

## **B's Needs Mtg Notes**

Sturbridge: Saturday June 22, 2013, 8:30-9:45 AM

Attendees:

Meeting Facilitator – Mark Aquino  
District Secretary Carolyn Weiser

RIBA - Cathie Sallar

CMBA - Jeanne Robillard and Steven Diamond

EMBA Representatives: Cecilla Borrás and Bob Bertoni

NHBA Representatives : Sarah Widhu ( Robert Eachus also arrived towards the end of the meeting.)

VBA - Wayne Hersey

CBA - Joyce Stiefel

WMBA - Bob Derrah

Mark Aquino kicked off the meeting by thanking all for their great participation - especially considering the fact that the meeting was at 8:30AM on a Saturday morning. He pointed out that the attendance at this morning's meeting was especially impressive, because the Nationals Planning Committee was being conducted at the same time. Mark said he was thrilled with the great work that had been done in many key areas over the past 4 months since the group last had a face to face meeting. Perhaps the biggest accomplishment is that so many players across our district are thinking about how they can help increase attendance at our regionals. There has been a lot of email correspondence, and this was an opportunity for all to share the progress - and challenges - they have faced in advancing some of the initiatives the team had decided to pursue on a local level. He didn't want folks to be disappointed if some ideas didn't prove initially successful, because it only takes a couple of good ideas to result in some big improvements. The hope was that some of the activities might spark interest and spread across other units, and hopefully across the entire district. He thanked our unit secretary, Carolyn Weiser, who has been a strong supporter of this effort from the outset, for keeping minutes for this meeting and welcomed her perspective and insights.

---

RIBA - Cathie Sallar - with RIBA President Lois DeBlois made a special effort to contact every club in RIBA. Those that made time for a meeting/conversation were asked three questions: 1) Why aren't players attending Regionals? 2) How do we get players to attend? and 3) How can we maintain our player base? They asked these questions

while playing at the club. This gave the Director/Manager/Owner time to think about the questions, and often, during the game, the answers were expanded on as they thought of more and more things. (Her entire comprehensive survey, plus responses are attached.)

CBA – Joyce Stiefel stated that Connecticut is doing a good job attracting new players through lessons and novice games throughout the state. Before each sectional and regional Joyce is sending personal e-mails to club managers and CBA board members asking them to announce the upcoming tournament. CBA's new sectional schedule is friendly to players on all levels. A suggestion was made to distribute copies of CBA's newsletter, "Kibitzer", at senior centers.

CBA- Bill Watson couldn't attend this meeting, but he forwarded the following additional comments by email: *I have been thinking about our "assignment" for encouraging players to attend regionals. My first thought is to ask club managers/directors to advise and encourage their players to attend local tournaments. I know that at HBC we tend to only leave flyers at the community desk and don't give advance notice either verbally or by posting. Perhaps a "directive" from the Board to each club a few weeks before any tournament offering within traveling distance would be advisable. Or, perhaps, Joyce and I could compose a brief note explaining our role and forwarding same to all clubs. I think there are several groups of players that don't attend: 1) "Newbies" that are intimidated by competitive bridge in general. 2) Players who don't believe that they are good enough and don't make the effort to form a partnership or team. 3) "Intermediate" players who have earned their lifemaster and now find themselves up against the "big guns" and, after several tourneys without much success, choose to stay at home. 4) Those that have never entered a tournament for whatever reason and don't make it part of their bridge life. 5) Many experienced players who don't offer to help newer/less experienced players by teaming with them either in their club or at tournaments.....most of our A's play with A's, B's with B's etc. Some of these issues cannot be settled externally but the need to encourage remains.*

VBA- Wayne Hersey stated that he frequently makes calls to players who have stopped attending club games and sectionals in Vermont, and he has found that these personal calls are without question the most productive way in getting players to return. Others thought this as a good opportunity and will be pursuing this approach within their own areas. This is a huge opportunity for us across the district as well.

EMBA- Cecilla Borrás has thought that it would be a great idea to introduce a Bridge Awareness Week at all clubs. This might start small - with one club, or one unit, but eventually should be run across all units in the district simultaneously. Unfortunately, a new grandchild, a busy job, and a lot of other volunteer bridge activities have her hands tied, and this is going to take a lot of work.

EMBA- Bob Bertoni has joined the team, and may be able to help advance this beyond the concept phase. Currently, in addition to his job, and support for bridge website activities, Bob has also recently acquired the Amesbury, MA Bridge Club. Bob

expressed a big concern that was echoed by at least 3 other unit reps about the downside potential associated with huge gold point giveaways with our Gold Rush events. All realize the huge popularity of these events, but the concern expressed at the meeting was that getting the needed gold points to become a life master too easily won't enhance players skill level and confidence to compete beyond the 750 masterpoint limit level and this is creating a group of players that achieve their goal of becoming a "life master" without being able to compete at flight B levels in D25. This reality is a turn-off for these players and without the need for gold points, coupled with the possibility that we may push flight B players, per force, to fill fields in flight A events (happened again on the Cape 2013) is driving them to find easier events for their bridge dollar than flight B. While the gold rush is not a flight B event, the effects from it become a problem for flight B players, and the new group of "sub B" that are now in B. Creating a new event class for them cannot be the answer.

WMBA- Bob Derrah indicated that in WMBA they had conducted classes in a middle school. They have only taught 4 players, but it is a beginning. He has found little interest in the Senior Centers he has contacted for either lessons or serious play. He has been told by bridge players at the Senior Centers that the reasons for not attending Sectionals or Regionals in that they are on fixed incomes or that their partners have died. They are unwilling to attend in the hopes of finding a partner. Pre-partnership pairing might help, he believes.

CMBA - Steve Diamond - reported that "A" players are not likely to want to partner with "B" players except for a special event. The "A" teachers would rather play with their students and many of the others would rather "take the day off" if that was their only choice.

CMBA - Jeanne Robillard added that their weekend Unit wide games are well attended partly because the clubs are reimbursed (a small amount) for closing during these games. Jeanne hosts CMBA sectionals and she says she loves doing it! She creates a party atmosphere and lots of players enjoy provided baked goods.

NHBA- Sarah Widhu's primary involvement with publicizing bridge has been her efforts with her small group of students in the game she runs. She hasn't had a lot of activity during the past few months, but she has announced games and several of her players are now attending. Sarah suggested that Club owners/managers/directors can help in encouraging players to attend and assisting in finding partners or transportation. Sign-up sheets posted on the bulletin boards can be the vehicle for this.

---

District Secretary Carolyn Weiser has also made several comments and suggestions.

1. Broader communication about 49- 99- 199- 299 games might help.

2. It might be a good idea for the I/N to make direct contact to the players with less than 100 or 200 points through emails.)
  3. We used to give lessons to the I/N . Carolyn gave two that were very well received.
  4. It would be great if we could create a more welcoming environment at our Regionals. She fondly remembers a time when the Chair of the Regional had a committee that greeted all the players upon arrival, checked their name and info from a sheet and gave a small welcome gift. This served several purposes: we had a list of who came and contact info , and the biggest thing was that it made the Regional seem special. The welcome gift didn't have to be lavish. It could be a chit for coffee or the like. One of her favorites was a mini notebook with attached pencil - it only cost 22 cents, and she used it for years)
  5. Carolyn believes that coordination with the youth program might open broader teaching opportunities. NEYB has a 1 year license on a 3 hour program that was developed and is successful in Georgia. Carolyn believes that we can use it free until the end of this calendar year. It teaches basic Bridge . After the 3 hours the players are actually playing. This can be done at Libraries, Senior Centers, schools, etc. It can be advertised free on local radio or cable TV, as well as online through both Verizon or Comcast ... every city will do it. It could be done on TV, and Carolyn knows of at least one individual within our district who has the knowledge of how to operate this equipment and has expressed a willingness to do this for us. Even televising a series of such lessons would be useful.
- 

It was a great meeting, with everyone engaged and energized by the discussions.

NEXT STEPS: 1) Post these notes on our District Website, per the advice of our Board of Delegates, and the direction of our District President, Ausra Geaski.

2) Share the team's thoughts with our District Director, Rich DeMartino, as he will be attending important meetings in Atlanta in a couple of weeks, and many of the ideas coming out of the ACBL's Strategic Initiatives may potentially dovetail topics raised here. Hopefully, Rich will appreciate and may benefit from this input.

3) Follow up with our Director in Charge, our Tournament Manager, and our I/N Coordinator, as well as with the entire Tournament Committee, Executive Committee, Board of Delegates, and our membership at large.

We should hope to see some clear direction in Warwick as far as priorities for follow-up, and to additional volunteers to support the work needed.