

Submitted by: Peter Marcus, District 25

Item 181-BG03: Conditions of Contests

Board of Governors Motion Issue Sheet

- Subject Matter of Motion (insert a short phrase)

ACBL Management unilaterally changing conditions of contest.

- Statement of Issue (one or two sentences)

Misusing an ambiguous, never before used wording in the conditions of contest for STaCs, ACBL Management, under the guise of an “experiment,” approved a totally unfair change to the conditions of contest for the Unit 155 STaC in October, 2017. This action created probably the most unfair events the ACBL has ever sponsored.

- The motion itself:

ACBL Management is explicitly prohibited from changing the conditions of contest for any ACBL contest without approval of the ACBL Board of Directors. Specifically, no wording of any existing rules or conditions can be used as justification for such change. All conditions of contest, both written and customary from decades of practice, would require BOD approval before Management could make any changes. In an emergency situation, ACBL Management can request the BOD Executive Committee to act until the full BOD can consider any change.

This motion would not, in any way, limit the rights of the DIC to interpret and enforce all ACBL regulations during the actual playing of a tournament.

In fulfillment of this motion, all ACBL documentation, including but not limited to the Codification and Handbook, should have added the following clarification:

- In any reference to authority to amend, restrict or expand any condition of contest or other ACBL regulation or customary procedure, either permanently or on a temporary or experimental basis, where such authority is given to “...ACBL...” this shall explicitly refer to the ACBL Board of Directors and not to ACBL Management acting unilaterally. The only exceptions will be where the language explicitly references the authority of “...ACBL Management...” to make such changes.
- Material impacts (what the change causes and who it affects)

This motion would prohibit ACBL Management from repeating its conduct with regard to the October, 2017 Unit 155 STaC, where Management permitted all games with an upper limit of 7500 points or more to be combined for overalls with Open games. To the best of my knowledge, no similar action has ever occurred in the 37 years during which I was an ACBL tournament director.

This motion would only affect ACBL Management and its ability to unilaterally violate existing rules and practices under the heading of running “an experiment.”

- Reasons why the Board of Governors should adopt the motion (Please attach a succinct summary on a separate sheet of paper)

See description below (starting page 3)

- Risk if the motion is not approved

ACBL Management will feel freedom to repeatedly ignore both written rules and decades of standard and customary practices for running bridge games and other ACBL procedures and practices and to arbitrarily allow unfair conditions to be promulgated, pretending that such changes represent experiments for future changes, without any control or direction from the organization's governing board, the Board of Directors.

Three times per year, Unit 155, Greater New York Bridge Association, part of District 24, runs a STaC. The largest club in the STaC, and, in fact, the largest club, by table count, in the ACBL (based on annual table counts) for the last 4 years, runs its games by regularly "splitting" its open game into what is called "The White" section, generally the strongest game with potentially multiple World Champions, and "The Yellow" sections. Even though all sections are open and theoretically have some players from each stratum (A, B, and C), The White is almost always the strongest and many players specifically do not want to play in it because of its strength of field.

For STaC games, the ACBL has consistently enforced the rule that, since these are not really all open, with the best players being "steered" into The White section, both White and Yellow sections could not participate as open games, combined with other clubs, for STaC overalls. Various solutions, such as running The White section as a stand-alone invitational game or running The Yellow sections as 0-20,000 (or higher) stand-alone games, have been attempted. None of these has been well received by club management.

For many years, this has been a regular area of contention, involving not only the ACBL directors for the STaC (most recently, Marilyn Wells, Peter Marcus, and Alex Bealles), but also Horn Lake management, including Sam Whitten, National Recorder, Linda Dunn, in her role as National Recorder, and Robert Hartman, CEO. Despite their repeated requests, the club has not been allowed to include both The White and The Yellow sections as Open Pairs for overalls in the STaC, combined with other clubs.

Yet, for the October, 2017 STaC, the first STaC conducted since Bahar Gidwani assumed the position of CEO (coincidentally, Bahar comes from New York, NY where this club is located), a special request was made to completely subvert long-standing ACBL fairness rules. The conditions of contest for the Unit 155 STaC were amended to allow any game, including any masterpoint limited game, to be combined as an Open Game, including combined with Open Games at other clubs, as long as the upper masterpoint limit was 7500 masterpoints or more. For the first time that I have ever heard of, really "open" games and masterpoint limited games were combined into one event for overalls.

This change was approved by ACBL Management under cover of one line from standard STaC conditions of contest, "Sponsoring organizations may, with ACBL approval only, amend these conditions for a specific event. Such amendments should appear in all printed tournament schedules

and be posted prior to the start of event.” For purposes of this STaC, this condition was read by ACBL management to mean that “...ACBL approval...” meant Management and not the Board of Directors.

It should also be noted that nowhere was this amended condition posted or explained. It was not posted onsite at the one club which took advantage of this new rule (I know, I went there to play on the first day of the STaC to confirm how this was being run), which ran The White section as an Open Pairs and The Yellow sections as 0-25000 Pairs, both combined with other clubs’ Open Pairs for overalls. It was also not posted on the Unit’s or District’s website, the club’s website or the ACBL’s website. In fact, it seems that not only was this additional element of the condition of contest (that ACBL Management claimed allowed them to approve this) ignored, it was, in fact, intended to be kept as secret and unexplained as much as possible.

To demonstrate how totally unfair this arrangement was, over the main Open Pairs (Monday-Friday afternoon) of this STaC, the only sessions this split between Open and 0-25,000 Pairs but combined for overalls, at this one club the Open Pairs had stratum breakdowns as follows:

- A: 88 pairs, 72% of the participants
- B: 27 pairs, 22% of the participants
- C: 7 pairs, 6% of the participants

Total of 61.0 tables of Open Pairs

For the 0-25,000 Pair events, the stratum breakdown at this club was as follows:

- A: 76 pairs, 28% of the participants
- B: 89 pairs, 32% of the participants
- C: 109 pairs, 40% of the participants

Total of 137.0 tables of 0-25,000 Pairs

Yet, despite this ridiculous and totally unfair division, all of these events were combined together for overalls.

There can be no valid excuse for allowing this combining of limited and unlimited events. It violates not only ACBL stated conditions, but the standards that every ACBL member recognizes for fairness in bridge competition, that an open event cannot be combined and compared even-up with a limited event. To have allowed this at all is ridiculous; to have allowed it with no notice, no posting of the changed conditions, nothing to let players know that this STaC would be run according to conditions that no one had ever experienced before, is even worse.

Further, where could this ridiculous experiment lead? Can you now go to a regional and ask to play in the “weak, 0-7,500” section of the regional Open Pairs, and then let the best players “beat up on each other” in the “really” Open section, while you cruise to a 70% game in a much weaker field? When will I be allowed to enter “the weakened sections” of the LM Pairs, so I can have a chance to qualify, and maybe win, while World Champions compete against only themselves in selected, much stronger sections, of the same event?

The problem is not how absurd this event was, but that ACBL Management used an obscure sentence from the STaC conditions as “carte blanche” to violate every standard of fairness the ACBL has come to represent, and all to appease one large club that had finally found an ACBL Management administration that was willing to “sell out” the idea of fairness.

Clearly, ACBL Management cannot be trusted to follow the standards all bridge players have come to recognize, and instead will misuse, and abuse, ill-defined conditions of contest to harm the vast majority of players for the benefit of a few.

Steps must be taken to ensure that this kind of abuse never occurs again. This motion, if passed, would go a long way towards ensuring this never happens again.

Existing ACBL Policies and Conditions:

There is limited information covering this issue, since everything the ACBL has ever written regarding the conduct of its tournaments assumes a presumption of fairness which this “experiment” clearly violated. However, the following written policies make clear that the modifications to the conditions for this STaC violated existing ACBL rules:

ACBL Codification Chapter VI, Section B, Section 1

Open Games

1.1 An open game is open to all ACBL members. (My note: Clearly, although the 0-7500 games of this STaC were considered Open Games, they were not open to any ACBL member with more than 7500 points, so they were not, in fact, Open Games and should not have been considered as such.)

ACBL Codification Chapter VI, Section B, Section 2

Invitation/Restricted Game

2.1 An invitational game is one that limits or places restrictions on who can participate in its events. Participation commonly is limited to:

c. Players who hold fewer than a stipulated number of masterpoints

(My note: Again, this makes clear that a 0-7500 game is a restricted game, not an Open Game and is held under a different definition and authorization than an Open Game)

ACBL Handbook, Chapter VI, Section 4, Item I, Sub-Item III, Paragraph IV.

Events

- Open (no masterpoint restriction)
- Flighted (by masterpoint only)

(My note: This makes clear that an Open event must have no masterpoint restriction, such as 0-7500, and is separate from a Flighted event, which has masterpoint restrictions.)