



New England Bridge Conference of the American Contract Bridge League

Executive Committee Meeting
Crowne Plaza
Cromwell , CT
February 19, 2011

Present: Robert Erwin, President; Ausra Geaski, Vice President; Richard DeMartino, Treasurer/District Director; Roy Green, Past President; Carolyn Weiser, Secretary;
Unit Representatives: Mark Aquino, James Rasmussen (EMBA); Phyllis Bausher, Allan Clamage (CBA); Sue Erwin (RIBA); Joe DeGaetano, (NHBA); Philip Sharpsteen (VBA); Richard Budd (MBA); David Rock (WMBA)
Invited Guests: Helen Pawlowski , Tournament Manager; Peter Marcus, Director
Absent: Bruce Emond (CMA) no alternate

The meeting was called to order by President Erwin who expressed his thanks to Vice President Ausra Geaski for chairing the meeting of the Executive Committee in Newton.

Secretary's Report - C. Weiser

A motion was made by R. Budd to accept the minutes of January 8, 2011 in Newton, MA as e-mailed. Seconded and so voted.

Treasurer's report - R. DeMartino

As there was only one tournament since the end of the year report, a separate report was not compiled as that tournament will be covered by H. Pawlowski in her report.

In response to a request by J. Rasmussen, everyone should have received detailed financial records for both 2009 and 2010. R. DeMartino asked J. Rasmussen if the detailed financials that were sent out for the last two years were what he had been looking for when he made his request. J. Rasmussen stated that he was still not clear why the losses in 2010 were larger than in 2009 and wondered if the additional Regional days were costing more money than they were making. R. DeMartino reminded the Committee that there are usually increased losses at the end of every five year cycle and that we are now expending extra money for board preparation as well as increases in director's fees and general expenses. Extenuating circumstances relating to the Waterbury losses such as the proximity in time and location to the Danbury Regional have been resolved.

The matter of increasing fees has been previously discussed. H. Pawlowski and R. DeMartino are preparing to come to the Executive Committee in Sturbridge with a recommendation to raise table fees starting in September, 2011 in the belief that this will provide a positive result for this year. With a one dollar increase in September, we could apply 50 cents toward the National fund a bit early and may not have to raise the rates before the Nationals begin. The guiding principle for the District continues to be make a small profit over the year to cover non-tournament expenses, such as bonding for the Tournament Manager and Treasurer, secretarial expenses, meeting expenses, etc. and maintain a reserve of approximately \$45-50,000. The reserve value has increased over the past decade due to inflation. A loss on any individual tournament is not a disaster. If we make \$2,000 to \$4,000 at our Regionals, we are successful. Concern was expressed by M Aquino about increasing the entry costs for both the North American Open Pairs (NAP) and Grand National Teams (GNT) events.

District Director's Report - R. DeMartino

The ACBL Board has approved rebuilding of ACBLScore. The ACBL is in the process of obtaining an initial study. The final cost is anticipated to range from \$750,000 to \$1,000,000 and Rich believes, optimistically, that the program can be completed by January, 2012.

The redesign of the ACBL website is underway. The company initially engaged did not meet expectations and the ACBL has hired a new group. The front page has been redesigned and is ready to go. Navigation of the website will hopefully be much simpler and faster.

A motion to be presented at the Spring NABC in Louisville regarding elimination of masterpoint awards for Robot Games. Some members do not see this as bridge; however, the revenue for these games is approximately \$200,000 each year. Rich intends to vote to retain them.

The CEO of the ACBL, Jay Baum, is retiring in July. Bob Blanchard and Steve Beatty are on the search committee. An advertisement will be in the Bulletin. The ACBL has 16-17 applications already. The goal is to make a selection by the end of the year. Allan Clamage added that the ACBL is also looking for an advertising assistant for the Bulletin.

Tournament Manager's Report - H. Pawlowski

The District lost more at the Newton Individual and the GNTs than last year. Table count was down due to one snowy day. Director fees are up about \$800 and other ACBL expenses have also shown an increase. There was a \$1,950 drop in total receipts received from P. Marcus. Staff room costs were up and as was the hospitality budget that increased by \$1,600. This was purposely increased at Newton because we did not meet our required room pick-up. Rather than spending money to buy-back the unused room pick-up nights, the hotel agreed that we could spend that money on hospitality, which provided a benefit to the players rather than paying the money for the unused rooms. R. Budd asked is it were time to consider dropping the Newton tournament.

H. Pawlowski presented a chart that provided table count and profit/loss for every tournament from 2006 to the present. A review of the chart demonstrates how volatile our table count is. We have not made a profit at Newton since 2007. The year 2009 was a five-day tournament because of the 2008 Fall NABC in Boston. The trend is downward. The Masters financial history is worse and we have sustained huge losses there. R. Budd noted that the losses at the Masters were caused by a variety of reasons including changing locations and competing schedules. R. Budd noted that the location of the Newton Regional is ideal with a large body of available players. R. Green reminded the Executive Committee that the Boston players support the other Regionals, and when near Boston they do not choose to reserve rooms. H. Pawlowski stated that though the table count is small, between 700-900 tables, we are contracted to Newton until 2016. Any decision regarding the future of the Individual in Newton will have to be made in 2014, when the contract is up for renewal. D. Rock noted that there were more tables at the three-day Individual than at the five-day Masters. A. Geaski will review this with the Tournament Committee.

H. Pawlowski explained that we need between 6,000-7500 total tables for the year to break even. An increase of \$1 would greatly increase our total revenue. Since 2006 we have managed to break even each year, although there are fluctuations with individual tournaments. If we decide to raise the table fees, this would help because all of our costs continue to go up and negotiations with the hotels are becoming more difficult as the economy improves.

M. Aquino stated that the chart indicated that staff room costs have gone up and asked for the definition of a "staff room." H. Pawlowski explained that these are the ones we have to pay for that are not "comped". These include the Caddy Master, Bulletin Editor, directors, President, District Director, Treasurer, and Secretary. Sometimes the number of comp rooms is contractual. Sometimes it is based directly on the number of rooms actually sold by the hotel. The number needed and the per diem fees are also a function of the director's schedules. In some areas, such as Newton, directors are willing to commute. We do owe them a room, if they request one, usually during bad weather. A. Clamage asked if the number of tables in the actual "Individual" portion of the event, deserve the retention of the Regional. The table count for the "Individual" portion actually went up this year. It was cautioned that if the "Individual" is not retained we will lose the event.

The GNT's this year lost approximately \$700 more than in 2010.. There were additional director, staff, hotel, and ACBL fees. D. Metcalf was being trained but sometimes P. Marcus commutes. R. DeMartino stated that District 4 has asked the ACBL Board if it can conduct the Flight C GNT's in clubs. The ACBL Board has reluctantly approved this. This has been a great success for the Flight C; however, it would not be possible for the higher flights.

M. Aquino requested the 2010 financials for comparison purposes. Table count went down from 257 in 2010 to 202 this year. R. DeMartino added that we lost tables from the Rainbow weekend due to the snow on Friday. Saturday and Sunday table counts were up.

M. Aquino asked if taking the Flight C out of the mix would cause us to lose more money. R. DeMartino answered that the revenue generated from the games held in clubs would still go toward the total GNT revenues. M. Aquino, in his research, has found that some Districts' participation is struggling and others have fared much better. D-6 (Mid Atlantic) had 90 teams, with 18 in the open. California is also doing very well. District 25 is "right up there" while Florida is quite small. R. DeMartino reminded the Executive Committee that we cannot compare ourselves to the Mid-Atlantic which is still charging \$10. It has qualifiers at the Club, Unit, and District levels. We have been operating under the assumption that qualifiers were a negative. In the locations enjoying success, the qualifiers may actually be increasing exposure. These Districts also have A, B, and C flight players pushing their flights.

H. Pawlowski reported that Wayne Burt had contacted her regarding an article in the Nashua Telegraph that the Radisson Hotel in Nashua had closed. It is owned by a small New Hampshire holding company which is significantly behind on its mortgage. The hotel was up and running again in five days but this does not portend well for the Labor Day Regional. The General Manager of the Radisson is willing to let us break our contract without penalty. The current four-year contract provides us with more comp rooms and lower rates than any of our other sites. If we end our contract with this facility and choose to return, we will have to totally renegotiate. An alternate site that is under study is the Crowne Plaza in Warwick, RI.

Nashua represents a risk to our Regional. If Nashua closed its doors once, it could do it again. There are also risks with Warwick. Every time we change a site, we lose tables. The site is not as accessible to the northern tier units as Nashua is. The room rate is higher: \$76 in Nashua versus \$83 in Warwick. H. Pawlowski was able to secure a \$5,000 grant from the State of Rhode Island, but the room rates will go to "fair value" by 2014. The hotel has a wedding booked for Labor Day weekend, 2011. Monday through Friday we will play the ballroom, but due to the wedding, on Saturday and Sunday we would have to play bridge in a large tent (100' x 120'), which is also air-conditioned. H. Pawlowski visited the site in August and her sole concern is the lighting. The contract specifies that H. Pawlowski can go out a month before the event to inspect the lighting, which will be addressed by the hotel with the help of the Convention Center. We are guaranteed ballroom for the rest of the contract.

H. Pawlowski does not know specifically under what set of conditions the Radisson was able to reopen. Even the General Manager at this hotel recommended that we get out of our contract. Positive and negative features and options for both possibilities were discussed. A question was raised whether we could remain in Nashua for this year and then look for an alternate site in the future. H. Pawlowski noted that Waterbury was on the auction block just this week.

R. Erwin reminded the Executive Committee that this could be a problem similar to the "Sea Crest" problem in 2009, where we were notified of problems two months before our scheduled dates. P. Marcus added that if we choose to stay in Nashua and it closes, we will not be able to find an alternate site (due to the Labor Day weekend) and will have to cancel the tournament. Labor Day weekend makes finding alternate sites for this tournament more difficult. H. Pawlowski stated that she had been unable to find an alternate site in southern New Hampshire.

President Erwin asked for a show of hands for those who favored leaving Nashua and contracting for the Warwick hotel. The vote was 9 - 5 in favor of moving the Labor Day Regional to the Crowne Plaza in Warwick.

J. Rasmussen asked if we could reduce the required room block in the Warwick contract since when the room rates go up, more players will seek alternate hotels. H. Pawlowski said that we if we reduce the room commitment, it would cost us more for the playing spaces. H. Pawlowski will try to put a guarantee for hospitality dollars and try to include the concession dollars into the mix in an effort to get lower rates for the last two years of the contract. R. Erwin expressed his confidence in H. Pawlowski getting the best rates available.

M. Aquino expressed the view that perhaps we should wait until other options have been investigated. D. Rock added that the hotel may book the space. R. Erwin proposed that, as H. Pawlowski has the sense of the group, the Executive Committee leave the final decision to H. Pawlowski. She stated that we can contract for

two years only with 2013 and 2014 as “right of first refusal” only. P. Sharpsteen added that the proposed room rate of \$105 is a risk if cheaper alternatives are available in the area, as we are unlikely to meet our room block commitment at the higher rate. President Erwin ended by saying that H. Pawlowski has the sense that the Executive Committee will support a change in location with several concerns. He has every confidence that Helen will make the best deal she can and make the best decisions possible acting in her capacity as Tournament Manager.

Tournament Committee Report - Ausra Geaski

The Regional schedules through 2016 were handed out. The Executive Committee needs to make a decision regarding the Masters Regional in 2014. Because of the proximity to the NABC - Providence, we have to decide whether to cancel or reschedule the tournament; retaining it as scheduled is not an option. After lengthy discussion, the Tournament Committee recommended that we cancel the Masters Regional for 2014. A. Clamage had suggested that we move it to the NAP weekend, but this has other problems associated. R. DeMartino reminded the Executive Committee that we can move it six months in either direction, but he recommends against it. One caveat is that we have a contract with the hotel and will have to offer an extension in order to cancel that tournament. A motion was made by M. Aquino that we cancel the Masters for 2014, provided Helen can successfully renegotiate with the hotel. Seconded and voted unanimously.

With the NABC-Providence in 2014, we have to consider when and how much to raise table fees. R. DeMartino stated that he will work with H. Pawlowski (and anyone else who wishes to participate) to prepare a proposal to be presented at Sturbridge. Rich strongly feels that we can wait until the Fall Regional to raise rates. H. Pawlowski and R. DeMartino will prepare an analysis of the various possibilities with the numbers for Sturbridge. We can also present this to the Board of Delegates for their input. We should avoid raising fees twice before the Nationals. The Executive Committee agreed to wait for a concrete proposal before discussing this further.

Scheduling Committee- D. Rock

There seems to be a general consensus that there are too many events. The Scheduling Committee agrees. The committee recommends ending the morning side games, effective in Sturbridge. These have been sparsely attended and have, in all but in name, been cancelled already. The committee also has concerns about the proliferation of starting times. The committee recommends that we synchronize the starting times to three start times: 9:30AM, 2:15PM, and 7:15PM for all events. M. Aquino asked when the Flight A pairs would run. D. Rock replied at 2:15PM and 7:15PM, which M Aquino felt could be a problem. A. Clamage questioned what times would be available for meetings. M. Aquino expressed the view that the flight-A pairs were being disadvantaged.

P. Marcus said that there is a clear trend toward morning and afternoon games. The A/X this afternoon had only 11 ½ tables and the B/C had 17 tables, both down from last year. The Compact KO's this morning had 30 tables. On Friday the Daylight pairs had 32 and the 1PM & 7PM had ten tables. Admittedly the Gold Rush Pairs had an impact on these numbers. Afternoon and evening are no longer prime time. Six starting times create staffing and room problems, both drive up costs. They require more directors to sell and be available in more areas. What events can be put when can be settled later. Mr. Marcus stated that we could consider horizontal events some time, but we should decide on the times first and then the events. If the 1 o'clock games go away we do not have to start the early game at 9:00. The Scheduling Committee did not specify which set of three times is best but that we need to harmonize the times.

R. DeMartino advised the Executive Committee to avoid starting times that are not on the hour or half-hour and that the convenience of Executive Committee or Delegates meetings was secondary to the needs of the players. D. Rock added that the 10AM start time would be maintained on Sunday. A. Geaski cautioned that starting events before 10AM is very problematic because of morning rush-hour traffic.

P. Marcus offered that the bottom line is, whatever the Executive Committee decides, someone will be unhappy. He stated that we can handle a change in time with proper marketing. With the pre-duplicated boards and one break we now finish about 20-25 minutes earlier than the pair games used to end. Games starting at 7:30PM now will end about the same time that the 7:00PM games used to end. What we have now is an attempt to please everyone that pleases no one.

D. Rock will survey what other District Regionals are doing through their flyers and report to the Executive Committee in Sturbridge. He will make as many comparisons as possible. H. Pawlowski reminded the Executive Committee that flyers have been printed through Sturbridge. Practically, the earliest possible opportunity to change start times would be for the 2011 Masters.

P. Marcus volunteered to get the financials for any event that will indicate start time in order to make comparisons. R. DeMartino volunteered to help provide data from other Districts. D. Rock will compile the pros and cons of the possibilities and will ask the Delegates for their input at Sturbridge.

D. Rock will survey again this Sunday regarding the preferred times for teams on Sunday/Monday holiday tournament weekends. The survey asks players to indicate their first, second, and third choices.

Old Business

Danbury - H. Pawlowski spoke to Joan Gerard regarding the conflict with Danbury. Ms. Gerard has agreed to move the Danbury dates for 2013 & 2015 to an earlier date in October. Helen expressed the appreciation of D-25 for Joan's efforts to make the change. In 2014 & 2015, the D-3 tournaments at Saratoga (which have always ended on Father's Day) will be scheduled earlier in June. This change is expected to benefit both Districts.

Electronic Scorepads - M. Aquino reported that there are lots of different things going on in other Districts regarding the use of electronic Scorepads. In some Districts, they are borrowed from clubs. In others some Directors are providing them as a side business. There are no clear trends at this time. R. Erwin asked if he had any recommendation at this time and M Aquino stated that he felt that the decision should be moved to the Tournament Committee. R. DeMartino remarked that we are already behind the curve, the players like them, but he would never recommend we buy them at this time because the technology is moving too fast.

H. Pawlowski added that there were issues of damage, transportation and storage. R. DeMartino agreed that we do not want to buy them and believes that if it is done right, we will save on directors and caddies. J. Rasmussen asked if we had researched the possibility of borrowing them from clubs. There is an issue of damage and liability. H. Pawlowski stated that we would not be liable for damage or loss and agrees that we do not want to buy them but disagrees that would save money. R. Erwin queried the ACBL regarding the reduction in the number of directors and the ACBL answered, "None." A. Geaski agreed that the Tournament Committee would take the issue for further research.

Website Committee

R. Erwin reviewed the meeting of the Website Committee and the presentation made by Robert Bertoni. The current website is obsolete, difficult to manage and update, and all changes go through a single choke point - the Webmaster. The new website, as proposed would allow direct input by specific, authorized individuals (i.e. District Director, District Scheduler, Tournament Manager, I/N Lead) who will be able to input data and reports, directly. It would significantly improve security, provide for ease of changes and updating of information, surveys on line, and add a dedicated "site within the site" strictly for the I/N players. Employing log-in controls, it could be used to take surveys and we will be able to generate important statistical information. R. Erwin stated that Mr. Bertoni demonstrated that any and all information on a page could be added/modified/deleted in seconds. The Website Committee was very impressed with the proposed improvements. It unanimously forwards the following recommendation to the Executive Committee: that D-25 authorize the solicitation of interested parties for the development of a modern website and in support of that, in the Sunday and Monday Bulletin and on our website we would advertise as follows: "The New England Bridge Conference is soliciting interest from individuals in the New England area and is looking for individuals/ companies interested in developing a new/updated website for our organization (www.nebridge.org). Interested parties should contact Mr. Joe Brouillard at Joe@JoeBrouillard.com, or via our current website, by the end of February." At that time, Joe will provide further information regarding proposals. Specific proposals and bids will be required by the end of March and will be reviewed by the Website Committee. J. Brouillard has been appointed chair of this committee, supported by R. Bertoni. A request for someone to make this motion was made. Discussion followed.

M. Aquino, suggested that we need to define exactly what features we want first. Before going out to bids we need to define what features we want. A. Clamage agreed and will look at the other District websites and develop a table of their content. R Erwin stated that this can go in parallel with developing the structure of the site, which is what the Website Committee is doing. Content should not affect the structure of the site. Bids will not be closed by March 1, but the committee is looking simply for interested parties. M. Aquino reiterated that the committee should define the needs more clearly first. P. Sharpsteen commented that R. Bertoni had just completed a redesign for Vermont and that they are very happy with the results. The site is easy to use and modify. R. Erwin added that the price R. Bertoni has quoted was 70% below any bid we may get. This was confirmed by Joe Brouillard. If the committee wants to go through the process of defining our needs first, we will do that and take as much time as the Executive Committee needs to make everyone happy. He said that if you want to see the quality of Mr. Bertoni's work, you can go to the Vermont or EMBA websites. R. Erwin stated that we need to proceed, but will go back to the Website Committee if that is what the Executive Committee wants. Mr. Bertoni is willing to work dynamically as we proceed. He is willing to be innovative. Joe Brouillard has stated that his company cannot touch the price for what B. Bertoni proposes.

A. Geaski stated that in her opinion, after taking part in the online meeting and being at the presentation, we won't get a better deal from anyone else. Mr. Bertoni's dedication to bridge and District 25 is obvious. Her decision would be to go with Mr. Bertoni now. A. Clamage stated that we want to make sure that the important things are on the website and can be quickly accessed. There was general agreement that the current website is not a viable marketing tool; is unwieldy; is difficult to modify/update; and is difficult to add/remove pages. Having all additions/modifications/deletions go through one individual, who is a volunteer, is inefficient and time consuming. H. Pawlowski stated that making changes is very difficult.

R. DeMartino reminded the committee of the issues revolving around the selection of the last web designer. A. Clamage stated that what we did ten years ago was done with the tools that were available then. Today there are so many other things that we can do. The whole process is different now. Whoever develops the updated website will include the content we want. R. Erwin agreed to take it back to the Website committee.

Announcement of New Committee Chairs

Charity Committee

The ACBL Charity Foundation has allocated \$30,000 to D-25. P. Sharpsteen, R. Green, A. Geaski, and R. Budd have expressed interest in serving. S. Erwin has been appointed as chair of the committee. Executive Committee approval is requested, though not required, for this selection. No opposition was made. The committee will review the possibilities and report initial recommendations to the Executive Committee in Sturbridge.

R. DeMartino at our last meeting made a suggestion that the \$30,000 from the ACBL could be divided up among the Units for distribution. S. Erwin stated that one of the individuals on her committee is part of the National Charity Committee and she will analyze the amount of money that charities remove from their donations for administrative costs, overhead, and fund-raising. She will identify charities that allocate less than 12% to all costs and contribute at least 88% to the recipients. R. Budd was reminded that R. DeMartino did not make that suggestion but only noted that it was an option that some Districts have chosen. D. Rock added that he was sure that the Charity Committee would take that under consideration.

Website Committee

The website Committee will be chaired by Joe Brouillard, with R. Bertoni as vice-chair.

District Budget

R. Erwin recalled that the issue of budgets has been proposed for years. Though individually opposed, there remains continued sentiment expressed in support of developing a District budget, so that he proposes putting a budget in place for the remainder of 2011 and reviewing it at the end of the year to see how useful it was in making predictions and helping the Executive Committee make decisions. R. Budd cautioned about allowing a budget to cause "Lenville Disease" in which there was an attempt to make a profit at every tournament, regardless of extenuating circumstances. Our goal was restated: to make a profit for the year sufficient to cover our non-tournament expenses. We know that with inflation we will have to raise fees every few years gradually. R. DeMartino stated that this is not a subject we can discuss in as short a time as available.

R. Erwin restated that all he wants to do it put a budget in place as a test and review it at the end of the year to see if it had any value. M. Aquino stated that the fears of a budget are ill-founded. It is just a way to keep track and make decisions. M. Aquino made a suggestion that this be made the first order of business at our next meeting.

Joe DeGaetano made a motion to adjourn the meeting, seconded and so voted unanimously.

Respectfully submitted: Carolyn Weiser, Secretary