



January 2021 NEWSLETTER



NEW YEAR'S DAY

GAME? YEP
CAKE? NOPE



JANUARY SCHEDULE

Welcome to January. New Year, Same Old Stuff. But, let's be thankful that we have the opportunity to continue to play bridge with our friends, even if it is only online. Vaccine distribution is in process as we speak – hopefully the light at the end of this tunnel. While most all of us are anxious to return to face to face bridge, we are where we are, so let's make the most of it.

Our three latest Life Masters are looking for a fourth. If you are in need of Silver Points to get there, January offers you an opportunity to win Silver at our online games. The week beginning Monday, January 18th is

Silver Linings Week

We will hold games Monday through Saturday, all at our usual 1:30 PM start time.

Since I can't find any info on the ACBL site, I will assume the games will award double points, all silver, as in the past. Card fees for these special games will be \$4.00.

For the rest of the month, we will just plod on with our usual three games a week awarding black points at 150% of the normal club rate.

Public Service Announcement – If you were thinking about going to Gatlinburg in April to earn those few remaining gold or red points, you can stop thinking about it. The Gatlinburg 2021 Regional has been cancelled. This is normally ACBL District 7's largest and most profitable tournament. They faced a nonrefundable \$20,000 payment to the Convention Center in mid December and due to all the continuing uncertainty decided to pass. A painful, but fiscally responsible, decision in my humble opinion.

Game Schedule - January 2021

Monday 1:30pm	Wednesday 1:30pm	Friday 1:30pm
		1-Jan Open Pairs
4-Jan Open Pairs	6-Jan Open Pairs	8-Jan Open Pairs
11-Jan Open Pairs	13-Jan Open Pairs	15-Jan Open Pairs
18-Jan Open Pairs	20-Jan Open Pairs	22-Jan Open Pairs
25-Jan Open Pairs	27-Jan Open Pairs	29-Jan Open Pairs

ANNUAL ELECTION

The New Year brings us our annual election. Our voting members will be selecting two of their peers to serve three year terms as members of the Board of Directors.

Our recently approved Bylaw Amendment defines voting members as those individuals who were club members as of March, 2020.

This year we will conduct the election by email. You will receive an email with voting instructions on or before January 6th. The voting period will end three weeks later on January 27th.

We have two excellent nominees for the two positions,

Linda Knox and Phoebe Walters.

Each voting member will be entitled to two votes. While you do not have to use both votes, you may not use your two votes for one nominee. You also have the option of write-in voting.

BYLAW AMENDMENT

During the month of November, you were asked to vote on a temporary amendment to the Club Bylaws. The Amendment passed by a vote of 59 to 0. Having been duly approved, all people who were members of the Aiken Bridge Club as of March, 2020 have had their 2021 dues waived and are members until December 2021, and are eligible to vote in our upcoming election. The Amendment further allows us to hold our 2021 election via email, and to substitute the Management Report to Members in the February Newsletter for our usual January Annual Meeting.

I would like to thank the nearly 50% of our membership who ratified this Amendment. For the rest of you, I am absolutely thrilled that your pandemic life is so full and busy that you could not, despite your best efforts, find the 10 seconds needed to vote.

NOTICE OF ANNUAL MEETING

Our original Bylaws require an Annual Membership Meeting in January of each year. That, like so many other things, will not be possible this year. The recent Bylaw Amendment allows us to, in lieu of the Annual Meeting, present a written Management Report to the Membership detailing the current financial and operational condition of our Club. This report will appear as an article in the February Newsletter and be considered part of the minutes of the Annual Membership Meeting by reference.

BOARD MEETING REPORT

Your Board of Directors met for its final 2020 meeting on December 14th using the Zoom platform. Seven of the eight Board members were present as were three club members. The Minutes of the October 19th Board Meeting were approved as presented. Following is a very brief summary of the meeting.

Operational and Financial Results – For the eleven months ending in November, our table count is up by about 7.5% over last year. Considering we missed a month of bridge before getting our virtual games going, I think this is terrific. The overall response to our online program has been very gratifying.

Financially we continue to be in excellent shape. This is simply a result of table count. For our regular games (\$3.00 entry fee) we net about \$8.00 per table. For our special games (\$4.00 entry fee) our net drops to about \$7.00 per table. Charge more; earn less – what a great business model.

In next month's Newsletter, Mike and I will report to the membership the final financial and operational results for the total year 2020.

Amendment Status – The Bylaw Amendment submitted to the membership for ratification passed 59 to 0.

Board of Directors Election – This year's annual election of Board Members will be conducted by email, similar to the method used to vote for the Bylaw Amendment. Ron will be responsible for sending the voting email and instructions as well as determining the election results. The last day for someone to get their name on the ballot is December 31st. The voting email will be sent the following week, the election period will be twenty one days, and the results will be announced in the February Newsletter as part of the Management Report to Membership.

Volunteer Appreciation Gifts – Traditionally, the club gives monetary appreciation gifts to club management, game directors, and our other valued volunteers at our December Holiday Party. This year's party was to have been on the same day we ended up having this Board Meeting. So, I guess it was an appropriate day to have this discussion. The Board decided to allocate just shy of \$4000 to this group of volunteers. The vast majority of the gifts were allocated to the six game directors without whom there would be no games and no money. I think it inappropriate to list the amounts gifted to individuals. However, since the Aiken Board operates in the sunshine, if you feel you need to know, contact Mike or Ron who have all the details.

Ban the Bots – Mike introduced for discussion a proposal to ban the use of robots in our games. The rationale is that players who elect to play with robots have an advantage over normal partnerships. In addition, the robots do not communicate and make the game less social. I certainly agree with the latter, but maybe not so much with the former.

After a significant amount of discussion, the Board elected to continue with our current approach. Robots will be used as fill-in pairs since they are easy to find, easy to deal with and don't steal masterpoints from our members. We will continue to discourage player/robot partnerships but allow them if the situation warrants.

VIRTUAL CLUB REPORT

Can you believe it? We have now been playing online for nine months. While I was not one of those who thought the pandemic would be over in a matter of months, I never nightmared that we would be where we are as 2021 rolled around.

Our Club continues to be fine. The last month or so has exhibited a slight, but noticeable, decline in attendance. Could be the Holiday season, could be a lack of interest. I don't know which, but I hope it's the former. We will see as we move into 2021. .

OK, let's move on to some BBO stuff.

Person/Robot Partnerships – We seem to be having a few too many person/robot partnerships in our games recently. While playing with a robot is a good solution if your partner cancels at the last minute or you want to play but don't have a partner, we are kind of discouraging it. Why? Well, a number of our players think the robot gives the player an unfair advantage. Not so sure I agree with that, but fair is in the mind of the beholder.

The best way to handle this is to check out the Partnership Desk prior to signing up with a robot. Even better is to put your name on the Partnership Desk, and if nothing happens, a few minutes before game time sign up with a robot.

So, while we will allow person/robot partnerships in our games, for the sake of other members, let's try not to abuse this option.

Pre - Alerts – We have not been pre - alerting for three months now. So, I give up! You win! Don't do it! The Pre – Alert is just another tool we use to make the game fairer for everyone. The fact that pre – alerting has been universally rejected by our players must mean something, but I don't think I want to know what that might be.

For those of you who think the game should be as fair as possible, please continue to pre – alert. It will be appreciated by those of us who subscribe to the fairness doctrine.

If you wish to play more often, there are ABCL sponsored Support Your Club games every day at 10:00 am, 5:10 pm and 7:30 pm. These games are open to all players and cost \$6.00. The lion's share of the entry fee goes back to support your home club or clubs. That would be us.

Final Note: *If you change your mind and want to start playing bridge in on our online games, Sherry Buck is here for you. Just give her a call and she will you get you registered and teach you how to play on BBO.*

REMINDER -- FREE BRIDGE LESSONS

Last month's newsletter contained an article regarding free lessons being offered online by District 7. This is an excerpt of that article to serve as a reminder to those who may wish to sign up. I signed up today.

District 7 and its local clubs, in partnership with SE Carolina, is offering a FREE expanded version the ACBL "Bidding in the 21st Century" course online using Zoom. Al Smith, an ACBL-Certified Teacher, who has taught this course numerous times, will be the instructor.

The course consists of twelve (12) lessons. Attend as many or as few as you want. Each lesson will be about 1 hour followed by a brief Q&A session. Lesson handouts will be emailed to participants before each lesson.

The Zoom Online lessons will be on Tuesday afternoons at 1:30 pm. The course schedule is:

January 5, 2021	General Concepts
January 12, 2021	Opening Bids
January 19, 2021	Responses to 1NT Open
January 26, 2021	Responses to Suit Open
February 2, 2021	Rebids by Opener
February 9, 2021	Rebids by Responder
February 16, 2021	Overcalls
February 23, 2021	Takeout Doubles
March 2, 2021	Stayman, Jacoby/Texas Transfer
March 9, 2021	Reverse and Splinters
March 16, 2021	Strong 2C with 2D Waiting
March 23, 2021	Gerber and Blackwood

To register, click on the following online registration form link. Fill out and submit. Magic, you are registered. If you need help, feel free to call Al Smith at 910-457-6674 or email him at se.carolina.bridge@gmail.com.

<http://eepurl.com/hfh-BX>

While the primary purpose of the program is to introduce new players to bridge, I think there is value here for many of our players. The lessons do begin with 52 cards, four suits, four points for an Ace, three for a King..... yada yada yada. But after that, the lessons teach the 21st century version of the Standard American Bidding System. Many of us learned to play many years ago, probably at the kitchen table, and mostly from friends or family who may or may not have had a sound understanding of the game. Bidding concepts have changed considerably over the years, so you may not be current on today's methods.

So, if you know someone who might be interested in learning how to play bridge. Please pass this information along to them. If you feel a review of the basics would be of value to you, please sign up. Remember, you don't need to take all the lessons, you can pick and choose, and there will be lesson handouts emailed to you. Sounds like a pretty good deal since it's free.

VCOBBO

Coming soon to a device near you is **Voice Chat On BBO**. That's right; you will be able to speak to the other players at your table instead of having to type your message. I believe this will make the virtual game experience more enjoyable for most of us. It will, hopefully, bring back some of the social aspects we miss from face to face bridge.

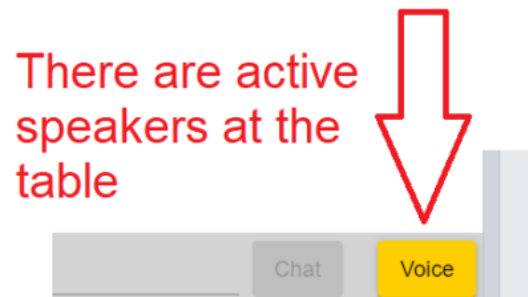
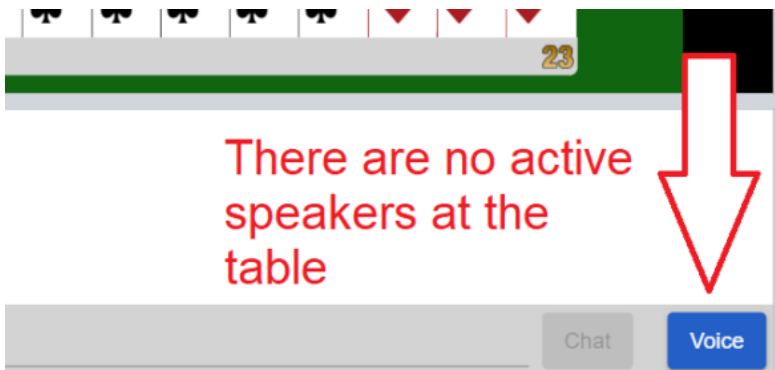
This is a new feature on BBO which was introduced in early December. Most of the early comments I heard was it was not quite ready for prime time. So, I thought, let's let the pioneers take the arrows and get on board later.

Well, later is now! Starting Monday, January 4th, we will be adding this feature to all of our virtual games.

Following are some instructions and illustrations from BBO about how to use the voice chat feature. Frankly, I think the instructions are a tad on the sketchy side, but, at this point, that's all we have. I have changed some of the verbiage to make it, hopefully, easier to understand. I'm kind of guessing here since I have not had the opportunity to use this feature either.

OPTING IN

- ➡ Voice chat **is not active by default**. Each player must click to activate voice. If you do not click the Voice button, you will not hear the other players — even if the others are already chatting.
- ➡ When there are active speakers at your table, **the Voice button turns yellow**. When there are no players speaking, the Voice button is blue.

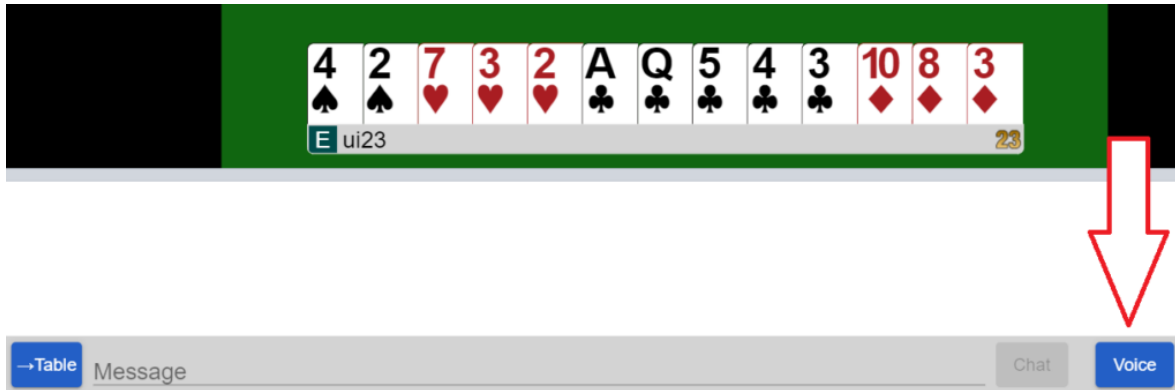


- ➡ When you move to the next round, there will no longer be any active speakers. You need to click the Voice button again if you wish to speak to your new opponents.

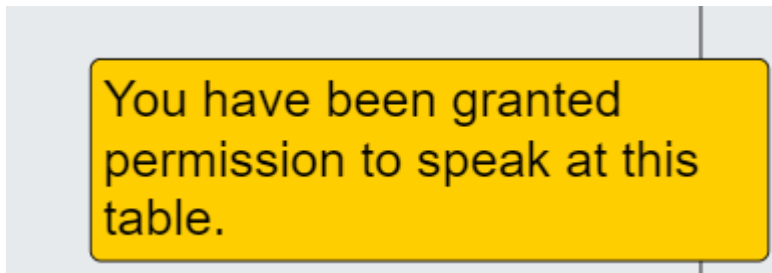
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SPEAKING OR LISTENING

Click the Voice button, which is located at the bottom right corner of the Chat area:



A yellow message will appear, informing you that you may speak, if you wish:

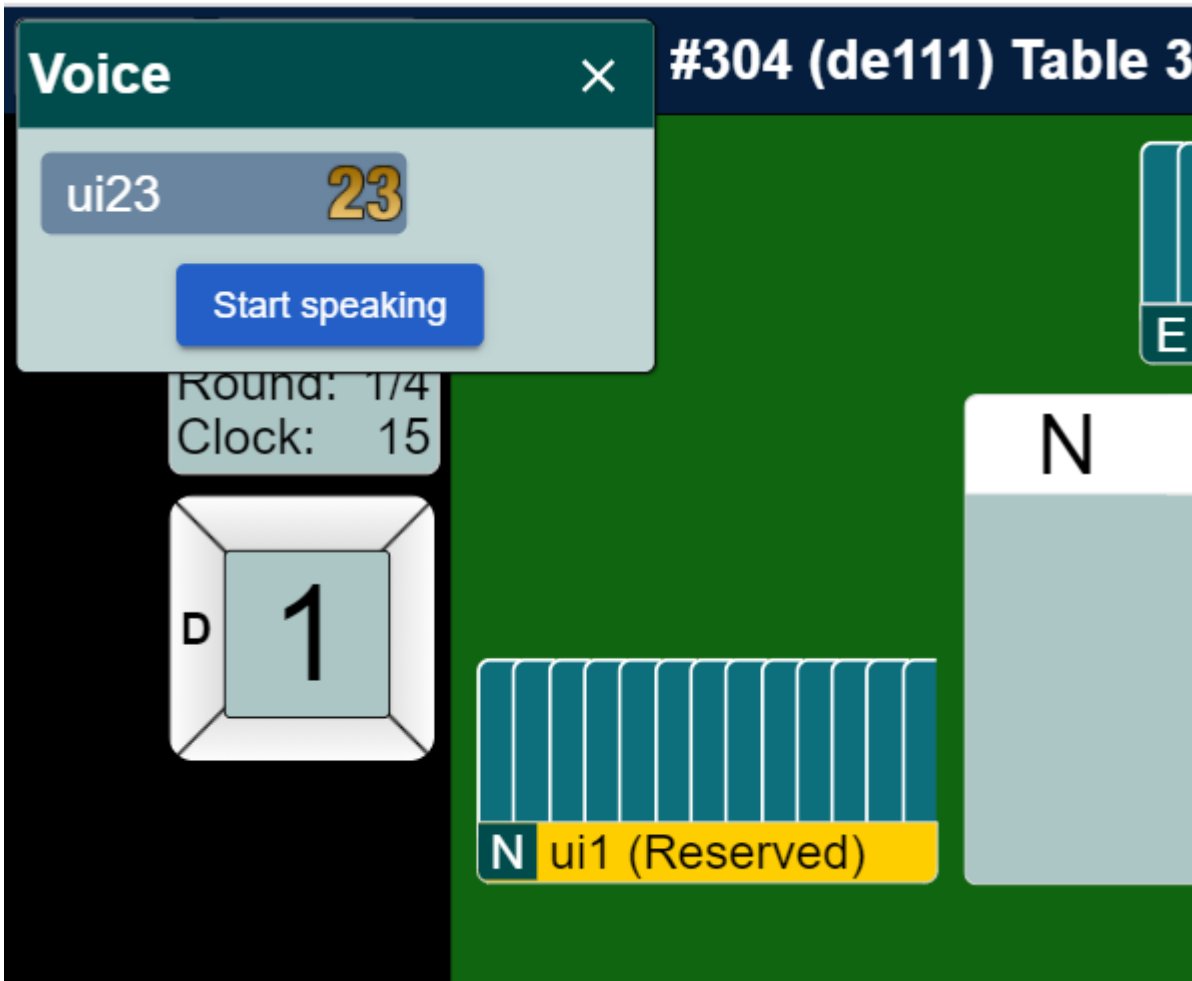


At the top left corner of the screen, you will see a pop-up listing the other players — if any of them have also clicked Voice — with a “Start speaking” button:

Note: I don't think this is exactly true, though it may be. I think you really need to click on the “hamburger” icon in the top left corner of the screen and select the appropriate item from the drop down menu. This is what the “hamburger” icon looks like. In the following illustration, it would be located under the Voice dialog box shown.



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Click **Start speaking** to join the voice chat. This will allow you to speak and also to hear the other speakers.

OTHER STUFF ABOUT VOICE CHAT

Totally Optional – You do not have to participate in the voice chat program. It is your choice, and you have the option of making that choice each and every round. You know, this is really kind of cool. In the F2F bridge world, I can certainly think of a few times when I would have preferred not to hear what was going on at the table. So, here is my chance.

Alerting – We will continue to **self alert** as some of us are actually doing. **DO NOT ALERT** your partner's bids using voice chat. Self Alerting is a much fairer and better procedure since your partner doesn't know what you alerted, or even if you alerted at all.

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Pre Alerting – Anyone remember this. This is a pretty much universally ignored request that you make a short announcement before play starts describing the systems you are playing. Examples, “2/1 std card”, “SAYC std card”, “big club 17+ udca”, “1M/1m = 5 cards std card”,

“1NT = 12-14, udca”, etc. Since it’s really hard to get less compliance with this request, I think it can’t do much harm if we use voice chat to not pre – alert.

Play First – Chat Later – Please don’t delay playing the hands by chatting with your table. Play the hands first and then chat to your hearts’ content. Remember, play first – chat later is very different on line than in face to face bridge. While we always had the same request at Croft House, it seems like it ended up being more like Chat First – Play Later. The big difference is that in F2F after starting late because of chit chat, you just kept playing until you were done sometime in the middle of the next round. As you know, online the round ends when the clock strikes zero, not when you are done. Try to avoid those timeouts, nobody likes them.

Punography

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.

A dyslexic man walks into a bra.

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!

Broken pencils are pointless.