

## NEW LIFE MASTER



Guess What! We have our first new Life Master of 2021. Congratulations to **Phoebe Walters** for achieving this milestone. As I have said many times before, this is the most important one, the one you remember forever.

Phoebe had already earned all her required pigmented points and just needed a couple more black points to reach LM. On February 22<sup>nd</sup> she and her partner Sherry came in first in one of our double point online games winning 2.8 black points, and presto, new Life Master, done in style.

Although she joined the ACBL in 2011, Phoebe's LM journey really began when she joined the Aiken Bridge Club in 2016. She kind of went all in, becoming a frequent flyer, joining our small cadre of usual suspects who always volunteer to do whatever needs to be done, serving as Hospitality Chairperson for our Sectional, and was recently reelected to our Board of Directors (where she also serves as Assistant Treasurer) for her second three year term. All that in five short years. Simply amazing!

Three years ago, Phoebe went to the Gatlinburg Regional where she ripped up her shoulder and broke her leg (and you thought bridge was not a dangerous contact sport). She and I rode to the Croft House together while she was mending. I remember her telling me how difficult it was to become a Life Master and lamenting that she was never going to make it. Well Phoebe, not so! A mere three years later you have accomplished your mission.

**Congratulations Phoebe!**

Phoebe joins Marc Carney, Cathie Lindler and Sue Kline on our list of honorees for our next Life Master Party. I'm actually beginning to feel like this event is going to happen sometime in the near future. Where? When? Don't know, but it's going to happen. Please make your plans accordingly.

So, **Who's Next?**

## APRIL SCHEDULE

April is usually Charity month in ACBL Land. While we generally hold a Charity every time one is available, many ACBL clubs do not. The ACBL has designated the week beginning April 12<sup>th</sup> as Charity Week, so all online games that week will be for Charity. So, the special games for April are:

### **Charity Week**

**Monday, April 12<sup>th</sup> thru Saturday, April 17<sup>th</sup> @  
1:30 PM**

### **Double Black Points**

**We are adding games on Tuesday, Thursday  
and Saturday to our usual schedule**

### **Stay@Home, Play@ Home**

**Thursday, April 22<sup>nd</sup> thru Sunday, April 25<sup>th</sup>**

**ACBL Sponsored Regional Event (not  
at our club)**

### **Event Schedule**

For the rest of the month, we will have our normal three games a week awarding black points at 150% of the normal club rate.

## ONE YEAR IN

In the past, the April Newsletter has often contained an April Fool's Day spoof. So, I was wondering what the reaction would have been if, last April, I had written that there would be no bridge at the Croft House for well over a year, and that many of us would be playing against each other using desktop and laptop computers, I-Pads, and even phones? What if I further said many of our most frequent and ardent players would just, boom, stop playing, but some infrequent players would morph into frequent players? What if I also said you would not see the folks you are accustomed to seeing three times a week for well over a year? How about if I added that, despite all this, our little old club would do just fine financially in this environment and that we would even have four members reach Life Master Status during the year? Well, while a significant number of our members were taken in by past April Fool's Day spoofs; I don't think anyone would believe this crap. Yet, here we are! Who would of thunk it!

April 8<sup>th</sup> is the one year anniversary of our club playing duplicate bridge solely on BBO. So, I thought we would take a look back and see how we got where we are. We'll look at the good, the bad, and the ugly.

### WE ARE HERE

This is undoubtedly the best news. I think being able to play bridge with our friends online has been a real boon to many of us. The pandemic has disrupted our lives immensely. The deaths, sickness, and economic mayhem have caused world-wide dislocations, the extent of which will not be fully known for many years. Our daily routines have been, in many cases, shattered, causing us to find new ways to get on with our lives. It is not life as we have known it. Being able to play bridge online has given us a little piece of normality.

We should be grateful to Jay Whipple (Common Game), Uday Ivatury (co-owner of BBO before its sale), BBO, and certainly least, the ACBL for making online ACBL club bridge happen in such a short period of time. At the local level, we thank our game directors (Lauren, Alan, Jay, Jesse and Steve) for stepping up to learn how to direct on BBO and running our games for the last year.

### WE ARE DOING JUST FINE

The table count for our online year was 2162, which would rank as our highest yearly total. Even though we charge the lowest card fee allowed by BBO (about 1/2 of the average) our profitability is excellent. We have added funds to our reserves and are well placed financially for heading back to face to face bridge, whatever that might look like. Hopefully, there are some nice parties in our future.

During the weeks that the ACBL has added special games (Silver Point Week, Stardust Week, Charity Week, etc.) Our policy is to add Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday games to our usual schedule. This has been done to allow our members to earn pigmented points as often as possible. This program has not been terribly successful. Attendance for these games has been well below our average for our regular games. I think the Board needs to revisit this policy in the near future. If you have an opinion, one way or the other, please let a Board Member know.

Despite our success as an online club, in the last few months we have experienced dwindling attendance. This trend is definitely a concern. I don't know the reason for the slippage, nor do I have a clue what to do about it. So, I think we are stuck with hoping for the best.

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## **WE ARE NOT GOOD AT FOLLOWING RULES**

Duplicate bridge, particularly the face to face variety, is a game of many rules. These rules, if broken, offer restitution to the non-offending side, or standardized penalties for the offending side. So, what's the difference?

Well, many of the penalties for breaking procedural rules (bid or lead out of turn, revoke, insufficient bid, etc.) are punitive by design. That means there is a standard penalty for these irregularities, the purpose of which is to deter cheating. For example, let's say declarer is, prior to drawing trump, trying to get rid of losers from their hand by pitching them on good cards in dummy. An unscrupulous defender may decide to revoke on purpose by ruffing, cashing out in other suits and conceding the rest of the tricks. Unless declarer is highly alert (or paranoid) this tactic is likely to succeed so it must be punished severely (two tricks in this case). Other examples include purposely barring your partner from the auction by bidding out of turn, and leading out of turn because you know what to lead. If these actions are not dealt with by imposing severe penalties, the cheaters will cheat.

The other class of irregularities (which I will call "soft" irregularities for lack of better terminology), generally involve such things as dissemination or use of unauthorized information, misinformation from opponents alerts, failures to alert, and the like, and are not automatically penalized. The purpose of the rules, except those designed to thwart cheating, is to achieve a reasonable bridge result on each hand. So, for this second class of irregularities, the Director is charged with determining if the non-offending side was actually harmed, and, if so, among other remedies, determining an adjusted score. As you might imagine, this can be quite a nightmare for the game director.

Well, I feel a digression coming on. We are going to take a side trip which could prove uncomfortable for some of you. You are more than welcome to come along for the ride, but if you would rather not, just skip the **dark red** text. So, where are we going? To the most vile place in the bridge world, the Land of Unauthorized Information (UI).

**A couple of paragraphs ago, I characterized the dissemination and use of unauthorized information (UI) as soft irregularities. This characterization was based on the fact that there are no hard and fast penalties associated with them. In fact, violations regarding UI are hardly soft; they are the hardest of the hard but are not dealt with that way. In my humble opinion, the dissemination and use of UI is the most heinous bridge violation. Simply put, it is overt cheating. Let's look at some of the more fragrant UI violations.**

**Since we are currently in an online bridge world, let's talk about that first. The UI problem online is huge. It's just too easy. Unscrupulous players simply communicate with their partners in person, by phone, or other devices. If your partner tells you what cards they hold, or what to lead or what to bid, seems like you would have a major advantage over the honest players. Computer analysis of thousands and thousands of hands played on BBO indicates that at least 10% of the players are doing this sort of thing. The ACBL Recorder has been investigating suspected pairs and has handed out quite a few suspensions and expulsions. This is an arduous and very slow process which is highly dependent on other players reporting suspicious behavior to the Recorder. Consequently, the chances of being caught and sanctioned are, unfortunately, not all that great. I also think that the ACBL's lack of active disclosure of sanctioned players has not made the process and penalties the deterrent that they should be. Do we have this behavior occurring at our club? Without proof, I will opine that it would be naive to think otherwise.**

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What about face to face bridge? Same problem, different methods. Obviously, in online bridge, telling your partner what cards you hold is about as overt and effective as it gets. Face to face use of UI is a bit more subtle, but still equally nefarious. UI can be communicated to partner in various manners. Asking inappropriate or inappropriately timed questions about opponent's bids with the sole purpose of alerting partner to your interest in that suit, and thereby suggesting that leading that suit may be an effective defense. Frowning if you don't like your partner's lead or jumping up and down on the table if you do like it is another method of conveying UI. Any comments during the auction or play of the hand which call attention to particular tricks or suits is another. The list goes on and on, only limited by the imagination or brazenness of the perp.

While those are some of the more egregious ways to offer UI to partner, the most common is through hesitations during the bidding or when defending a contract. Bridge is a tempo sensitive game. That means that all bids should be made at an even pace, with the time between your bid and your right hand opponents bid being approximately the same each and every time. There are quick players and deliberate players, so the normal time duration between calls varies according to that player's proclivities. For example, a deliberate player may normally think ten to fifteen seconds before making a call, while a quick player (or one who doesn't bother with the thinking thing) may normally make their call within two or three seconds. Generally, if it takes ten to fifteen seconds longer than that player's "normal" to make their bid, it is considered a Break In Tempo (BIT). It is also possible to create a BIT by bidding too fast. When the green card hits the table in a flash, it's called an "insta-pass" and conveys the indisputable message that you have nothing and are not the slightest bit interested in the proceedings. BIT's come in numerous varieties, ranging from the mundane (simply quietly sitting there and thinking longer than normal) to the dramatic (closing your hand, putting it on the table, leaning back in your chair and looking skyward (seeking divine guidance or maybe just asking the ceiling what it thinks)). They are no different in the eyes of the law, a BIT is a BIT. I guess the folks who use the dramatic approach want to make doubly sure that their partner knows they have a problem.

While you should always refrain from making a BIT, sometimes you have a real problem, and the extra time to think it out is absolutely needed. That's fine, and that is why there are no penalties associated with a BIT. Quite the opposite, the onus is squarely on the partner of the BITer (new word, I think). BITer's partner is obligated to bend way over backward to not take advantage of the UI. For example, let's say partner opens one diamond, you respond one spade, and drama queen partner goes into their act and eventually emerges with a one no-trump rebid. Well, clearly, partner does not have the 12-14 point balanced hand she advertised. She most likely has one no-trump count but the hand has a flaw which she deemed sufficient enough to not open one no trump. You have a nice 9-10 point hand with which you would want to be in game facing the 15+ your partner's BIT showed. You must bid as if the BIT did not happen, so you MUST pass, not taking advantage of the BIT. Another example. You open one heart with a decent 13 points and a decent six card suit, partner responds one no-trump and you rebid your hearts. The opponents, as they always seem to, butt in and bid three clubs. Partner now hesitates for quite a while before passing, rightly passes, now it's up to you. Partners BIT shows some values and more than likely honor doubleton in hearts, making it very likely that bidding again will be a success. You know this from the BIT, not the actual bidding; so, don't even think about bidding again based on the UI. When the director is summoned in this very frequent situation, the three heart bidder seems to always say "Well, I was always going to bid three hearts." The director will normally treat this comment as self-serving BS and roll their eyes. Even if your statement is true and you were going to bid again, the director will disallow the bid. The question to ask yourself before seemingly using the UI is if there is a logical alternative to bidding three hearts (the action suggested by the UI), and, in this case, pass is clearly a logical alternative. .

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Although they may not exactly fit in here, I'm going to describe two of my favorite (favs because they are totally outlandish) UI tricks. First up, the 'I've heard enough from you partner' bid. During a non-competitive but somewhat protracted auction where everyone puts their bidding cards on the table in the usual manner, partner plops a number of bidding cards on the table from about six inches off the table sending the crystal clear message that you bidding again may result in severe bodily injury. Sometimes the plop is accompanied by placing their hand on top of the cards or even attempting to return them to the bidding box when partner still has a turn to bid. Cool, huh. Even better is the F2F self alert. You open one no-trump, lefty bids three clubs and partner bids three diamonds. You think three diamonds is a transfer to hearts, but aren't really sure. No problem! Just say something like "I'm going to take that as a transfer" and see how partner reacts. If it was not intended as a transfer, partner's mini heart attack followed by their three no-trump bid clarifies the issue for you. So you can now safely pass with your four card support and maximum hand (how smart you are).

Do we have this sort of behavior at our club? We sure do, and it is abundant. While it is all too frequent among our more experienced players (who should know better, but apparently don't care), it is also quite prevalent among our less experienced players. Over the last number of years, I have had many players come to me with bidding problems, giving me their hand, the auction thus far, and asking what I would bid. Most of the time, my answer is "pass." Their frequent response is "Oh, no, I can't do that". Why? I ask. They explain that they know their partner has some stuff because they paused so long before passing at their last opportunity to bid. For me, this is a teaching moment, and I try to explain the concept of UI and their responsibility to not know of the hesitation or its meaning. Not really sure if this is successful. So, while the more experienced players are skating perilously close to the cheetah line, the less experienced are just ignorant of their responsibilities under the UI doctrine. I actually think there is a pretty good and innocuous reason for this. Many of our players learned to play at the kitchen table or in other mostly social situations. In those settings, the promulgation and use of UI is pretty much the norm, and, in fact, part of the deal. That is, of course, fine. However, when playing ACBL sanctioned bridge, it is assuredly not fine.

We are now returning from our side trip, and I just ask that if you recognized yourself or your partner during our little trip, that you give some consideration to cleaning up your act.

Moving back to online bridge, we still have our rules, but they are handled differently. The good news is that most of the anti cheating procedural penalties are eliminated by the BBO software. It will not allow you to bid out of turn, lead out of turn, revoke or anything else of a procedural nature. However, all of the soft irregularities are still present online. They are just dealt with in a slightly different manner. Over the last year, we have tried to convince you to obey the online rules and make our games as fair as possible. Before we talk about our level of compliance with these rules, let's try to get on the same page regarding the meaning of full disclosure, since it's the sole reason for all of the rules.

## **FULL DISCLOSURE**

Full disclosure is a fundamental, if not the fundamental principle of tournament bridge. Simply put, your opponents are unequivocally entitled to know exactly what information your agreements convey to each other. This includes bidding, opening leads, and subsequent carding. It also includes experiential tendencies you may be aware of, but that is beyond the scope of what I am trying to do here. If we can reach full disclosure of agreements, I will be quite pleased.

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I have had way too many players (some highly experienced who should know better) tell me that they don't think it's right that they have to tell their opponents what their bids mean. Well, they are certainly entitled to their opinions and are even more certainly not entitled to their own rules. Full disclosure is simply not optional.

While we are here, let's talk about another group of people who make achieving full disclosure nearly impossible. They are our ever popular terminally arrogant (TA). You have known quite a few; they are the ones who have never met a rule that applied to them. So, they simply ignore the rules the rest of us try to follow. I have long since given up trying reform them; they are not worth the effort.

So, let's see how we are doing with regard to full disclosure rules in our online games. Note that TA's have been excluded from this analysis.

## **SELF ALERTING**

This was a real struggle from the get go. Either nothing was alerted or sometimes partner's bid was alerted, causing immense confusion. We have gotten a whole lot better at this and it's not really much of a problem for the most part. However, many of our practitioners of Kennedy Club, Montreal Relay and other such systems that require a five card suit to respond in a major don't feel obligated to alert this as required. Neither do they alert whether the one Diamond response shows or denies a four card major. Let's try to clean this up folks. Interestingly, many of the folks who told me they didn't think it was right to have to tell the opponents what their bids meant are users of these methods. Must mean something, but I don't know what. So, all and all I give us a B here.

## **POSTED CONVENTION CARDS**

These are few and far between. Just like in face to face bridge, these are a requirement in any ACBL sanctioned event. A lot of room for improvement. I will grade our compliance as a D, only because I don't like to use the F letter.

## **PRE - ALERTS**

We originally suggested pre - alerting as a house rule about seven months ago. The suggestion was pretty much ignored until January when the ACBL added pre - alerts to their Alert Procedure. Since then, compliance has gotten better and better each month. Once again, the major exception is the Kennedy and Montreal folks. I guess they just don't want people to know what they are doing. So, how about a C?

## ROBOTS

For quite a while it has been our policy to use robot pairs to fill out half table games, and we have been allowing players to play with robots on an as needed basis. I have been a strong advocate of the use of robots. I continue to believe they make wonderful fill-in pairs because they play fast, don't leave, don't bitch, and are not allowed to win Masterpoints.

Since we first started allowing player/robot partnerships, it has been stressed that such usage should be reserved for unusual circumstances (partner is a no-show or a late cancellation). Lately I have seen too many instances where the robot appears to be the partner of choice. People are signing up solely to play with a robot. I think in some cases the objective is to enhance their chance of winning Masterpoints. The robots play at the level of an advanced club player. While I don't consider this a huge problem, there is a huge problem. Unbeknownst to me at the time, playing with a robot is very close to permissible cheating. By putting your cursor over the robot's bid, you get an explanation of what the bid means, and by putting your cursor over your intended bid you get an explanation of what that bid will mean to the robot. Looks like a whole bunch of unauthorized information to me. Imagine if you could ask your partner what their bid meant and ask them what they think your intended bid means. I'm guessing you would eliminate a whole lot of bidding disasters. Obviously, this is quite unfair to the rest of the field.

So, while I still think the use of robots in emergency situations was a noble solution to a real problem, the ensuing abuse of the program now leads me to wonder about it. I think this is another item that needs to be revisited by your Board. Once again, let us know your opinion.

## NOTICE OF BOARD MEETING

The next meeting of your Board of Directors will be Monday, April 12<sup>th</sup> at 12:00 Noon. The meeting will be held via Zoom or a similar technology.

While the agenda is not yet complete, some of the items are:

- Approve the minutes of the October 19, 2020 Board Meeting
- Financial Status as of March 31, 2021
- Appointment of Assistant Manager and Assistant Treasurer.
- Revisit holding Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday games for special ACBL weeks
- Revisit allowing human/robot partnerships in our games
- Need for membership survey regarding our return to face to face bridge
- What will the next iteration of face to face bridge look like
- The dreaded other business

Remember, our Board Meetings are open to all members, so please join us if you are interested. If you have any items you would like to have included on the Board Meeting Agenda, just inform any Board Member.

If you would like to attend, please send an email to Steve at [steve.banwarth@pobox.com](mailto:steve.banwarth@pobox.com). He will then email you a link (probably the day before the meeting) and instructions on how to join the meeting.

# DON'T JUST THE BOX

## FOURTH SUIT FORCING




This is yet another article in our series about commonly used, misused and abused conventions. You remember the scenario. Right? You and your newish partner have agreed to play Fourth Suit Forcing but that's as far as you got discussing it. That is just not good enough. What we are trying to do in this series of articles is convince you that you and your partner need to be on same page with any convention you adopt. That includes what it shows, what it asks for, and what the responses and continuations mean. It is also best to play the whole convention, not just some portion of it.





### What is Fourth Suit Forcing?

Fourth Suit Forcing (FSF) is a bit of a one trick pony. But, that trick is so important that FSF is pretty much mandatory unless you are playing a 1940/50's era Goren based bidding system. Fourth Suit Forcing occurs when a partnership bids all four suits in the first two bidding rounds. The fourth suit bid is artificial and forcing, so opener must bid again. Forcing to what, you might ask. Very good question! Some partnerships play it forcing for one round, others play it forcing to game. Playing it as a one round force allows you to create many nuanced bidding sequences using further invitational bids. It also gives you more to remember. Playing it forcing to game settles the issue – we are going to game, let's figure out which one. So, when you check the FSF box, make sure to agree to what it is forcing.

Since I am not a terribly nuanced kind of guy, don't have a bunch of excess memory, and like to keep it simple, I prefer the forcing to game flavor. That's what we will discuss in this article.

So, why is this thing so important? Let's look at a simple example.

OPENER	RESPONDER
1 	1 
1 	?

If responder has an opening hand and knows the hand belongs in game, she is in a bit of a quandary. She needs to elicit additional information from partner, but there is no forcing bid available. 3  would be invitational with a six card suit, 3  and 3  would be invitational with at least four card support, and 1(6 to 10 HCP) or 2 NT(11 to 12 HCP) would also be non forcing. So, enter FSF, in this case 2 , as the only forcing bid. The only alternative is a SWAG (scientific wild ass guess) leap to game. While most players are not particularly fond of SWAGs, there are many who think making these guesses if great fun. If that describes you, you probably don't need FSF in your bidding tool box.

Note that FSF only applies in an uncontested auction (except for an opponent's take our double which you choose to ignore), when responder is not a passed hand, and says nothing about the fourth suit and is alertable.

### What does FSF show?

It shows a hand with **game going or better values** that is unsure of what strain the game should be bid. It seeks additional information from opener to help make that decision. *continued on next page*



## What does FSF ask for?

Well, as requested, it asks for additional information about opener's hand. Opener's responses are essentially natural. They are, in order of priority:

1. Showing 3-card support for partner's major
2. Rebidding a suit to show additional length
3. Bidding no-trump with a stopper in the fourth suit
4. Raising the "fourth suit" with 4 cards in that suit
5. If none of above applies, do the best you can

Following are a few examples of FSF in action.

### Showing 3-card support for partner's major

Opener should strive to show 3-card support if partner's FIRST suit was hearts or spades.

Opener	Responder
♠JT3	♠KQ952
♥KQT54	♥A2
♦A	♦J32
♣KJ52	♣A87

Opener	Responder
1 ♥	1 ♠
2 ♣	2 ♦ (1)
2 ♠ (2)	4 ♠ (3)

1. Fourth Suit Forcing.
2. Opener shows 3-card support and minimum strength. Bid 3 ♠ with 15 - 17 points.
3. Responder bids game.

### Rebidding a suit to show extra length

Opener can rebid his first suit to show 6-4 shape, or he can rebid his second suit to show 5-5 or longer.

Opener	Responder
♠KQT7	♠652
♥J	♥AKT98
♦	♦64
KQT985	♣AT5
♣K2	

Opener	Responder
1 ♦	1 ♥
1 ♠	2 ♣ (1)
2 ♦ (2)	2NT (3)
3NT (4)	Pass

1. Fourth Suit Forcing.
2. Opener shows his 6-card diamond suit. With a strong hand, bid 3♦ instead.
3. Responder suggests NT with a balanced hand and club stopper.
4. Opener bids the most likely game.

### Bidding no-trump with a stopper in the fourth suit

Opener can rebid no-trump if he lacks 3-card support for partner's major suit.

Opener	Responder
♠7	♠KQ942
♥AJT94	♥63
♦A95	♦K63
♣KQJ3	♣AT2

Opener	Responder
1♥	1♠
2♣	2♦ (1)
3NT (2)	Pass

1. Fourth Suit Forcing.
2. Opener bids the obvious 3NT with a diamond stopper.

### Raising the fourth suit with 4 cards in that suit

This occurs when opener holds a 3-suiter which is short in partner's first-bid suit.

Opener	Responder
♠9	♠AQ542
♥AT84	♥KJ9
♦A975	♦K43
♣KQ63	♣87

Opener	Responder
1♦	1♠
2♣	2♥ (1)
3♥ (2)	3NT (3)
Pass	

1. Fourth Suit Forcing.
2. Opener shows a 4-4-4-1 or 5-4-4-0 pattern.
3. Responder knows that opener has a 3-suiter, but opts to bid 3NT anyway.

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## So What About?

Our alert readers may have noticed that there has been no mention of the 1♣-1♦-1♥-1♠ auction. Is 1♠ FSF or simply a spade suit? That is a matter of partnership agreement.

My preference is that it is FSF to game. But what if I have four spades? Not really a problem. Prior to your 1♠ FSF bid, partner has shown four or more clubs and four or more hearts. Looking at our list of partner's responses to FSF, if he also has four spades, (thus 4-1-4-4 or 4-0-4-5) he will bid two spades and all is well. Some play if you have four spades 1♣-1♦-1♥, a jump to 2 spades shows four. I see no need for this. My preference for this method is because you know you are going to game after 1♠ and now have both the entire two and three level to figure out what that game might be.

Other folks play that the one spade bid shows four or more spades and is not FSF. It is, however, forcing for one round (new suit by an unpassed responder). These folks also play that 1♣-1♦-1♥-2♠ is FSF. The choice is yours, just make sure to agree with your partner which way you are playing it.

## Important stuff to remember about Fourth Suit Forcing

- ◆ Only the responder can use 4th suit forcing (never the opener).
- ◆ It is always the 4th bid of the auction.
- ◆ FSF is typically not used after a 2/1 game forcing response, because you are already forced to game. The 4th suit should be natural in that case (1♠-2♦-2♥-3♣=clubs).
- ◆ Fourth-Suit is NATURAL and non-forcing by a passed hand (P-P-1♥-P-1♠-P-2♣-P-2♦ = 5-5 or longer in ♠ and ♦). If the opponents have made an early double, 4th suit forcing is still on. If they overcall, it is off.
- ◆ Fourth Suit forcing is alertable.

I tried to catch some Fog. I mist.

When chemists die, they barium.

Jokes about German sausage are the wurst.

A soldier who survived mustard gas and pepper spray is now a seasoned veteran.

I know a guy who's addicted to brake fluid. He says he can stop anytime.

How does Moses make his tea? Hebrews it.

I stayed up all night to see where the sun went. Than it dawned on me.

This girl said she recognized me from the vegetarian club, but I'd never met herbivore.

I'm reading a book about anti-gravity. I can't put it down.

I did a theatrical performance about puns. It was a play on words.

They told me I had type A blood, but it was a Type O.

PMS jokes aren't funny. Period.

Why were the Indians here first? They had reservations.

Class trip to the Coca-Cola factory. I hope there's no pop quiz.

Energizer Bunny arrested: Charged with battery.

I didn't like my beard at first. Then it grew on me.

How do you make holy water? Boil the hell out of it!

What do you call a dinosaur with a extensive vocabulary? A thesaurus.

When you get a bladder infection, urine trouble.

What does a clock do when it's hungry? It goes back four seconds.

I wondered why the baseball was getting bigger. Then it hit me!

## WHENCE FACE TO FACE BRIDGE

I do think there is face to face bridge coming to a venue near you in the not too distant future. The vaccination program appears to finally have gotten off the ground. Unfortunately, as our fourth wave of self inflicted virus spikes attests, too many people have taken this as a call to abandon the COVID safety protocols that were beginning to help contain the virus. What will win out, the vaccine or the stupidity? To misquote Albert Einstein, genius has its limitation, stupidity has no bounds. Despite this, I'm rooting for the science.

In the last month or so, your Board members have had casual email conversations among themselves about this topic. Not surprisingly (nobody has ever been in this situation before), opinions are all over the place. Following is a little discussion of the issues which need addressing.

### WHEN CAN WE START PLAYING AGAIN

Board member opinions range from a week from next Thursday to January, 2022. If we plan to resume F2F play at the Croft House (best in my opinion), I think this decision is pretty much theirs. While the Croft House vaccination program has been successfully completed, they are still dealing with an extremely vulnerable population. If you think about it, outside of nursing homes and the like, they may be the only group more vulnerable to the virus than the Aiken Bridge Club.

Could we start up at another venue? Sure, but it would be problematic. Some of the issues are storing our stuff, getting tables, chairs and everything else set up for the game (I think this would get old pretty quickly, even for our dedicated usual suspects), and adequate parking. Only place that I know of would be Odell Weeks Center, but I'm sure there are others.

### WHAT ABOUT SAFETY PROTOCOLS

There are the obvious questions about the use of masks, sanitation of cards, boards, bidding boxes, and other equipment, as well as the efficacy of having snacks available.

Probably the most vexing issue, however, is what about vaccinations? There is both pro and con sentiment on our Board for requiring proof of vaccination to be able to play face to face. One of the issues for some is, is it even legal to have such a requirement? While I am not a lawyer, and certainly not a HIPAA specialist, I will opine that, in our situation, it undoubtedly is. While I am not 100% sure that Croft House could include this condition in our lease, I'm pretty sure they can, and that would be that. What I am sure of is that the Aiken Bride Club can require vaccination proof to play. Even if not legal as an open club (which I believe it is), we could simply change our ACBL sanction from Open to Invitational. Invitational clubs are just that. You have to be invited to participate, and, if not invited, you may not participate. The only limit on exclusion is that you may not exclude a legally protected class (race, ethnicity, religion, etc). Am I saying we are going to do this? No. I'm just alerting all our Monday morning lawyers and general contrarians so they don't waste their time planning how to fight this.

So, for the most part, safety protocols are also Croft House calls, although we can be more stringent than they mandate.

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## **HOW MANY GAMES WILL WE HAVE**

Yet another big unknown. The people who are currently playing in our online games will most likely continue to play either online or face to face. But, we really have no idea about the people who have elected not to participate online. I'm sure many of them are more than ready to get back to playing bridge. But I fear that many may have been lost forever. Maybe they have become chess players, tri-athletes or extreme sports aficionados, or, even worse, have discovered that they can easily live without bridge. So, we just don't know.

While I believe the majority of our members prefer F2F bridge, there is a not insignificant minority who, for various reasons (easier to play, no travel, takes less time, really don't care about the social aspects, and many others) prefer the online game. We must make sure they are satisfactorily accounted for going forward.

My guess is that we will have some sort of hybrid model, running both face to face and online games. Three games a week is not cast in stone. We could have one, two, or three F2F games per week plus one, two, or three online games per week. The obvious question is how many games per week will our membership be willing and able to support. I have no idea.

## **SO, LET'S DO A SURVEY**

As you can see, most of the issues going forward will be decided by the response of our individual members. For example, will you play in a game with unvaccinated people?, How many times a week will you play F2F and online?, Will you be coming back at all?, etc.

The only one who knows the answer to these questions is you. The Board has pretty much concluded that a member survey is in order. Responsibility for the survey will be discussed and hopefully decided at the next Board Meeting.

We have conducted three surveys in the past five years concerning your likes, dislikes and what you would like to see in the future. These surveys were somewhat useful to management but not as useful as hoped. About half of our active members took the surveys, but apparently did not see it as terribly important since the correlation between what was asked and the future actions of our members was not very high. This was not that big a deal, since if we started some program based on your input, and the participation never materialized, we could simply cancel the program. No harm, no foul.

However, this survey is a whole lot different. The Board will be deciding how to move the club forward based on your input. Online? F2F? Games per week? Vaccinations? Croft House? and on and on. So, I am asking you to please take the survey, but, more important, think about your answers so they reflect what you really think and feel and are likely to do.