised that this got 2 votes, especially considering the stress that ACBL is under with the coronavirus.)

It was decided to focus on the core issues, anything not business critical would be delayed until the next BOD meeting.

The biggest news is that the “reorganization plan” did pass this time, first of 2 required readings. Next vote will be in Montreal this Summer. If it passes again, the Board of Governors must approve, as it is their motion originally. The vote required a 2/3 majority, and was 20-4-1 (abstain), whereas it was defeated in San Francisco. The board size will be reduced from 25 to 13 over the next few years. If approved, the next election for our area will be in 2022, where voting will be for a Regional Director to represent District 8 (Illinois, Missouri area), 10 and 11 (Ohio, Kentucky, Indiana areas). Currently the number of members from the three Districts is 2574, 6370, and 4190 respectively, making our District roughly the size of the other two combined. In other words, representation of the three Districts will be merged into one. Voting is the same as before, with the proportion of membership weighting the unit board members vote. One major objective of this change is to achieve a significant shift in board members focus – in the past where the primary job for many was to advance the needs of their Districts, the Regional directors primary job will be to “serve the bridge related interests of others,” meaning that

they must do what is in the interest of the ACBL as a whole. The first term will be 4 years, and up to 3 additional terms after that may be served. (That is longer than I would prefer, but I compromised on this point to get this done.) There was a motion to defer this issue until Montreal – basically, push it down the road, and the motion was defeated 19-6.

There was discussion that we have put the “cart before the horse”, meaning that we voted for restructure, but we don’t have concrete plans yet on how the BOD will transition things off of the board. Some thought this was good – pushes us to do the right thing. Others thought the plan should come first. For some, this is the reason they wanted to defer to Montreal.

For the reorganization to work, non-strategic board work must be off loaded to committees. A transition task force is underway, working with the intent of making a lot of this happen later this year. The plan for the Montreal Nationals is to have a recommendation for major committees on what pieces to off load from the BOD. Transition will not address potential BOG reorganization or disciplinary committee(s) structure. (I voted for the downsize. I am very concerned that the BOD spends too much time on trivial issues and not enough on our major strategic issues; part the reason this happens is structural, and that is what the transition task force is trying to improve.)

ACBL management is working on revised financial plans for various financial scenarios based on projected impact from the coronavirus. The BOD will meet as needed online to discuss.

Pre-coronavirus 2020 budget: membership revenue -4%, Tournament table -3.7%, Tournament revenue up 2% (still a \$544,000 gap between expense and income on the part of the business), Club sanction fees -4.7%, online sanction fees up 4.4%. Our objective is for NABCs to pay for themselves, which is why the fees are set where they are, and that is the way it should be since only about 4% of our membership participate in Nationals in any given year. NABC planning is in the process of a major upgrade, the intent of which is to reduce the number of “surprises” due to factors that could have been known. Any of you that have run tournaments know that there are a lot of details that can cause surprises in expenses, and with our NABC that is even more true. What we want to get to is a “no surprise” outcome, where the only variable is the player table count. There is a Marketing plan for \$240, 000 increase in expenses in this area, to be spent if a plan is developed that management feels confident in. **IMPORTANT TO NOTE:** With the huge impact of the coronavirus, these plans will all likely change.

The deadline for the District GNT finals has been moved to October 1, 2020 and the finals will be played in the Tampa Fall Nationals.

A Strategic (Regional) Tournament Task Force committee has been established. The reason is that tournament attendance has been declining and more have been losing money than in the past. We know that older people play less and travel less. Initiatives underway include a rewrite and upgrade of the Regional Tournament chair documentation and training manual, analysis of Regionals best practices – sharing of best event structure, etc. The task force intends for Regionals to self-govern rather than consider downsizing the number of Regionals at this time.

Strategic task force report on New Member Retention and Recruitment. A survey has been developed for Units and Districts to complete, guidance was asked for, and it was decided to hold on it until Montreal until the bridge situation is stabilized. I voted in favor of doing the survey, because in the

coming month it is a good time to get input from the Units and District because most of us are at home looking for something to do. It was defeated 15-7.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> reading of 201-23 round masterpoint Award for Robin Qualifying passed again, 23-1-1. I voted for it.

Louisville NABC was approved for Spring 2024, vote 24-1. I voted for it.

AJ Stephani was elected to the NABF by a unanimous vote.

Ethical violations were reclassified per motion 201-23. The result seems to be a clearer more organized approach. Will have, 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> degree groupings. It was approved by unanimous vote.

The 2020 financial Budget, pre-coronavirus, was approved 24-1, Capital budget, pre-coronavirus, 25-0.

On Saturday I sat in on an online board meeting of the ACBL Education Foundation. As most of you may be aware, they now are the Education arm of ACBL, while being a completely separate entity. As a result, many feel like Education is getting more focus. I am very excited about something new they are working on – social bridge. They estimate that around 15 million people nationwide age 45 and over know how to play bridge, 5 million play a few times a year, and 2 million play at least once a month. They voted to start work immediately on the process of figuring out how to connect with this group. Stayed tuned – I believe that this has potential for us.

Any questions or concerns?? Please call me at 501-922-8608 or email me at [irvingmail@sbcglobal.net](mailto:irvingmail@sbcglobal.net).

Thanks,

Ned Irving

District 10 Director, ACBL Board