

# FALL 2017 ACBL Board NEWS

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## ACBL Board Member Notes

### San Diego NABC

Whew! It's been a super-busy first few months under the leadership of our new CEO, Bahar Gidwani. We knew that the San Diego meetings of the ACBL Board of Directors would be packed, as I believe we had to close to 70 Motions and Discussion Items up for deliberation and resolution. This made up for the Summer NABC meetings in Toronto, which had fewer motions than normal. I won't detail everything, but these decisions affect a wide swath of activities across the ACBL ecosystem. As a result, I ask your forgiveness for a newsletter longer than normal. I want to continue focusing on decisions that matter most to our players, but if you're not interested in a particular item, feel free to skip to the next one. I also want to maintain an approach that balances the informational content (what did the Board decide?) with opinion (why did I vote a certain way?). I will continue to give shout outs to wins and high level finishes at NABCs by players from our District and provide scattered news from around our District.

### "Of-the-Year" Honorees

The ACBL Board recognizes certain ACBL members for their exceptional contributions during its Fall meetings. Nelda Linman of Bend, Oregon was appointed the 2018 Aileen Osofsky ACBL Goodwill Member of the Year. Pete Misslin, who co-chairs the Gatlinburg Regional with his wife, Julia, was appointed as the 2017 Nadine Wood Volunteer of the Year. And uber-bridge dynamo Jan Martel was named the 2017 ACBL Honorary Member of the Year.

### CEO Update

I am often asked, "How's the new CEO doing?" To be honest, my perspective as a member of the ACBL Board is skewed, as our impressions are limited to the information we've received and the specific roles that we play. From what I see, Bahar is a tireless worker, and his energy has injected much-needed introspection into the organization. He has asked a lot from the various ACBL Board Committees and Task Forces. I had no fewer than 7 conference calls during the Fall of at least 90 minutes, and used several pounds of virtual ink in e-mail correspondence.

Most of these calls and e-mails were prompted by "Bahar's Big Ideas," as they're coming to be known. Some of these ideas are terrific – some not so much – but they all needed some serious work before they were implemented, or in some cases, discarded. We got a chance to do this in San Diego, prioritizing his Big Ideas and integrating them into formal Board motions. Some of the ideas proposed struck us as management overreach. Some weren't big deals, but they struck a top-down authoritative tone that we felt was inappropriate for an organization as diverse as ours. As a small example, management asked us to require that all ACBL sanctioned tournaments pay a fee covering the costs of a post-tournament attendee satisfaction survey. Now, everyone on the Board thought that post-tournament satisfaction surveys were a good idea, and we applaud tournament chairs deciding to use them. But mandating them by edict from Horn Lake, and then charging tournaments for the obligation? The motion failed unanimously.

The experience has made me appreciate the collective knowledge and wisdom of the ACBL Board in ways I didn't fully appreciate. Sometimes it takes a group of people to understand how all the pieces of the ACBL ecosystem (HQ, Districts, Units, Clubs, Teachers,

### TOP DISTRICT 11 MP WINNERS AT SAN DIEGO NABC

1. Matt Granovetter, Cincinnati OH	164.48
2. Jerry Clerkin, Bloomington IN	121.40
3. Dennis Clerkin, Bloomington IN	119.57
4. Pamela Granovetter, Cincinnati OH	48.80
5. Suman Agarwal, Columbus OH	47.08
6. Bill Cook, Louisville KY	44.85
7. Jerry Premo, Noblesville IN	44.16
8. Judith Auer, Dublin OH	37.81
9. A.J. Stephani, Cincinnati OH	33.82
10. Kay Beck, Noblesville IN	33.52
11. Wagner Van Vlack, Carmel IN	31.33
12. Marshall Lewis, Bloomington IN	28.21
13. Toni Bales, Pickerington OH	23.98
14. John Meinking, Maineville OH	21.08
15. John Bishel, Columbus OH	19.92
16. Tom Bishel, Columbus OH	19.92
17. Nancy Gaunt, Evansville IN	15.45
18. Stephen Moese, West Chester OH	14.00
19. Daniel Koppenhafer, Mason OH	13.80
20. Ronald Rybak, Worthington OH	13.46
21. Liz Lin, Cincinnati OH	11.58
22. Iris Libby, Cincinnati OH	10.85
23. Barbara Boswell, Cincinnati OH	10.13
24. Alex Khrakovsky, Columbus OH	6.76
25. D Balsmeyer, Monroe OH	5.69
26. David Whitesell, Yellow Springs OH	5.69
27. Judy Gerald, Louisville KY	5.02
28. Jane Perkins, Evansville IN	4.34
29. Jane Sturgeon, Louisville KY	4.31
30. Frank Paynter, Grove City OH	4.27
31. Kimberly Music, Lewis Center OH	2.31
32. Jean Donoho, Louisville KY	1.97
33. Erin Kennedy, Louisville KY	1.97
34. Nan Turner, Carmel IN	1.68
35. Mark Ambrose, Louisville KY	1.62
36. Judy Banks, Elizabethtown KY	0.92
37. Terri Chandler, Campbellsville KY	0.92
38. Jim Sturgeon, Louisville KY	0.78
39. Jill Gasper, Dublin OH	0.65

Members, Tournament Volunteers, etc.) fit together. On the whole, the Board had a productive set of meetings with Bahar in San Diego, and he has promised to work more closely with us when developing his future Big Ideas (and more are coming!). I am eager to see what 2018 has in store for us.

## New ACBL President

Many of us have gotten the roles of ACBL CEO and President confused at one time or another. The CEO is the full-time Chief Executive Officer of the ACBL who works in Horn Lake – that’s Bahar. The President of the Board, on the other hand, is a 1-year volunteer elected position that serves as something of an ambassadorial role to the ACBL Membership. The President is not just a figurehead position, however, as the President sets the Board’s agenda, acts as the liaison with the CEO and ACBL management, and helps to frame the tactical approach of the organization.

I’m pleased to announce that Jay Whipple (Boca Grande, Florida) is our 2018 ACBL President, besting challenger Bonnie Bagley (Colorado Springs, Colorado). You probably all know Jay through the innovations he has introduced to our daily bridge lives – he’s the moving force behind The Common Game, Fast Results, and many of the electronic support services behind our Regional tournaments. As a nod to Jay’s leadership, I will end each of my newsletters next year with his signature e-mail line: “What’s Next?” (And if you look closely, you may spot Jay somewhere else in this newsletter!)



## WBF Dues Reconsideration Motion

The ACBL Board of Governors has the authority to require the Board of Directors to reconsider motions passed or defeated at prior meetings. One such motion was the gradual reduction of ACBL support for dues owed to the World Bridge Federation (WBF) by our National Bridge Organizations (NBOs). This vote passed by the narrowest of margins in Toronto, and I was on the losing side of the vote. However, I voted against reconsideration of the motion in San Diego, which failed 10-14-1. \*

\*Where votes of the Board are noted, the tally will be given with the Ayes first, then the Nays, then the Abstentions (e.g., 15-9-1 would be 15 in favor, 9 opposed, with 1 person abstaining).

My seemingly contradictory positions can be explained by my attitude on reconsideration motions. As I stated back in my Spring 2017 newsletter: “I have a strong preference for deciding issues and then moving on to other questions, instead of re-litigating the same old thing meeting after meeting. Even when I find myself on the losing side of a vote, I will rarely, if ever, vote to reconsider an item unless I believe it necessary to correct a grave injustice.” The motion had a fair hearing in Toronto, and we need to move on.

## NABC Robot Individual

Some of you played in the NABC Online tournament (a.k.a., “The Pajama National”) held on BBO last summer during the Toronto NABC. Entries nearly quadrupled estimates, and though our first crack at running this kind of event revealed some unforeseen wrinkles, the results were sufficiently promising to warrant the continuation of the event. We had a spirited discussion in the Bridge Committee about the status of the event and whether it deserves the “NABC” label. We all recognize that online bridge is not the same as face-to-face bridge, especially considering that the online game was played against robots. However, it resembles what we think of as “bridge” in many ways, and we have to embrace our electronic future one way or another. The ACBL had a “49er NABC” for years, and no one confused a winner of that event with a Spingold Champion.



We decided to swap the word “online” for “robot” in the name of the event to more accurately describe the event and confer upon it an appropriate status. The full Board approved (22-3-0) adding an “NABC Robot Individual” tournament for each NABC going forward (I voted in favor of the motion). The event will run during the 3-4 days

before the beginning of each NABC.

## Cell Phone Policy

The ACBL went through several iterations of a cell phone policy before it finally settled on one that mostly works. However, until now, that policy was effective only at NABCs – other tournaments and clubs were free to fashion their own policies. Management wanted the policy to apply at all ACBL tournaments, but we felt that Sectionals had too much local variation to try to impose a single solution. Besides, if we overreached on this, the policy would likely have been ignored on a local level anyway.



We did, however, agree that our Regionals should harmonize and standardize more of its operations, and this was a good first step. The severed portion of the motion that applied a uniform electronic device policy to all Regionals passed (22-3-0) (I voted in favor), but the severed part that would have applied the policy to Sectionals failed (9-14-2) (I voted no).

## Soloway KO

Many of you recognize the Vanderbilt, Spingold, and Reisinger as the premier events on the NABC Championship calendar. While other bridge events and activities seem to be struggling, these events have thrived in recent years. Hundreds of foreign players come from all over the world to test their mettle against the best, and our premier NABC Championships have essentially become 3 of the 4 World Championship bridge events each year.



The Reisinger is a little different than the other two, however, in terms of the format of the event, how long it runs, and the kinds of teams it attracts. The Fall NABC has lacked a true KO-style premier event, and our Competitions & Conventions (C&C) Committee had recommended such an event for several years. This year, I'm very pleased that our Board approved the event, named in honor of all-time bridge great Paul Soloway. The inaugural Soloway KO will debut at the 2019 NABC in San Francisco.

The format of the Soloway KO is new to the ACBL. It begins with a 2-day Open Swiss, with the top 32 teams advancing to a 5-day KO. This is familiar to those of you who have played in our GNT District Finals, which runs in a similar way, but on a reduced scale. I love this format, and look for it in area Regionals next year.

## Notable D11 Finishes in San Diego

The Fall NABC is typically the least well-attended NABC for District 11 members, and San Diego was a longer haul than usual for most of us. However, that didn't prevent D11 from its share of success. Congrats to the Dennis and Jerry Clerkin, who won (with teammates listed to the right) the Baze Senior Knockout Teams! The Levine Team bested perennial powerhouse Nickell in a thrilling final, 143-132.

Matthew and Pam Granovetter boasted a pair of second place finishes in Nationally-rated events, but with different partners. Matthew and partner Sylvia Shi took second in the prestigious Kaplan Blue Ribbon Pairs, while Pam played on a women's team that finished second in the Marsha May Sternberg BAM Teams.



Jerry Clerkin, Mike Passell, Eddie Wold, Dennis Clerkin, Marc Jacobus and team captain Mike Levine



Sylvia Shi and Matthew Granovetter



Pam Granovetter, Yiji Starr, Rose Yan, Shao Hong Wu

Jerry Premo (with Jakob Kristinsson) finished 42nd in the Nail Life Master Open Pairs, and Steve Moese and I (with teammates Bill Begert and Jess Jurkovic) clawed our way to a 15th place finish in the 10K Swiss.

## Convention Cards at Table

I had high hopes for a motion that required each pair to have only 1 convention card visible at the table, instead of the current requirement that both players have identical cards. As most of you know, this rule is more honored in the breach – many pairs don't comply, and directors rarely impose the indicated penalty (for good reason – a different subject). Anyway, the motion failed 8-17-0, so it's a good time to remind everyone to have 2 identical convention cards present at all times. Bridgewinners.com has a [terrific CC card editor](#) (underlined text in blue are links to indicated websites), so it's easy to fill one out and print 2 copies.

## ACBL Membership Amnesty

You may remember when the ACBL increased the Masterpoint requirement for making Life Master to 500 (along with pigmentation point increases) back in 2010. To entice lapsed members to rejoin the ACBL, we passed a motion applying the pre-2010 MP requirements to those players if they originally joined prior to 2010. A temporary amnesty is in effect for those players until July 1, 2018; after that date, the ACBL will charge a \$50 fee.

## STaC Events

ACBL management proposed a motion changing various rules governing STaC events, which, after considerable discussion, was eventually split into 2 motions, both of which failed. Quite frankly, the motion was neither conceptualized nor written very well, and we encouraged management to go back to the drawing board. I mention the motion because it will likely be re-presented at a future meeting, and so we should expect changes to our STaC events going forward. STaCs were originally intended as alternatives for Units with large geographic areas whose membership would have to travel considerable distance to attend an in-person sectional. It has morphed into a silver MP smorgasbord in some parts of the country, and I believe we need to re-think how these events fit into our Masterpoint offering structure at clubs.

## Developments Affecting Regionals

Regionals have attracted a lot of the Board's attention over the past year. Regional attendance is down significantly (almost 7% between 2013 and 2016), and the rate of decrease is accelerating. Yet, the number of Regionals is increasing slightly. As a result, we see "thinning" in individual Regional events, with many small Regionals unable to attract teams for more than 1 KO bracket and some events being canceled entirely. No District wants to give up a Regional, however, as they continue to be profitable (though less so) and serve the needs of our members. A solution will not be easy.

Nonetheless, the Board is encouraging Regionals to innovate, especially with KO formats. Some Regionals are running three-session "variable-board" KOs that finish in a single day and allow teams knocked out in the first round to enter a second championship event the same day. Another approach is the "Mini-Soloway" format, where KO brackets are run as 2-session Swisses or round robins the first day, with the top 4 teams in each bracket qualifying for the semifinals the second day. Cincinnati's Flying Pig Regional will use this approach next June 11-17 – look for details soon. Other Regional organizers who would like to consider something like this and want more information should contact me. The Board also passed several motions fixing some Masterpoint formula flaws for various Regional events.



## Term Limits for ACBL Board of Directors

For decades, the ACBL Board of Directors has been criticized as a bloated, self-perpetuating body that is out of touch with its base. One of the dynamics that has fed this perception, in my opinion, is the failure of the ACBL Board to impose any kind of term limit for its members. Term limits have been suggested numerous times throughout the long history of the ACBL, and they have been defeated each time.

I am very pleased to report that the ACBL Board, for the first time, voted to approve term limits (four consecutive three-year terms) for itself (16-8-0, 1 absent). Because this requires an ACBL bylaws change, the Board must pass the motion with a 2/3 majority, with a second vote required at the next Board meeting in Philadelphia. The Board of Governors must then approve the bylaws amendment. You can see that the margin is razor thin, and our two new members of the Board or a change of mind by current Board members may produce a different result. You may have guessed that I voted in favor of the motion.

## Temporary ACBL Memberships

ACBL management proposed a complex motion introducing the concept of a "temporary" ACBL membership, which passed (14-9-1, 1 absent). For \$8, players can now join the ACBL for one month. The idea is that, once we have the contact information for casual bridge players, HQ can more easily reach out to them and hopefully convert them to regular members.

I probably felt more strongly about this motion than any other, and I made (at least what I believed to be) an impassioned speech in our full Board meeting opposing the motion. I was the lone dissenting vote in Committee, so I was surprised that at least 8 other Board members felt as I did. I won't detail all the reasons I believed the ACBL shouldn't go down this road, but suffice it to say that I think that management is too narrowly focused on growing current ACBL membership at great cost to its long-term future. If we continue to ignore the long-term health of bridge in North America at the expense of current membership figures, we face a dire future. Noted Indianapolis bridge legend Easley Blackwood is reputed to have said, "you can't package duplicate bridge and sell it like corn flakes." Sometimes I think that's exactly what we're doing.

For a second NABC in a row, the ACBL hit a home run on the tournament venue. . . . **San Diego** was fantastic! The host hotel, the Manchester Grand Hyatt, was a terrific venue: ample playing space, good lighting, multiple “mingle” areas, and lots of restaurant choices in the nearby Gaslamp District.



The Hyatt was a few steps away from the waterfront, and San Diego accommodates those of us who like to walk between meetings or playing sessions with beautiful walking paths along the water. And if you hate airport hassle as much as I do, San Diego is a welcome respite: the airport is less than 3 miles from the hotel. When I departed, I managed to get from my hotel room to the airport, check a bag, go through security (with my shoes on!) and arrive at my gate in a total of 18 minutes.



Because the Board of Directors holds its meetings prior to the beginning of each NABC, we had to fly in to San Diego the Sunday before Thanksgiving. Our meetings lasted a full 5 days, with various other Committee meetings and events scattered over the next 3 days. I stayed and played in a few 10K events with local partners (Steve Moese and John Meinking) after our Board meetings wrapped up.

Thanksgiving morning was notable – our regular morning walking group crashed San Diego’s annual Turkey Day 10K Race, and we had some company at the finish line!



Under the program, temporary members can only be referred by a teacher, club, or tournament, with the referring party receiving a recruitment bonus. I question how this will work at the grass roots level, and I am worried that we will see unanticipated consequences from the program creating additional problems.

## Budget Deficit

The Board received a preliminary 2018 budget from management containing a deficit of \$178K on total projected revenues of about \$18M. Running a budget deficit doesn’t bother me as long as the expenses are justified in light of our mission and organizational objectives. I’m not sure I’m convinced. Additionally, the deficit would be much larger without optimistic projections of ACBL membership growth in 2018. We formally vote on the motion at our Spring meeting.



## Other Developments

Management is trying or has approved several ongoing initiatives. Clubs needing answers to questions of all kinds now have a toll free phone number for club support: 855-275-7629. Best of all, ACBL Tournament Directors are available on evenings and weekends from 8AM-Midnight, Monday-Friday, and 11AM-7PM on weekends (all times CST) for help with rulings, scoring and other game administration questions. Give them a call and let me know how the service works!

I’m really excited about our new REACH (Regional Events At Club Houses) experiment. It’s a “5-Day Side-Series Regional Pairs Event” that essentially works as an optional national stratification for club games. Because it’s technically run through a Regional sanction, it pays Gold Points! We tried it out the week of November 13-17, and it got terrific reviews. Individual players win Gold Points based on their results at local clubs that participate in “The Common Game.” Look for more opportunities in 2018, and get your clubs signed up for “The Common Game” now!

## Around the District

I can’t highlight all the great activity from our District here, but I want to give a shout out to special events in my newsletters. On Sunday, November 19, Unit 193, the “Cardinal States” Unit, covering Southern Indiana and Western Kentucky, held its first annual Indiana/Kentucky “Bragging Rights” Contest. The event format featured a 12-person team of Unit members from Indiana, and another from Kentucky, competing in 3 separate KO matches in different strats. Indiana residents wore Indiana red and brought popcorn in honor of Indiana native Orville Redenbacher, while the Kentucky folks wore Kentucky blue and came bearing gifts of miniature Kentucky bourbon bottles.

Indiana won the competition, 2 matches to 1. In addition to bragging rights, the Indiana team won the privilege of displaying the “traveling” trophy at a club in the Hoosier state for the coming year. Winning the <750 MP strat for Indiana was Carol Olinger, Kitty Recker, Pat Probst, and Jane Perkins. Winning the Open strat for

Indiana was Katie Brown, Bill Lea, Bernie Kay, and LeRoy Breimeier. Kentucky took the 750 to 2500 strat as Dale and Suzie Hill, with Bobby Tapp and Kirk Ranta, won their match. Special thanks to Richard Sarles, who served as director for the game.

The organizers hope to expand the event in future years to allow more players to participate. As novice players in the area see and learn more about knockouts through this terrific event, their interest and participation in IMP bridge play should blossom.



## Looking Ahead

Just as the “Stop” card disappears from our bidding boxes on January 1, we can look forward to a complete re-write of our convention card charts in 2018. I’m not talking about our convention cards, which are designed and printed by private companies, but the charts that govern which conventions are legal in different events, including tournaments and games at your local club. Likely gone will be the General Convention Chart, Midchart, and Superchart, and in their place will be 2 streamlined charts for MP-limited games and newer players (the Basic Chart and Basic+ Chart) and 2 charts for all other games (the Open Chart, and Open+ Chart).

I won’t attempt to list the likely changes you will see, but if you are interested in those kinds of things, the biggest change is that the Open and Open+ Charts will be “Blacklist” charts. This means that all bidding agreements will be allowed unless they are specifically disallowed. This is different from the current convention chart structure, all of which are “Whitelist” charts (bidding agreements disallowed unless specifically allowed). Make sure you’re reading the charts properly when you use them.

Regional tournament allocation will remain on the Board’s agenda in 2018, and Bahar has promised a new set of “Big Ideas” for the Spring. Finally, our Bridge Committee is committed to proposing a “Strength of Field” (SOF) approach to Masterpointing Swiss events at tournaments much in the same way that KO Masterpoints are calculated. The final brushstroke will be applying an SOF formula to pairs events, which will eliminate a great deal of the complexity in how MPs are calculated.

In the meantime, I hope to see you at the [Indianapolis Regional](#) coming up January 29-February 4 at the Wyndham Indianapolis West and the [GNT District Finals](#), to be held this year at the Louisville Bridge Club on February 24-25. Until then, I am always available by phone (513-313-0488) or e-mail ([AJStephani@gmail.com](mailto:AJStephani@gmail.com)) with questions or concerns.

May At Least Half Your Finesses Work,

A.J.

What’s Next?