



American Contract  
Bridge League

**Strategic Committee**  
**March Board DI211-01S**

# Post Pandemic Bridge Discussion

## Purpose:

To provide the Board's strategic objectives to management for use as they develop our plan for post pandemic bridge.

## Process:

- Quickly share the background information which has been distributed and answer questions.
- Discuss the Committee's first objective to determine whether it has support of the full board.
- Discuss the primary options for Virtual Clubs and determine which has board support
  - Questions for understanding
  - Advocacy
  - Straw Polls



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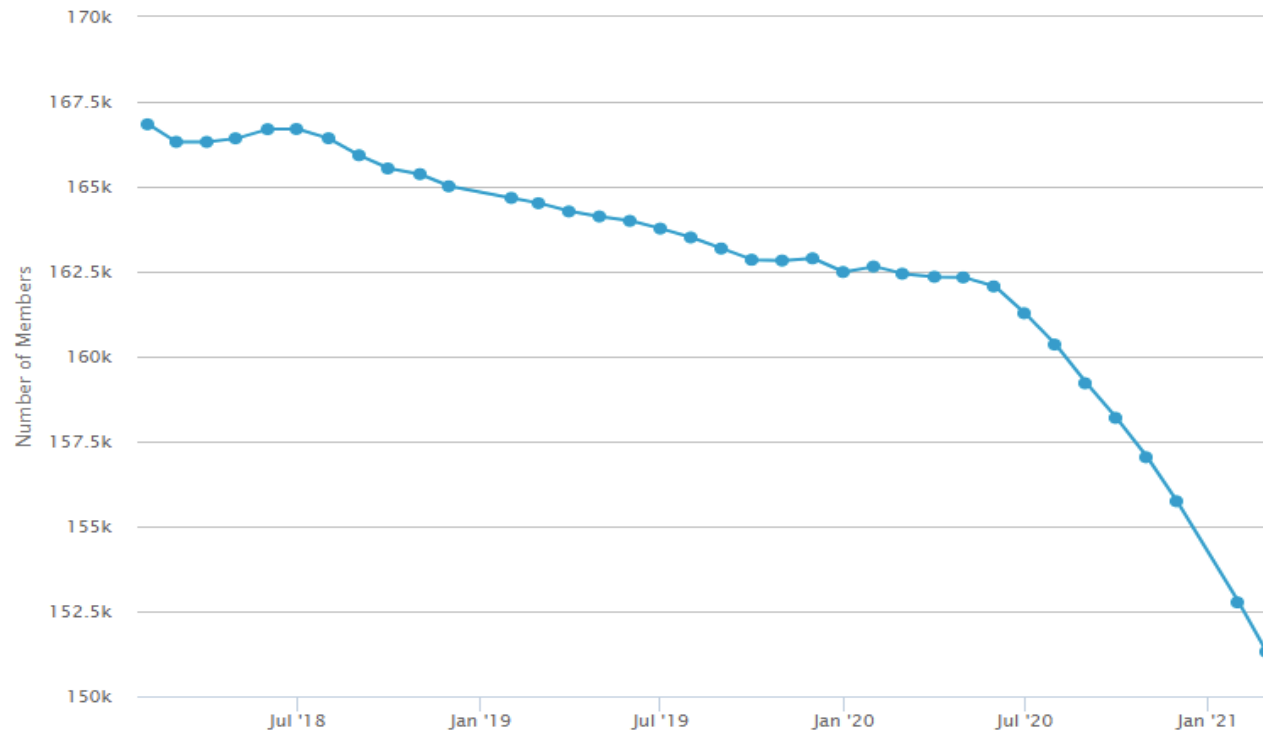
# Current Membership Trends

District:

All Districts ▼

Membership for past 36 months for ACBL

Click and drag to zoom in. On mobile devices, pinch to zoom.



1%/year decline from August 2017 to Jan 2020.

The decline has accelerated to 8.8%/year from June 1, 2020 to March 1, 2021.

If membership declines at the current rate, July 1, 2021 we'll be at 147,000 members.

Increased decline rate is caused by decreased new members and increasing membership lapse.

About 70% of members who played in club games in 2019 are playing in online ACBL games

# Post Pandemic Online Bridge Survey October 2020

## Primary Purpose:

- a. Help face-to-face clubs supplement their income through online play - 65%
- b. Maximize ACBL's income from these sanctions – 3%
- c. Encourage those without f2f\* sanctions to compete with f2f\* clubs - 14%
- d. Encourage members to play in more online clubs than BBO - 18%

## Accomplish through online sanctions (average rating):

- a. Generate significant income for ACBL from virtual club sanctions – 1.65
- b. Protect f2f\* clubs from cannibalization by online virtual clubs - 3.82
- c. Provide opportunities for club owners who did not return to f2f\* - 2.47
- d. Protect all f2f\* clubs in an area from cannibalization by other clubs in the area that have virtual online club sanctions - 3.27
- e. Provide opportunities for area players to play in a Virtual Club – 3.47

# Post Pandemic Online Bridge Discussion

Premises:

- Face to face bridge has resumed and the health risks of club play are generally the same as pre-pandemic
- Face to face tournaments have resumed

There will be a transition period. No one knows how long that will be, but it may be guided by what's decided for Post Pandemic Bridge.

The BBO contract runs through June 30, 2025. We are currently operating under an agreement for the Pandemic which allows tournaments and virtual clubs.

BBO has indicated a desire to continue virtual clubs, but at a higher cost.

A post pandemic contract will need to be negotiated.

# Post Pandemic Bridge Discussion

- **OTF** - Online bridge complemented by face to face club and tournament play
- **Management Response** - To inspire people to compete in the world's most challenging and enjoyable card game through face to face and online play

Play during the pandemic has changed online play:

- More players enjoying online – more than 60% of those who was masterpoints in club games in 2019
- 18 Board BBO games are huge versus struggling to make pre-pandemic

Prior to the pandemic: Face-to-face clubs had double the tables of online

During the pandemic: BBO and other online games have been double the Virtual Clubs tables

- Regionally rated tournaments conducted by ACBL online. Virtual Clubs have Silver Linings, Stardust and Club Appreciation which award pigmented points.

# Post Pandemic Bridge Discussion

Healthy vibrant bridge communities are characterized by:

- Bridge Centers that offer games 6-7 days per week that operate in owned or leased space. (Units may own or lease the space and have several “clubs” using it)
  - Have established teaching programs
  - Work on new member recruitment and integration into bridge
  - Are a source of volunteers for all governance levels and tournaments
  - Generate new teachers and club directors
  - Are key to building the social fabric of the bridge community
- May have clubs that operate in community centers/temples/churches etc. that have games 1-5 times per week. Some pay “rent” or other fees to use the space.

# Post Pandemic Bridge Discussion

Economics of face-to-face and online bridge:

Face-to-face bridge centers:

- Entry fees from \$10 in major metropolitan areas
- Typically provide some food and drinks
- 24 to 27 boards in open games lasting 3 to 3 ½ hours
- Players may have significant commuting time and costs

Online Clubs:

- \$1.75 for 18 boards – BBO; typically \$5 to \$8 for virtual clubs
- 2 hour games, no commuting costs, no fixed costs



# Post Pandemic Bridge Discussion

Club ownership takes many forms: Sole proprietorship, partnerships, member owned.

- Table count is critical to profitability.
- Bridge Center owners have significant fixed costs for rent, maintenance utilities and supplies.
- Margins are thin. Typically break-even table count is 85% to 90%.
- Owners get additional income through teaching programs.

Face-to-face regional and sectional tournaments have the same basic economics; high fixed costs for space and hospitality, and low margins.

# Post Pandemic Bridge Discussion

Prior to the pandemic:

Face-to-face clubs had double the tables of online

During the pandemic:

BBO and other online games were double the Virtual Clubs tables

601 Virtual Clubs hosted games in February. Another 1400+ were pooled under the hosts. 700 clubs had no participation.

70% of the players who won masterpoints in 2019 have played online. About 40,000 have not.



# Post Pandemic Bridge Discussion

A poll was conducted on Bridge Winners. To participate you had to be a “member” and log in to vote.

Key takeaways:

24% expect to play almost exclusively face-to-face

34% face-to-face supplements by occasional online play

17% equal face-to-face and online

The other 25% are primarily online or exclusively online.

# Post Pandemic Bridge Discussion

In our meetings of February 3 and 17, the committee has taken the position that ACBL needs a robust return to face-to-face bridge and that actions should be taken to enable it.

Potential Options to help a robust return to face-to-face:

- Remove the masterpoint multiplier for virtual clubs
- Apply a masterpoint multiplier for face-to-face clubs
- Allow more “special games” for face-to-face clubs

**Does the Board support this position?**

# Post Pandemic Bridge Discussion

Our decisions on post pandemic virtual clubs will have a major effect on the robust return of face-to-face bridge and its prospects for the next several years.

Once regulations are promulgated it will be much harder to restrict virtual clubs than it will be to allow more freedom of operation.

We need to decide the objectives so that management can develop a plan and codification language can be drafted and communicated to all.

# Post Pandemic Bridge Discussion

Meeting with Linda Dunn. Key takeaways:

- Need to treat members of a class equally – online clubs, face-to-face clubs, virtual clubs etc. are examples of classes
- An example is that applicants for face-to face sanctions have these requirements:
  - Club manager – must be a member in good standing with fees paid
  - Location specified and acceptable condition
  - Not in same physical location with same times and games. Example 2 open games at the same time at the same address.
  - Operations conducted in accordance with Laws of Duplicate Bridge and ACBL rules and regulations
- Nothing in the Codification on Virtual Clubs. They were created under management’s authority to “experiment” and have operated under that authority with Board concurrence.
  - Without Board action Virtual Clubs will be closed after the pandemic is over
  - Post pandemic Virtual Clubs may be open or invitation/restricted

# Post Pandemic Bridge Discussion

## Potential Options for Virtual Clubs:

- Open competition
  - Any member in good standing could apply for a virtual club sanction
  - No restrictions on numbers of sanctions for owners
- Create post pandemic virtual clubs as “invitational/restricted”.
  - Restrictions could limit ownership of virtual clubs to face-to-face sanction holders
  - Masterpoints could be colorless as are BBO and other online clubs or black as face-to-face clubs
  - Masterpoints could be restricted to 80% as face-to-face invitational clubs.
  - Restrictions on pools and players
  - Restrictions on numbers of sanctions and/or sessions virtual clubs are allowed to operate

# Post Pandemic Bridge Discussion

Process:

## 1. Questions for Clarification/ Understanding

- One question at a time
- Board member will be recognized through the hand raise function. If you do not have that capability, chat to Georgia who will call on members.
- After the questions have been answered, we'll move to advocacy

## 2. Advocacy

- A Member in favor of Open Competition will speak first. Other members may make additional points in favor.
- Questions from members about the points raised and likely outcome of this option.
- A Member in favor of Restricted/Invitational Virtual Clubs will speak. Other members may make additional points in favor.
- Questions from members about the points raised and likely outcome of this option.
- Final argument for Open competition
- Final argument for Restricted/Invitational

## 3. Straw Poll