

WBL Board Minutes

July 11, 2022

Board members attending: Hadi Abushakra, Bob Bell, Herb Schulken, Mary Tenenbaum, Lloyd Rawley, Kathy Kopnisky, Alex Gretsinger, and Linda Marshall. Board members absent: Clyde Kruskal, Lena Maman, and Alex Stille. Ted Ying (Club Manager), Brad Theurer (Tournament Chair), and Carole Banks also attended.

Minutes: The Board approved the minutes of the May meeting.

Treasurer's Report: Despite declining attendance at our online games, which have recently been drawing just under 30 tables, revenues continue to exceed expenses for these games. We have also received \$1400 from District 6 as our share of revenue from its online game as well as \$1400 from ACBL as our share of membership income. The initial face-to-face games have run large deficits. The two most recent games have drawn 9 1/2 and 6 tables, resulting in losses of over \$500 and \$600 respectively. Herb said that we have enough reserves to enable us to lose money on the revived face-to-face games for a while, but not forever. He noted that a weekly 10 table face-to-face game would run a deficit of about \$2000 per month

The Mix of Online and Face-to-Face Games: The Board had a wide-ranging discussion of how to reintroduce face-to-face unit game bridge. There was widespread support for the following ideas:

- It will be important to coordinate our activities with those of the Northern Virginia Bridge Association (NVBA). We will try to hold a joint meeting with the NVBA Board in August.
- It is desirable to avoid direct competition between face-to-face and online games sponsored by the unit.
- To accomplish this, there was considerable support for moving the unit online games to a different night, so that Thursday would be exclusively face-to-face. But alternating between a face-to-face game in each unit one week and a joint online game the following week could also be considered.
- At the same time, there was concern that moving the online game to a different night might have a serious adverse effect on attendance. This, in turn, would deplete financial resources available for rebuilding the face-to-face game.
- The WBL online Monday evening game failed to build a consistent following. Players disliked competing against those with far more experience, but the small game made dividing players into relatively homogeneous groups impossible. Ted observed that in his experience midweek was generally more attractive than Monday or Friday and might attract more attendance.
- Face-to-face bridge builds community in ways that online bridge cannot—it is a more social experience that enables players to meet new friends, sustain acquaintanceships with other players, and form new bridge partnerships. If bridge becomes an overwhelmingly online game, some Board members believe that it will attract fewer new players, which will speed its decline.
- As ACBL membership grows older, evening bridge has become less attractive. Many players don't wish to drive at night, dislike traffic, go to bed early, etc. Yet evening games can be important for younger players who work during the day but wish to play regularly.

- The WBL should set time and financial limits on its investment in reviving face-to-face evening bridge at the unit game. If we view this as a trial of a hybrid (face-to-face/online) model, we should coordinate the trial with the NVBA. We can make adjustments to the trial plan as it proceeds.
- If the evening unit game survives, it is likely to need a smaller and less expensive playing space. Ted suggested that, on the whole, sites outside the Beltway were more attractive than those inside.
- It is difficult to plan without data. We don't know how people would react to having an earlier start time, playing fewer boards, or efforts by the unit to promote the face-to-face game. We also don't know how the season (historically, summer tends to reduce attendance at local games) or bridge events in nearby districts (regionals, nationals) are affecting the reintroduction of face-to-face bridge.
- Many old and familiar issues (e.g., recruiting and retaining new players; adjusting stratification limits, starting times, and length of games to changing player preferences) may take on different forms or become more challenging in an environment with both face-to-face and online options.

Substitute Director: Ted is unavailable for the July 14 unit game; Livingston Johnson will serve as director. The Board discussed possible candidates for a regular substitute director, since one may be needed for future games. We agreed that the substitute needs sufficient in-depth bridge knowledge to be able to respond knowledgeably to the concerns of experienced Flight A players, but also needs the social skills and empathy to understand the perspective of less experienced players when directors are called. The Board agreed that the substitute would be paid \$120 for the evening.

WBL Sectional: Linda reported on the tournament committee's plans for the next WBL sectional (September 29-October 2). She said that they planned to run the bottom bracket of the Sunday Bracketed B team game as a Swiss team and that they would include this in the tournament advertisement. She explained that this would give them flexibility to accommodate 499ers who wanted to play only one session in case there were not enough teams for a separate 499er event. Linda also said the committee planned to use 11AM and 3:30PM start times.

The Board discussed moving to a cashless system for entry fees. Ted offered to write up details of how this could work, describing in detail the equipment that would be needed and its cost. He noted that publicity for a cashless sectional would need to prominently feature information about this change and the importance of being prepared to pay by credit card.

Next meetings: The Board will try to arrange a joint meeting with the NVBA in August (NVBA has proposed that we meet together on August 7). The next regular WBL Board meeting will be September 7, 2022. The annual WBL membership meeting is scheduled for October 1, 2022 between sessions at the WBL sectional.

Respectfully submitted,

Robert Bell