

THE WE ARE BACK ISSUE

After a one month hiatus, the Aiken Bridge Club Newsletter is back.

Also back is playing bridge at our club, but it's on BBO instead of at the Croft House. Starting on page 2 and going on ad nauseam is an article about this virtual club thingy.

In addition, Jay is back with a double header. That's right, two articles to help you improve your bridge game. One article discusses the value of voids while the other explores help suit game tries. They can be found somewhere after the ad nauseam.

2019: Stay away from negative people

2020: Stay away from positive people.

The world has turned upside down. Old folks are sneaking out of the house, and their kids are yelling at them to stay indoors!

You think it's bad now? In 20 years our country will be run by people homeschooled by day drinkers...

BBO USER NAMES

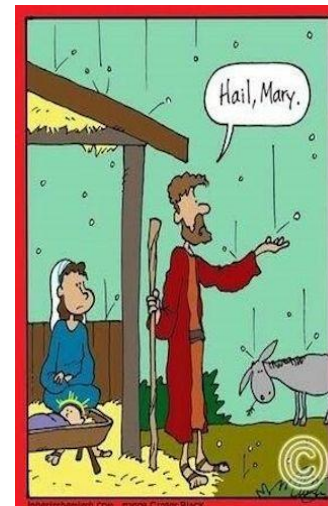
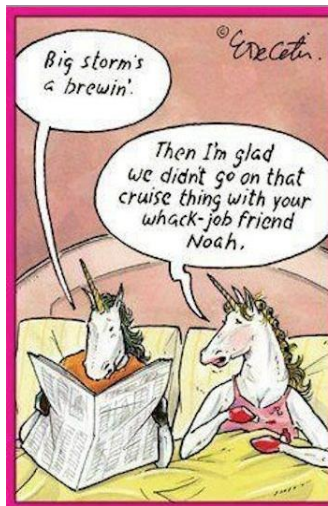
In two of my previous emails to you I requested that you send me your BBO user names so I could compile a list of BBO players for use by our members. I was totally overwhelmed by the twelve responses I received.

However, through other means, I now have a list of BBO user names for 91 of our players. My intent is to email this list to our membership next weekend. If, for whatever reason, you do not want your BBO user name to appear on this list, let me know and I will delete it before distributing the list.

MAY SCHEDULE

This is where I usually tell you about all the different types of games we will be having in the upcoming month. Well, guess what, they are

ALL THE SAME



Game Schedule - MAY 2020

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

HELLO,

*Yeah, it's been awhile
Not much, how 'bout you
I'm not sure why I'd called
I guess I really just wanted
To talk to you*

*I was thinking maybe later on
We could get together for a while
It's been such a long time
And I really do miss your smile*

*I'm not talking 'bout movin' in
And I know you think you're just fine
But there's a robot dealin' the cards around
And I'd really love to see you online*

..... **England Dan, John Ford Coley and me**

Yeah, I'm talking about those of you who have yet to play in our games on BBO. If you are waiting for face to face bridge to return to the Croft House, well, it's going to be a while. Despite the grandiose proclamations of our King and two of his many Court Jesters (aka, the Governors of the Great States of South Carolina and Georgia (to his credit, even our King was not amused by this clown)), I don't foresee returning to bridge as we knew it any time soon. Croft House will act with an abundance of caution (as they should) in allowing us to return to their venue. I will act with even more caution (as I should).

So, if you want to play bridge for masterpoints with your friends from our club anytime soon, you need to get with the program. As I've said before, this is not rocket science. If you have managed to retrieve this newsletter from your email, you have more than the computer skills required to play on BBO. If you finally decide to get started playing in your online club game, we have volunteers ready to help you get there. Sherry Buck (803-641-0245), Diane Davies (803-644-4564) and Lynn Smith (803-649-0638) are all available to walk you through the process. You can also ask your friends or any Director or Board Member for help. Believe me, it ain't hard. OK, I'm done here. I think I have beaten this horse to death over the last month or so, so, I promise I won't try to convince you to play online anymore. But, I hope your friends won't give up.

For those of you currently playing in our games (and those I hope will), following is some additional information, in no particular order, that may or may not be of interest to you.

Finding Our Game – after going to ACBL Virtual Games, there is a search button on the top right of the list – enter “aik” and you will be taken directly to our game to register or sign up on the partnership desk.

Who Can Play – our games are limited to players who have played at our club during the last 365 days. The list of eligible players is produced and maintained by the ACBL. This rule, with a few exceptions, is true for all virtual ACBL clubs. However, some clubs have, unfortunately, chosen not to abide by the rules and are poaching players from their home club. We will not do this.

continued

So, Who Are These People I Don't Know – if an odd number of pairs sign up for the game, the Director must find two people to fill out the movement (BBO does not allow sit outs and the ACBL doesn't allow robots in these games). The substitutes are taken from a list of folks who have volunteered to be subs anywhere so they can be from anywhere.

Masterpoints – the ACBL virtual games award black masterpoints at club masterpoint rating, unlike the other ACBL games on BBO, which award colorless points (does that mean they are transparent?) at 50% club masterpoint rating. The awards you see on BBO after the game are not the real awards. The real awards are 50% greater and can be seen on ACBL Live for Clubs. At this point there are only awards for placing in your direction, no overalls. Adding overall awards is being considered by ACBL, but needs much work.

Time Outs – if you don't finish a round in the allotted time, the computer simply moves you into the next round. This is called a "time out." The computer will immediately tell you it has given both pairs average. However, it will then look at where you were in the hand and give you the result it thinks you would have achieved. The Director will look at those hands the computer can't handle and give you a score, if possible. If neither the computer nor the Director can figure out what the hell you were doing, you will get an average.

Whose Turn Is It? – every once in a while play will cease because someone kind of falls asleep and doesn't know it's their turn to play. If the box with your username is highlighted in an orangey goldy color, that person is you.

How Am I Doing? – since everyone is playing the same round at the same time (called barometer scoring), you can see your results after each round is completed. To do this, click on the "History" tab on the right side of the screen.

Alerting – on BBO, you should **self alert** any bid or announcement you would make playing F2F (face to face). To do this, press the "Alert" box in your bidding box, enter the description (i.e. "15 – 17", "transfer", "2 or more", etc.) and then make the bid. The alert will be seen only by your opponents, your partner, as usual, remains in the dark.

Partnership Desk – for some reason, the Partnership Desk is not being utilized in our games. To use it, find our game as described above, click on the game and near the top you will find the "Partnership Desk." Put your name on it or ask someone on the list to play. This feature is there for a reason. If you don't have a partner for that day's game, consider using it.

Common Game Hands – we will, hopefully begin using Common Game hands for our games sometime next week. When that starts, you will be able to review the hands on the Common Game site and supposedly on Live for Clubs. It should be just like it was when we were playing F2F. We will see.

Very Uncomfortable Topic – as we all know, cheating on BBO is pretty simple. It is so simple that the ACBL has asked all virtual club managers to reiterate to their players that cheating not only will not be tolerated, but will be dealt with in a harsh manner. The whiz kids at BBO have developed computer based algorithms which are able to determine if collaborative cheating is occurring. The usual ACBL sanction for collaborative cheating is suspension or expulsion from the League and loss of most or all of your masterpoints. So, don't even think about it.

SO, HOW ARE OUR GAMES GOING?

Pretty well. Our last F2F game was Wednesday, March 11th and our first ACBL Virtual Game was Wednesday, April 8th. We have had a total of 8 games thus far, ranging in size from 8 to 12 tables, averaging 10. The last three games have all been 11 or more tables, so we are pleased. Our card fee of \$3.00 is the lowest allowed by the ACBL, with most clubs charging \$5.00 and many charging more.

I have been bombarded with requests for our club to join various consortiums with other clubs. The original intent of this program was to allow small clubs to band together so they could generate enough tables to hold games on BBO. That was a good idea. Now, however, some people are attempting to put together large consortiums with most of the card fees collected going to them and a pittance going to the player's home club. This is not a good idea, since supporting F2F clubs put out of business by the virus was the stated, and very valid, intent.

In addition, 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 difference is that \$4.00 of the entry goes to support your home club or clubs. The consortiums return about 10% to the player's home club. That's why, in my humble opinion, most of these consortiums are simply a money grab by their organizers.

The only positive I can see in joining a consortium is that the games would be larger and therefore the masterpoint awards would be greater. The downside is we would be playing against mostly people we don't know. To me, one of the nicest things about our virtual games is "seeing" and chatting with your friends at the table. Remember, we are committed to being the nicest bridge club on the planet, but I doubt all the players in these random consortiums share that vision. We are a very nice bridge club, and I want to keep it that way,

Thus far, I have avoided and intend to continue avoiding all these consortiums and hope we can continue to attract enough tables to remain independent. We are also much better off financially as an independent virtual club. If you disagree with this, please let me know.

There has been a lot of work put in by our usual suspects to get this program up and running. Many thanks to Steve, Lauren, Alan and Jesse for working on this program and agreeing to be Directors on BBO.

SO, WHAT'S NEXT?

Currently, we have three games a week, Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at 1:30. All three games are 18 boards in duration, 2 or 3 boards per round depending on table count. Why? Good question! Because we do. Bad Answer!

Absolutely none of this is set in stone. In the virtual club arena we are free to have as many games as we wish, when we wish, and for any duration we wish (less than 18 boards would reduce masterpoint awards). At this point the limiting factor is how many Directors we have and how often are they willing to work.

Maybe what we are doing is just fine. If nothing else we can all probably remember the schedule. But, maybe things would be better in some other configuration.

I'm asking for your feedback on all this stuff to help us schedule and structure our games to best meet membership needs.

There is one question I would like everyone to comment on: If we held more than three games per week, would you likely play more times a week than you currently do?

ONE LAST SHOT

OK, I lied. I'm going to take one last shot at convincing you to play bridge online. Why? Well, I just received an email from Linda Naples relating her positive musings about online bridge. So, I thought since you won't pay attention to me, maybe you will pay attention to her. Thanks for your help Linda. You never know.

1. *You don't need make-up, a haircut, or a manicure.*
2. *If your partner doesn't show, you don't have to drive home.*
3. *You can play in your pajamas.*
4. *You can work on a crossword puzzle or do needlepoint if you are the dummy.*
5. *You can scream at the screen, "Take the finesse, take the finesse."*
6. *Nobody asks you if you rode your bike today.*
7. *You can create a user ID so arcane that nobody knows who you are.*
8. *You can't revoke, trust me I've tried.*
9. *You don't need to arrive early to grab a N/S.*
10. *You can cuss like a sailor.*

ad nauseam ends here

THE VALUE OF VOIDS

BY JAY JACOBS

Hand evaluation includes both strength and distribution. Traditional high card point count undervalues aces and kings while overvaluing queens and jacks (many suits do not go for more than two rounds, so third round control is less valuable). In no-trump queens and jacks represent slow tricks and/or potential stoppers so they are worth a little more vis-à-vis suit contracts. Modify point count for length, shortness, distribution, and suit quality (including multiple honors, as well as intermediates such as tens and nines). Except in no-trump, add value for doubletons, singletons, and voids. In suit contracts, you duplicate points (pun intended) if you count points for both an honor and a singleton or doubleton in the same suit (double dip at your own risk), except for aces, which rarely go out of style.

What if you have shortness in partner's suit? If partner has only bid one suit and you are short in it, keep the auction as low as possible. Lacking a fit elsewhere, your misfit will not play well. Avoid no-trump unless partner's suit is self-sufficient and there is an entry to partner's hand. If partner has shown more than one suit and you have shortness in one but support for another, the value of your shortness does not diminish as much, since playing in the second suit allows partner to ruff losers in the first suit with the second suit as trump. But, values partner has in the first suit may be wasted, since they may need to be ruffed in your hand. Likewise, if the opponents have bid a suit in which you have a void or singleton, AND you have at least 3 card support for partner's suit, the hand should play well in partner's suit. Pard can ruff losers in the opponents' suit without shortening their own trump holding since the ruffs are in the hand with the shorter trumps.

You and partner must both re-assess your hands as the bidding progresses. If partner bids a suit in which you are short, do not count values for that shortness (but don't take away count for honors), thereby reducing the support value of your hand. Similarly, support for partner's suit, especially with shortness in the opponents' suit, increases the value of your hand.

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If you have a good fit with partner and a number of cards in the opponents' suit, you can assume partner is short in their suit (e.g., both opponents bid a suit in which you have four cards, then partner most likely has a singleton or void). Yet, if you only have three card support for partner, partner still risks losing trump control by having to ruff in the hand with the longer trump. But, if you provide four card or more support, it's a whole different ball game, as it greatly reduces the chance your side will lose trump control.

Soooo, what adjustment should you make? It's more of an art than a science. You need to look at the overall quality of your hand and what partner has told you about their hand. Look for potential winners and losers. When there is a void, you are playing with a 30 high card point deck. You could have a 26 point slam when the opponents have 10 points in one suit and assorted outside queens or jacks. But, partner's points in that void become less valuable, as you would have the tricks anyway with ruffs in your hand. Thus, partner's hand decreases in valuable since points in the void suit are not as usable as those in other suits. When there is a void, opponents may attack that suit [a] to shorten your trump, [b] to safely get out of the lead, [c] to make you break suits first (the advantage often goes to the pair that does not lead a suit first), or [d] to conduct a passive defense. Look at the length and strength of the combined trump suit. If you have three card support but partner will have to take ruffs in your hand, it is better that the three cards are small (and your strength lies elsewhere), so partner does not have to ruff with an honor. On defense, it may be a good idea to make declarer [a] ruff with honors, potentially promoting some intermediates, or [b] ruff in the shorter hand, thereby reducing the ability to take repeated finesses.

If partner opens a major in which you have 5+ cards, unless you have a lot of points, escalate the bidding immediately, since the opponents likely have at most one loser in that suit and probably have their own fit. Make it tougher for them to enter the auction or force them to make decisions at a higher level without being able to exchange information. In standard bidding, if partner opens one of a major and you have 5 card support AND few points, AND a singleton or void, it is virtually automatic to bid four of the major immediately, especially if the opponents are entering the auction. If you lack a void or singleton or have more points, don't go as high as quickly. The same thought process applies with the minors, but with exceptions: partner may have bid a short minor (so you need more cards to raise high immediately), you may possibly have a 4-4 fit in a major (e.g., you have six of a minor and four of a major and your partner also has four of that major, in which case you have a double fit, but likely then so do the opponents), and/or you may not want to go past three no-trump (especially if you have points).

If partner opens a weak two or three bid in a suit in which you have support, consider raising, but don't go too high unless you have a good hand. Often a raise from two to three will wreak havoc with the opponents' bidding. But a raise to four gives them a no lose option – they can bid game or possibly make more points by doubling you (especially if you are vulnerable). This is particularly true when their game is marginal. They can always take the gift of a doubled contract and beat everyone in a part score or those who go down in game. If, however, you are short of game, they may not know whether to defend or play. Try to avoid going down 150 or the deadly 200, since you lose whenever they only have a partial and/or not every opponent will necessarily bid game. Take advantage of favorable vulnerability and be careful with unfavorable vulnerability. Let the opponents play at the four level in a minor – no sacrifices since they have not bid game and you could go for a big number if you are doubled.

When you and partner each have a short suit AND also share a common suit, you can often make more tricks on a cross-ruff. But, make sure you get your tricks in the fourth suit. Whether you just cash them first or use them for communication between the hands is irrelevant. Do not give the opponents an opportunity to discard that suit and then ruff in at the end when the suit finally gets played.

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Remember: distribution trumps points. A hand with a 13 card suit has only 10 high card points but takes all the tricks as long as you play in that suit (and takes no tricks otherwise). Conversely, 10 points in a suit where the opponents are void are usually worthless if playing in their trump suit. Honors in a suit in which partner is void have diminished value. If you have a fit with partner and shortness elsewhere, add an extra trick or two in your evaluation. If you lack support for partner, reduce the value of your hand. Distributional hands should play in a suit, not no-trump. Don't give the opponents a no-lose option. Consider vulnerability. Finally, it's tricks that count, not points.

HELP SUIT GAME TRIES

BY JAY JACOBS

Invitational bids take many forms. The next time you have a sequence such as 1H – 2H – 3H or 1S – 2S – 3S, think about this alternative. Instead of simply raising to 3 to see if responder has sufficient values for game, opener bids another suit where they need help. For example, you have a hand such as: AQJxx, Kx, KQx, Qxx. In a non-competitive auction, you open 1S, partner raises to 2S (6-9 with at least 3 card support). After your 3S, partner goes to 4 with a maximum and passes with a minimum.

But, there is a better mousetrap. You are interested in what values partner has and where they are. You have many potential losers (one spade, one or two hearts, one or two diamonds, and two or three clubs). Obviously, partner has help somewhere, but what and where is the question. So, instead of bidding 3S, you bid 3C, the suit where you need help. If partner has help in clubs (A, K, or shortness) OR a maximum raise, partner bids 4S. If partner lacks club help AND doesn't have a maximum raise, partner bids 3S and you pass. There are at two sure club losers (maybe three) and game will be difficult. Help suit game tries are unconditionally forcing to at least 3 of your major.

Failure to use a help suit game try and simply bidding 3 of the major means you are either trying to shut out the opponents (unlikely, since they have not entered the auction) OR the suit you need help in is trump. That is, you have the other suits covered, but opened with five to the queen (e.g., Qxxxx, AKx, KQx, KJx and are concerned about trump losers. Then, partner's response is based on trump support quality. With AJx, partner bids 4, with Kxx, partner passes.

In a competitive auction, however, bidding a new suit after partner supported your first suit, indicates at least one of the following: [a] a two suited hand, [b] extra strength, and/or [3] another potential source of tricks if we wind up defending. Then, if partner barely scraped up support for you and prefers the new suit, they may pass. If pard supports the new suit, there is probably a double fit, even if it is unclear which suit would be better. Partner's return to the original suit at a minimum level is not forcing or necessarily encouraging.

Help suit game tries must be alerted, since you are making an artificial bid in another suit. Thus, the downside is that you give information to the opponents about where you need help, and, by implication, where you do not (i.e., you have values or shortness).