

**CEO REPORT  
DENVER CO**

**November / December 2005**

To: ACBL Board of Directors  
ACBL Board of Governors

cc: Linda Mamula, Chair Board of Governors  
Peter Rank, League Counsel

**MEMBERSHIP:**

Total active membership as of October 31, 2005 was 155,458. This is 87 members fewer than 2004. Our total number of paying members is flat (+16) compared to last year. Following the YTD trend, active unpaid life members continued to decrease.

October 31<sup>st</sup> is the annual date in which those unpaid life members who had no activity for at least 24 months, are moved off our rolls. We are proposing to begin doing this on a month by month basis in order to be as accurate as possible every month.

Our new member YTD count is 9,113, a decrease of 364 versus last year. We expect to finish the year with 11,000+ new members.

**Active Membership Statistics  
October 2005**

<b><u>Membership Category</u></b>	<b><u>2005</u></b>	<b><u>2004</u></b>	<b><u>Change</u></b>	<b><u>%</u></b>
Life Masters	46,528	45,948	580	1.3%
Non Life Masters	103,597	104,161	(564)	-0.5%
Total Paying Members	150,125	150,109	16	0.0%
Active Unpaid LM	5,333	5,436	(103)	-1.9%
Total Members	155,458	155,545	(87)	-0.1%
New Members YTD	9,113	9,477	(364)	-3.8%

**TOURNAMENTS:**

Through October regional tables are down 2.89%, sectional tables are down 3.85% and STaCs are down less than 1%. With 13 regionals left in 2005, we need 22,366 tables, an average of 1720 per tournament to equal 2004.

With 81 sectionals remaining, we are 21,837 short of last years total. We need to average 270 tables per sectional to equal last year.

STaCs have 15 events remaining and would need 25,873 to equal last year. December is traditionally the largest month for STaC tables and this December should be our largest month ever due to some STaCs bringing more Districts and units into the mix.

The per table average of all tournaments fell in 2005 with regionals having the largest deficit. There were a number of variables this year that did not help our numbers. Bad weather early in the year, natural disasters, and gasoline and energy costs rising to record highs all had some effect on tournaments. In addition the ability for players to play nearly everyday in sectionally rated games at clubs may have kept players closer to home. (See Club and Special game report.)

Table Count (Exhibit 1)

Special Games:

NAOP:

The 2005/2006 NAOP at clubs continued its upward trend thanks to Flights B & C. The table count of 40,722 was the highest we have seen in the last 12 years. These comparisons are for the club qualifying games during June, July and August. We believe the drop in revenue caused by the lowering of sanction fees is justified by the long term benefit. (Exhibit 2)

The NAP Coordinators in Districts 10 and 16 have come to an agreement to accommodate any of our members that have been displaced by recent events. Those members who opt for Texas residency will play in District 16. Others may qualify at District 16 clubs and receive a further waiver directly into the District 10 Final if there is a need to bypass the unit stage. Information on District winners is beginning to arrive in the Special Events Department. Notification to eligible winners has started.

Special Games at Clubs:

Through August the activity of the three special club games (International Fund, Junior Fund, and Charity games) has been very good. International Fund revenue is up 58%, Junior Fund revenue increased 28% and Charity revenue had an amazing 128% increase. (Exhibit 3)

ACBLscore:

The Windows version has been tested in clubs and at tournaments since August. The Denver NABC will be scored using the Windows version. It is anticipated that the Windows version of ACBLscore will be available on our download site, for general release, in January '06. We will continue to offer both versions of ACBLscore (Windows and DOS).

**NEW COMPUTER HARDWARE:**

In October, we upgraded our main computer to a new IBM i5 Series processor. This unit will allow us to shorten our system backup time, dramatically increase available

on-line storage, provide for faster, more reliable and highly secure ways to help simplify our Information Technology (IT) environment. The new system will reduce the number of servers and our annual software maintenance costs.

### **HUMAN RESOURCES:**

The Human Resources Department has been working on the employee insurance coverages for the last couple of months. Due to the age of our group and the poor claims experience, it has been hard to come up with a policy(s) that would still be competitive and that the ACBL and employees could afford. We have had to increase the deductibles and the amount of employee contributions to the plans. New plans and deductions will start on December 1, 2005.

To help encourage employees to focus on well health and preventive care, we had a Health and Wellness Fair at the office. Fourteen health care providers participated in the Fair.

### **UPDATE ON TOURNAMENT ADS VIA E-MAIL:**

The following has been posted on the Tournament Coordinators web forum and the ACBL web site at <http://www.acbl.org/units/tournamentmanagement.html>

#### Tournament E-mail Notices

New software has allowed the ACBL to reinstate the tournament e-mail notice program. Please send your notices to the [Data Services Department](mailto:listlabels@acbl.org) (listlabels@acbl.org). All notices must include a phone number and an e-mail address that can be used for replies. Replies to tournament notices no longer will be sent to the ACBL but to the tournament representative.

The ACBL is mindful of increasingly strong laws regarding Internet privacy. Members currently are able to opt out of messages. We are working on an "opt in" program that will allow members to accept tournament e-mails and other messages.

#### Notice Guidelines

Only one notice will be sent per tournament to the distribution criteria you select. You are responsible for your notice content, so please be sure to proofread it – twice. Keep your notices short and sweet and link to a flyer if you have one. Do not use photos or other graphics in your e-mail notices, as these make the notices more difficult to download.

### **MARKETING:**

#### **ACBL/Educational Foundation Funded School Program:**

The Educational Foundation has limited its contribution to the school program to \$50,000 for 2006 (down from \$60,000 in 2005). The ACBL will match this contribution. The program expenses are slightly more than \$30,000 per year, leaving us a little less

than \$70,000 for fees. So far in 2005 we have paid out a little more than \$76,000 in fees with two months to go. Quite a few fall classes will finish by the end of December.

ACBL has been actively promoting the school program since the late 80s. It has really begun to grow in the last five years. Here is what we plan to do in 2006:

1. Limit the number of fees per teacher to five classes ( $\$350 \times 5 = \$1750$ ).

At this time there are at least ten teachers who will have taught more than five classes in 2005. This will hinder our big producers but leave room to encourage more people to join the program.

2. Provide only the ACBL texts.

We will provide the ACBL Bridge Series texts as requested. We will continue to allow teachers to use other material but they will have to provide the books on their own.

We are unable to predict how the limit on teacher fees will effect the teachers who are currently teaching 15 to 30 classes a year. These cost-saving ideas will give us some leeway but may still create a situation where we are unable to pay some of the teachers if the program continues to grow.

#### The ACBL Archive Project:

We have had a tremendous response to the initial announcement of the ACBL Archive Project in the Bridge Bulletin, including a gift of \$500 from former national champion Leonard Harmon, who was featured in Goren's "Championship Bridge" program. Other members have sent books and memorabilia, including Joan Morse's donation of the ACBL Chattel Cabinet scrapbooks.

The conversion of the Goren films to DVD is progressing. We will produce four DVDs of the shows and a bonus CD with other features, including the show that featured Chico Marx. We are talking to early sponsors of the show such as United States Playing Card about possible sponsorship. The Marketing Department has been working on the fund-raising and donor recognition plan and will provide additional information on this exciting project.

The museum archive software has been installed, and we are beginning the slow process of documenting every book, every photo, and every piece of bridge memorabilia. It will take a monumental effort to be ready for the ACBL 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary year in 2012. We are approaching a library science class at Rhodes University for (free) interns to help with data entry. Our archivist's contributions to the students' education will be invaluable as they have the opportunity to work at his side.

The anniversary will be featured in the magazine and on the web site in December, and we are producing an online anniversary poster for clubs.

2005 ACBL Club Officials and Teachers Survey Report

The survey was delivered electronically to 4283 recipients. ACBL members continue to wow the survey firm, with a response rate this year of 30%.

For the first time, we asked for satisfaction levels with the addition of the category, “Do Not Use” or “Not Familiar.” Some of the numbers were a bit astonishing. For example, 48% of club officials and teachers are not familiar with the accounting department. This shows that when people call the ACBL – it’s just the ACBL, not a department. This reinforces the concept that all departments need to be consistent with policies and responses, as one influences all. If respondents were familiar with a department, more than 90% were somewhat or very satisfied with all of them.

Not Familiar with Department

Education:	26%
Club:	12
Bulletin:	10
Accounting:	48
Product Store:	18
Special Events:	38
Tournament:	27
Marketing:	34
IT:	36
Customer Service:	21

Levels of those somewhat or very aware of programs were mixed, driving home the fact that we need to refer to these programs again and again and again.

Again, if survey respondents were not familiar with or did not use a service, they were not asked for their level of satisfaction. This resulted in significant gains in those who were somewhat or very satisfied.

	'05 Awareness	'04 Awareness	'05 Satisfaction	'04 Satisfaction
Star Teacher Discounts	64	59	86	72
Find a Teacher web site	73	73	92	84
Web resources for teachers	73	62	92	78
Coop Adv. (teachers)	67	69	92	80
CopyMax Discount	39	43	79	68
Bridge Teacher Newsletter	81	74	96	83
Teacher Handbook	52		95	
Coop Adv. (clubs)	54	62	93	81
Find a Club web site	74	76	97	91
Web resources for clubs	61	75	94	82
Marketing Matters (clubs)	65		92	
Marketing Matters (teachers)	68		93	

Club Manager Portal	47		95	
Club Manager Newsletter	79	77	96	89
Club Manager Handbook	77		98	

The percentage of club officials and teachers who reported actively recruiting members rose from 76 to 79% since 2003. The reasons they use to recruit have remained virtually unchanged, though “Become a Life Master” has increased from 37 to 41%. The top reasons remain fun, improving their game, mental activity and the magazine.

The level of recruitment changes significantly with years of service and size of club. 42% of teachers who have taught 20+ years report that they recruit members very actively. Only 30% recruit very actively if they have taught 0-3 years. The numbers are more dramatic for clubs:

	1 game/week	2-5	6-9	+10
Recruit very actively	26	35	57	53

Interestingly, when asked the level of importance placed on reasons for joining the ACBL, clubs with +10 games placed the least importance on “support the game of bridge” — 65% — where a club with only one game gives it 75%.

Not surprisingly, teachers or managers with the most years on the job are most aware of publications or services, but there is little difference in satisfaction levels, with some odd exceptions.

One realization that became clear from the comments is that many respondents indicated they were teachers but are not recognized as an accredited teacher in our database – hence, they do not receive the Bridge Teacher Newsletter and some other items directed at accredited teachers. Recommendation: Develop a subscription process for the newsletter.

In the past two years, there has been an increase from 15 to 20% in teachers with more than 20 years of experience. The percentage for club officials with more than 20 years of experience has increased from 14 to 21%. It is important to continue and improve our TAPs and club director courses to bring in fresh faces.

For the first time, teachers were asked where they teach, with private lessons ranking the highest at 62%, followed by 59% at bridge clubs, 42% at community centers, 29% at country clubs.

Also for the first time, club officials were asked if they offer lessons. Again, there is no surprise that lessons are provided at 95% of clubs with +10 games and only 45% of clubs with one game a week. When asked why they don’t provide lessons, lack of space, time and available teachers were repeated over and over. When asked what the ACBL could do to help, the answer generally was “nothing.”

When asked about resources on the web site, teachers focused on the need for mini-lessons and sample hands. The Education Department is pursuing several options to provide these. Driving home the importance of this to the teachers is the fact that 68% report that they use their own teaching materials. 60% use the ACBL Bridge Series, 31% Better Bridge, 18% Easybridge! and 16% other. (Multiple responses were accepted.)

When asked about resources on the web site, club officials focused on ACBLscore for Windows and a forum for director rulings. Both of these are the responsibility of the Tournament Department. Recommendation: Develop timeline for director forum.

Many club officials also asked for information about special events – somewhat of a mystery because so much has been added, including online registration and the automated Participating Clubs features.

Various ACBL staff members are being asked to address individual comments in the survey, particularly when a contact name or e-mail address was given.

The overall recommendation from this survey is more — more references to our services more often and in more places.

#### **EDGE TV:**

We have no progress to report concerning the launch of Edge TV. ACBL's agreement of exclusivity ended in June and we are free to negotiate with other cable channels.

#### **MISCELLANEOUS:**

The Bridgemate scoring system is an electronic wireless scoring system that consists of table-top devices for collecting scores of boards being played and transmitting them instantly to a central receiver for storing them in a database file. Players enter the number of the board they play, the contract, declarer and result (optionally lead card) on the Bridgemate using the 25-key keypad. After verification by the opponent, the result is directly transmitted. Communication between receiver and Bridgemate is bi-directional, providing the opportunity to send back information to the players like an overview of results on that same board, the percentage obtained thus far, etc.

The system was first marketed in 2000 in the Netherlands. This year more than 700 clubs are using Bridgemate and this number is growing weekly.

What are the benefits of Bridgemate?

- No more caddies picking up score slips.
- No more entering scores in a scoring program.

- Fewer errors on entering scores. Bridgemate requires the board number, contract, declarer and result to be entered. Calculation of score points is now done by the computer, avoiding wrongly calculated scoring points (e.g. using wrong vulnerability).
- No manual typing scores in scoring program required, taking away the chance of making wrong score entries. Players are now fully responsible for entering scores correctly.
- Instant transmission offers the opportunity of live broadcasting of the current rankings.
- Offer the players direct feedback on their board result (if configured to do so).

#### Linking Bridgemate to ACBLscore for Windows:

Enabling Bridgemate functionality to a scoring program is an easy task. For an experienced programmer it takes about 2-3 days to include all functionality.

### **STRATEGIC PLAN PROGRESS**

#### Objective #1: Sanction Tournaments:

In an effort to make the sanctioning process more efficient, ACBL is moving toward full computerization. This will start with the Tournament Coordinator and the filing of application, move to Memphis for date and schedule approval, on to the Field Supervisor to DIC and finally to the Tournament Directors route sheet. Much of the process is finished with total completion due by April 2006.

Online Tables: Through September ACBL had 158,245 sanctioned tables online. This compares to 112,764 in 2004. These games are being run by four sites: World Winners, Bridge Base Online, MSN and Swan Games. Management expects two more sanctioned online clubs will be operating in 2006.

The “Relaxed Rules” for clubs has two versions that have been reviewed by selected club operators. Neither version has been well received and this project needs to be sent back to the drawing board.

#### Objective #2: Provide Quality Member Services

We are making progress on a 24 hour response to complaints. In most cases we are able to address problems on the day received. The response time is dependent by the specific problem. Our surveys indicate a high satisfaction rate (94%) by our members.

The web site continues to have improvements and now features a “Hand of the Week.” Our “Playful Polls” draw interest from members and will be appearing when appropriate. We are in the early stages of converting lesson hands that can be adapted to the site. This is one of the enhancements asked for by members in the annual Member Survey.

Another of the more sought after enhancements is the definitions of conventions. The test for this is being finalized and will be a section on the site in 2006.



No work has been scheduled until 2007 for the development of a ranking system based on current performance; however, this is an issue that members continue to request.

The annual membership survey was completed in June. A number of recommendations from that survey have been implemented:

- Masterpoints needed to achieve next rank has been added to the portal.
- Mini-google search engine was added to the site.
- Renewal reminders are being programmed into the portal.

### Objective #3: Expand the Awareness of and Participation in Bridge

The membership survey in June has given us some benchmark statistics to formulate a 50+ plan for 2006. This plan has not been completed but will be drafted for action in 2006.

Online teaching programs will be linked and featured on the web site.

Bridgeiscool.com was launched with added features on the way. Bridgeiscool.com T-shirts and bracelets have been produced and will be given away to juniors, caddies and kids in Denver. We hope to have them available for sale as well. Other recent accomplishments.

- The National Council for Teachers of Mathematics accepted the ACBL proposal for a presentation at its convention in 2006.
- An article about bridge appeared in the YMCA camp director's newsletter.
- Link to Society of Women Engineers:  
[http://www.swe.org/stellent/idcplg?IdcService=SS\\_GET\\_PAGE&nodeId=89&ssSourceNodeId=8](http://www.swe.org/stellent/idcplg?IdcService=SS_GET_PAGE&nodeId=89&ssSourceNodeId=8)
- Link to National Association of Middle Schools:  
[www.http://www.nmsa.org/moya/moya\\_2004/resources.htm](http://www.nmsa.org/moya/moya_2004/resources.htm).
- Girls Inc: Link approved and exact url placement is pending.
- National Science Teachers Association: Working with teacher Sandra Jones on content for link.
- Bridgeiscool.com T-shirts were shown on the outside audience of the Today show and The Early Show the week of October 26.
- T-shirts have been sent to stylists for VH1 and MTV VJ's.
- T-shirts and bracelets have started going out to several youth partner groups and will continue to ramp up in the next few months.
- Website information and links have been placed on several youth-oriented websites around the web (bulletin boards, chat areas, etc.).
- We have secured a meeting with AOL for Bridgeiscool.com to possibly be included into their kids and youth members content area.

Objective #4: Position ACBL as the Authority on Bridge in North America

E-newsletters were distributed to Unit/District officers in July. The next issue will be in January. Unit officer's handbooks have been updated and are currently available on the web site.

The ACBL portal for club managers is up and has been very well received.

Objective #5: Provide Professional Development for Teachers and TDs

ACBLscore for beginners is now online and has had over 300 members sign up. Ruling the Game will follow this year with more courses to come in 2006.

Teachers will soon have more options with Learn to Play Bridge as a textbook, SAYC by the ACBL, the revised Club Series and a new play course, Major Suite Raises.