

District Director's Report

Summer NABC 2017

Toronto, ON

Toronto Overview

The 2017 Summer NABC was held at the Metro Toronto Convention Center in downtown Toronto, ON, Canada July 20-30, 2017. The playing conditions were ideal. The ballrooms were spacious, well-lit, with ample access to restrooms and food concessions. The weather was great, except for the one day when it rained, and attendance was up 6% over our budgeted forecast. With 13,289 tables we were still a few hundred shy of 2011 attendance here, but overall this was one of the most enjoyable NABC tournaments we have had in recent years. Bill Gates returned with the same team with which he won the 0-10,000 Swiss in Kansas City. Personally, I think it's great to have prominent and successful people take the time to frequent our tournaments. This was validated the other day when Rob Russell, an EMBA player with a total of about 75 masterpoints, came up to me and told me that the highlight of his trip to Toronto was playing against Bill Gates in a side game!

If you would like a good glimpse of the playing areas in Toronto, I invite all to visit the attached link: <http://www.cbc.ca/beta/news/thenational/for-card-loving-bridge-players-attracting-youth-is-ultimate-puzzle-1.4230018>. This is a great 8 minute excerpt from a Canadian television presentation that speaks volumes about the excitement of our great game, and talks about the many overtures into youth bridge. There is significant emphasis on the accomplishments over the past several years of our own New England young superstars, Adam and Zach Grossack.

Welcome our new CEO! – Bahar Gidwani

This was the first NABC and the first board meeting for our the newly hired ACBL Chief Executive Officer, Bahar Gidwani.

Bahar is an extremely qualified executive with an impressive resume - and I have found him to be extremely bright and personable. Bahar grew up in Columbus, Ohio, but he has deep educational ties to New England - having graduated from Amherst College and Harvard Business School. He brings a positive enthusiasm, incredible energy, and a thoughtful, thorough, analytical approach.

Bahar replaces Robert Hartman, CEO for the past 5+ years, who announced he was resigning to help run a family business in Florida. Robert has said he has been proudest of his efforts resulting in bolstering the staff at Horn Lake, and helping the membership raise millions of dollars to support Alzheimer's thru The Longest Day. He was CEO during a difficult period that saw a number of high-profile cheating scandals, and multi-million dollar cost overruns associated with ACBLScore.

It's still very early to be overconfident, considering Bahar's admitted lack of experience in the bridge world, but he has hit the ground running at full speed, and I'm cautiously optimistic that we may be seeing some great

accomplishments for the ACBL under his leadership.

Task Force Update and ACBL Board of Director Meeting Notes

I'm frequently asked what the ACBL Board of Director meetings were about, and my short answer is usually "about 4-5 days long." What follows is my attempt at a more serious and in-depth summary of many of the actions that were completed, and topics that were discussed in Toronto – without putting you all asleep!

There were many motions not mentioned below. I am highlighting the more controversial matters – and, as you'll see, I did not always agree with the majority. I do, however, respect and support the board's decisions. Many of these matters are quite complex, and often there is no perfect answer.

Club Task Force – L.A.'s Director Kevin Lane has been leading a club task force. Steve Moese, a member of the task force, as well as a member of the Board of Governors from Cincinnati, teamed up with Kevin to provide a detailed, candid presentation to the board in Toronto about the activities and findings of this task force. One of the more disturbing findings has been the huge disconnect and misunderstanding that exists between club owners, bridge teachers, unit and district officials, the Board of Governors, and the Board of Directors, and the ACBL management. This task force will be working to identify opportunities to improve this situation and to help our clubs. More to come on this important work in San Diego in the fall.

Volunteer Task Force – Paul Cuneo, District Director from Houston, and I have been collaborating with Dan Storch, Marketing Director of the ACBL and a couple of other directors, Sharon Anderson from Minnesota, and Jay Whipple from Florida, to develop a webinar aimed at helping districts, units, and clubs to develop, improve, and retain volunteers in their organizations. We've done a lot of research and our data has shown that across the board, fully 1 in 3 volunteers do not return from one year to the next. The dollar cost to the ACBL of volunteer labor time alone is in the millions. One of the proven truisms has been that improvement in the retention rate depends largely upon improvement in recognition and rewards for our volunteers. The Volunteer Task Force will be working to identify and share best practices in the ACBL and to provide an educational tool kit for helping those interested in developing more effective volunteer programs.

Tournament Task Force – In Kansas City, I was asked by Tournament Task Force Chair, District 6 Director Margot Hennings, to join her and 4 other BOD members, 4 non board members, and 2 ACBL Staff consultants to help identify ways to improve tournament attendance. This has been a very busy group, with activities that have spanned a lot of time at and between actual board meetings. In fact, we had some meetings in Gatlinburg this spring. A lot of data has been gathered and analyzed, and a midyear report was provided to the full board in Toronto. The primary focus has been that across the ACBL regional attendance has experienced a 6.7% decline – and 2/3 of the decline is from members with less than 500 masterpoints. One of the more interesting discoveries has been that nearly half of the players who attend a regional one year do not go back the next! Work is continuing through the rest of this year, and the Task Force has been compiling a number of recommendations for action including sharing best practices with districts such as ours which has actually seen an increase in attendance over the past couple of years, promoting NLM Regionals as alternatives to Open Regionals and developing approaches for working with clubs to foster cross-participation in various bridge events – not competition. I've shared with the task force tried and tested tools such as Root Cause Analysis, and

Pareto charts to help identify the most important underlying causes of our attendance decline. It's been shown that 80% of problems are attributable to 20% of the causes. The one common issue affecting all three of our current task forces – Tournament, Clubs, and Volunteers – is our continuously increasing **aging**.

Average Age of ACBL Membership 1990-2016

1990 - 60.71 1995 - 62.39 2000 - 64.69

2005- 66.99 2010 - 69.05 2015 - 72.00

2016 - 72.51

Our ever-increasing **average** age of ACBL members is rather frightening. It has not only had an impact on attendance trends, but it has also affected our volunteer workforce, the distance our players are willing to travel to tournaments and the times at which our players prefer to play. It has resulted in a significant reduction in our evening games and as a result has made it more difficult for younger, working players to find a venue to pursue playing bridge. I just sent a note to our new CEO in which I have proposed a major strategic initiative by the ACBL, that I have dubbed “65 by 25” – a multifaceted marketing initiative aimed at reducing our average age of membership to 65 by the year 2025.

“Win an NABC Event in Your Pajamas” Promotion – The board in Kansas City had given ACBL management some broad permission to experiment with online events. An outgrowth of this decision was the highly publicized online Individual tournament that was run over 4 sessions during the NABC. Despite being somewhat hastily planned, this turned out to be a big success! There were more than 2,500 contestants at \$40 per player, and the ACBL grossed about \$50,000 profit before its marketing and overhead expenses. I do think the overall masterpoint awards for this were a bit excessive, and there was too much hype about this being an NABC event. Nobody loves individuals more than I, but there is a huge difference between playing against 3 humans and playing against 3 robots – especially if you never, ever have to be on defense. Regardless, I imagine that as long as our players vote for this kind of event by their participation, these will continue to be run – and they’ll probably continue to be run opposite our NABC’s. Hopefully, it won’t in any way adversely impact face-to-face attendance at our NABCs. As a Board member, I’m thrilled this was so successful and drew so many participants. Certainly, the ACBL needs to embrace new revenue-generating ideas.

Code of Disciplinary Regulations ReWrite – A complete re-write of the ACBL's Code of Disciplinary Regulations was done. Part of this was the addition of the Anti-Cheating Commission as a non-board committee. It was argued that these changes were very much needed at this time in order to provide clarity in various matters that are currently under review and consideration. I would have preferred the new CEO had more time to review it, and that any pros and cons could have been aired after a thorough circulation across the membership, but CEO Gidwani suggested he was comfortable with the changes and requested immediate approval - which was done.

Orlando Negotiated Settlement – The Fall 2016 NABC in Orlando was a financial disaster. It fell some 3,000 tables below forecast – which translates into approximately a quarter of a million dollars in table fees. There

were numerous complaints by players – primarily associated with parking and food. The ACBL was committed to go back to this location in 2022 and was facing a \$40/night rate increase. In Kansas City, the Board authorized ACBL management to enter into negotiations with Disney's Swan and Dolphin Resort in Orlando in order to get out of having to return to this site for the 2022 Fall NABC. I was in the distinct minority, but I voted against this, because I felt our management should have been able to get out of the contract at little or no additional expense to our organization, considering we were looking out so far in advance. It was reported in Toronto that the ACBL completed its negotiations with Disney and agreed to pay \$80,000 to break the contract.

On a positive note, it was announced that we are now scheduled to the very popular Phoenix venue with an attractive hotel rate for the Fall of 2022 – and Chicago will be the site for the 2023 Summer NABC.

NABC Financial Plan – This thorough, extensive, and detailed motion carried by a vote of 24-0-1 - with mine being the sole abstention. While I agreed with most of the provisions of this motion, I was unhappy with the the timing, and lack of transparency around this. I felt a motion as broad-reaching, and long-term as this should have broad membership visibility and I was also concerned as to the permanent free plays being granted to specific individuals. My vote changed from “Nay” to “Abstain” after the original wording was modified.

World Bridge Federation Funding – The board voted narrowly (12-11-2) to require the US Bridge Federation, the Canadian Bridge Federation, and the Mexican Bridge Federation – not the ACBL – to be responsible for the payment of any membership dues to the World Bridge Federation. I voted against this motion for several reasons. First, I thought it was not in the best interests of our league, the USBF, or for our game. It was argued that upwards of \$500,000 in total funds are provided to the WBF annually – via International Fund games, NABC+ entry fee surcharges, and the Junior Fund. This is true, but these monies are not coming from the ACBL operating budget in any way. We are just facilitating a funding mechanism. The approximately \$166,000 currently provided to the WBF represents \$1 from each member's dues. These funds are essentially invisible to our members, but the good they do for helping to allow the USBF to send two teams to the World Championships is enormous. My belief is that if these funds are no longer provided, it will not be long before the monies previously provided will soon be squandered. Secondly, I thought the Canadian Bridge Federation support for this was overtly motivated by a desire to expand it's already significant role and authority that it currently enjoys. It was clear to me that an unintended consequence of this will probably be the elimination of one of our teams down the road. Third, I think the real issue for us on the ACBL Board should be the large number (4) representatives we have on the WBF, and the way these representatives are selected. Happily, this last issue, and the broader issue of funding has not been finalized as the Board of Governors voted to have the BOD reconsider these matters at the next BOD meeting in San Diego. I will argue that the board should not move ahead with such a huge policy change as the funding change represents, without more clarity, and without a clear consensus. This could really prove disastrous for the ongoing success of the USBF, in my opinion.

Attempting to Improve Board / Management Efficiency – Small team break-out sessions were introduced in Kansas City for the expressed purpose of identifying and prioritizing a variety of ways that the BOD could improve communications, procedures, and overall efficiency. The board continued to pursue these topics in Toronto, and this work is expected to continue until the end of the year at least. The most important thing to note at this time is that the BOD recognizes it has some significant opportunities for improvement, and is working towards that rectifying this situation. I actually proposed a motion at this meeting that would have required clarity of roles and responsibilities between the BOD and management, and would encourage increased use of available technologies so as to allow for fewer face-to-face board meetings – and more frequent

videoconferencing of the full board – starting in 2020. This motion was apparently a bit ahead of its time, as it failed 3-22-0, but I'm confident that many of the things I have espoused will eventually be implemented one way or another in the foreseeable future. One of the key concerns for me is the difference between the perceived role of the board of directors by many of our ACBL members as compared to the perception by management of this role. In addition, there is a difference of opinions within the board itself. It seems to be pretty fundamental that we get this clarified if we have any hope of improving efficiency.

Term Limits – I co-sponsored a motion in Kansas City that would provide rather modest term limits for ACBL Board members (no more than 4 three-year terms). This was a verbatim repeat of a motion that had been filed by Robert Heller 3 or 4 years ago – before I joined the board and failed by a vote of 11 for and 14 against. This motion encountered unexpected committee delays in both KC and Toronto, but it is progressing as a bylaws change for review and action in San Diego. It will require a 2/3 vote which is quite difficult, but not impossible considering the large recent turnover on the board with some 6 new members in the past 2 years alone having replaced folks who mostly voted against this a few years ago.

Stopping the Stop Card – The board voted to eliminate the use of the stop card effective just after the 1st of the year in 2018. I almost never use the stop card myself, and have no strong devotion to it, but I voted against this motion. My reason was that our head director advised that the motion still requires a 10 second pause following a skip bid, but there is now absolutely no way to demonstrably prove that a proper delay was taken. It sounds like there may be some unresolved consequences as a result of this. Furthermore, this rule is not applicable to clubs, and further confusion is sure to follow during the upcoming months.

5-6 Player Team Entry Fees – The Board of Governors in Kansas City overwhelmingly demanded that the ACBL Board reconsider its motion to charge on a per person basis entry fees in 4+ session NABC events in which all team entrants receive full masterpoints. I was only one of 4 board members who voted to reverse the board's decision in this matter. I don't actually play in all that many team events, but many of you who do have expressed concerns about this to me. The intent was to generate additional revenues without hurting pro teams, but the players that are really being hurt by this are amateurs who are not on pro teams and are trying to compete with the pros. I think we ought to try to find better ways to help generate additional revenues.

D25 Toronto Player Achievements

Mr. (and Mrs.) Smith Went to Washington – then they took over Toronto !!

Michael and Susan Smith of Newington, CT, first rose to national prominence when they won the 0-5,000 Bruce Life Master Pairs in Washington, DC at last year's Summer NABC. Prior to the Summer NABC in Toronto, they were added to the all Connecticut Flight A District 25 GNT winners – Barry Bragin, Weiling Zhao, Michael Hess, and Gary Miyashiro. The Smiths continued their winning ways as they helped this great team over a period of 5 days of grueling competition, to go on to win the entire event! But that's not all, the Smiths capped off an amazing tournament by teaming up during the last weekend of the tournament with EMBA's Christina Parker and Stewart Rubenstein to win the 0-10,000 Mixed Swiss Teams!

All told, Michael and Susan each earned 149.96 masterpoints to top the D25 Top 25! -

D25 Top 25

Rank	Name	Residence	Masterpoints
1.	Susan Smith	Newington, CT	149.96
2.	Michael Smith	Newington, CT	149.96
3.	Victor King	Hartford, CT	144.96
4.	Barry Bragin	Prospect, CT	142.39
5.	Douglas Doub	West Hartford, CT	97.90
6.	Adam Grossack	Newton, MA	96.55
7.	Weiling Zhao	Brookfield, CT	88.46
8.	Christina Parker	Newton, MA	87.57
9.	Stewart Rubenstein	Newton, MA	87.57
10.	Michael Hess	Wilton, CT	85.00
11.	Gary Miyashiro	West Redding, CT	85.00
12.	Lloyd Arvedon	Woburn, MA	83.28
13.	Zachary Grossack	Newton, MA	83.03
14.	Sheila Gabay	Newton, MA	82.56
15.	Allan Graves	St. Johnsbury, VT	82.33
16.	Geoffrey Brod	Avon, CT	77.88
17.	Laurence Lebowitz	Boston, MA	65.26
18.	Lewis Gamerman	Randolph, MA	58.02
19.	Robert McCaw	Brewster, MA	57.24
20.	John McLaughlin	Melrose, MA	56.97
21.	Harrison Luba	Lynnfield, MA	55.57

22.	Phyllis Fireman	Chestnut Hill, MA	53.16
23.	Daniel Albert Rozenburg	Cambridge, MA	52.38
24.	Bill Irvine	Quincy, MA	51.45
25.	Haven Sharaf	Danvers, MA	51.45

NABC+ Top 10 Finishes by D25 players

Geoffrey Brod	Senior Swiss Teams	4th
Lewis Gamerman, Bob McCaw, Victor King	Truscott USPC Senior Swiss Teams	6th
Steve Becker, Larry Bausher, Shome Mukherjee, Mark Aquino	Senior Swiss Teams	8th
Sheila Gabay, Victor King, Douglas Doub	Mixed Board-a-Match Teams	3rd
Laurence Lebowitz, Adam Grossack	Roth Open Swiss	- 10th

NABC top 10 finishes by D25 Players

[Barry Bragin](#) , [Weiling Zhao](#) , [Michael Hess](#) ,

[Gary Miyashiro](#) , [Susan Smith](#) - [Michael Smith](#) GNT FLIGHT A 1st

[Sabrina Miles](#) Mansfield, MA; [Drryl Legassie](#) Milton, NH 0-2500 PAIRS – 3rd

[Richard Franklin](#) New Canaan, CT 0-2500 PAIRS – 4th

[Joel Wolfe](#) West Hartford [Tom Joyce](#) E. Hartford, 0-6K LM PAIRS - 5th

[Randolph Johnson](#) Suffield, CT 0-6000 LM PAIRS - 9th

[Andy Avery](#) Jamaica, VT 0-6000 MINI-SPINGOLD Tie 3/4

[Michael Wavada](#) Enfield CT, [Kenneth Leopold](#) Avon, [Felix Springer](#) West Hartford, [Trevor Reeves](#)
Farmington 0-2500 MINI-SPINGOLD - 9/16

[Christina Parker](#), [Stewart Rubenstein](#) Newton, MA ; [Michael Smith](#), [Susan Smith](#), Newington 0-10K MIXED
SWISS – 1st

Zachary Grossack, Newton, MA 0-10,000 Mixed Swiss - 3rd

(1st or 2nd overalls - Other Events)

Douglas Doub West Hartford, CT Friday Eve Side Swiss Teams -2nd

Haven Sharaf Danvers, MA; Bill Irvine Quincy Sat Day Open Pairs -2nd

Bob Sanzo Westford, MA Saturday 299er Pairs – 2nd

Donald Caplin Waltham, MA; Harrison Luba Lynnfield, MA;

Daniel AlbertRozenberg Cambridge, MA; Sat-MonKO I - 1st
Jackie Scott Norwalk, CT ;

Richard Jacoby Stamford, CT Sat-Sun Aft/Eve KO Teams - 1st

Allan Graves St. Johnsbury,VT Sat Eve A/X/Y Side Swiss – 2nd A

Hollis Barry - Gery Barry –Stamford, CT Sun Brack B Tms 4 – 1st

Victor King, Hartford, CT Sunday Daylight A/X Pairs – 1st A

Alexander Frieden Brookline, MA Sunday 299er Pairs – 2nd

Mark Aquino Jamaica Plain, MA; Fri-Sun Aft/Eve Side Game – 1st

Christina Parker, Stewart Rubenstein Newton, MA;

Christine Halkiotis,Diogo Teixeira Wellesley Sun Brack B Teams 1-2nd

Harrison Luba Lynnfield, MA Sunday Zip Knockout Teams 2 – 1st

Jean Senat Fleury Chestnut Hill, MA Monday 299er Pairs - 1st

Lon Sunshine Merrimack, NH; Herbert Sunshine - Rachele Sunshine Framingham, MA Mon-Tues
Aft/Eve KO Teams 4 – 1st

Rain Yu Han Lan Sudbury, MA Mon-Tues Aft/Eve Side Game – 1st

Barry Bragin Prospect, CT Tuesday Daylight A/X Swiss – 1st A

Joseph Sackett - Jill Sackett Winchendon, MA Sun Day Brack B Teams 6 – 2nd

Zachary Grossack Newton, MA Tuesday Zip Knockout Teams 1 – 1st

Ellen Dworetzky Bloomfield, CT 2nd Thu Afternoon 49er Pairs – 1st

Kim Smith Fairfield, CT; 2nd Thu Evening 299er Pairs – 2nd

James Keegan Cambridge, MA Paul Harris Waltham, MA; Rick Holcomb Malden, MA Wed Day Bracketed B Teams 1 – 2nd

Judith Hyde Northampton, MA; Robert Sagor Greenfield, MA; Wed Daylight Bracketed B Tms 2 – 1st

Sheila Katz – Jeffrey Katz, Stamford, CT Wed Open Pairs – 1st in B

Lewis Gamerman Randolph, MA; Barry Margolin, Arlington, MA; Nathan Glasser, Somerville, MA
Wed Zip KO -1 - 1st

Don Casey Brookline, MA, Franklyn Caine Weston, MA Harold Nordstrom Reading, MA Susan Lincoln
Boxford, MA Wed Daylight Bracketed B Tms 8 – 2nd

Kim Smith Fairfiled, CT

Jill Dimitrief Boston, MA 2nd Thu Evening 299ers – 2nd

Daniel AlbertRozenberg– Michael Albert 2nd Thu Open Pairs – 1st ABC

Harrison Luba, Lynnfield, MA Sat Dbl Dummy Youth Swiss – 2nd

Harrison Luba Lynnfield, MA 2nd Sat Eve Swiss- 2nd A 2nd B 1st C

Alix Taylor Lincoln, MA 2nd Sat Open Pairs -1st A

Eric Schwartz - Barry Margolin, Arlington, MA; Nathan Glasser, Somerville, MA 2nd Saturday Zip
KO-1 1st

Lewis Gamerman Randolph, MA Richard Binder Waltham, MA 2nd Sat Zip KO-2 2nd

Neil Montague Swampscott, MA, Jeffrey Lehman Newton, MA 2nd Sat-Sun Side Series- 1st A

R Michelle Green, Somerville, MA Julian Jefferson Manchester, NH 2nd Sat-Sun Side Series- 2nd
A 1st B 1st C

Ellie Hanlon – Mary Savko, Barre, VT 2nd Sun Open Pairs 1st A

Now I Want to Hear from YOU!

I'll be very interested in hearing your feedback regarding this report, and your perspective on any of the various matters currently being worked on by the full board – or by any of our various task forces.

If you have any questions about any of this, or any ideas on how to make things better, please feel free to contact me directly at any time by email at District25Director@acbl.org

Thanks!

Mark

Mark J. Aquino, Sr.
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