



Hartford Bridge Club

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April 2021 Newsletter

We have been repeatedly asked about reopening the club. Reopening was discussed extensively at our March board meeting and will be the principal topic of discussion at all future board meetings until we reopen. We review some of our initial thinking later in this newsletter. The pandemic has forever changed the landscape for bridge clubs and the challenges that this new world presents both now and in the future are formidable. We are working hard to meet them and very much appreciate the support we have received.

This year marks the 90th anniversary of the Hartford Bridge Club. It has a rich and proud history as the longest continuously operating club in the ACBL. Hilda Silverman, who recently passed away at 96, was very much both part of that history and instrumental in creating it. We want simply to acknowledge here her many contributions as both a director, board member, teacher, and good friend to many. We are also including a piece by Larry Sherman about a little slice of our club's history. We hope you will be as charmed by it as we were. We would love to receive other anecdotes or stories about the club's history that we can share.

Our educational initiatives continue in full force. Joel Wolfe's splendid five-part series on defense finishes early this month; Frank Merblum's incisive expert monthly game analysis will again take place on the third Tuesday of the month. Dan Finn's First Tuesday evening's wide-ranging instruction continues to draw a devoted audience. Laurie Robbins deserves special kudos for her ability to juggle directing and providing instruction on hands after the game to what are now two groups of players on Wednesday afternoon—the 0-100 and the 0-750 games.

As we've said in the past, our directors do an outstanding job and often don't get the recognition they deserve. Like professional referees, they do their job best when you don't notice them. So, this week we asked Susan Seckinger to describe the joys and challenges of directing while telling us a little bit about herself.

The work of Jan Rosow and Moe Walsh as our Good Will Committee deserves special mention. In the last month, they have reached out to more than a score of our members who we haven't seen online to ascertain how they're doing and hear their views on anything and everything related to the club. In addition to sharing with us the safety concerns of the people they've been talking to, one interesting idea that has arisen is whether, when we reopen, the club should arrange a carpool for some of the members who would have difficulty coming to our games otherwise. We can't thank you enough, Jan and Moe.

Last, but by no means least, we celebrate our most recent Life Master and other significant milestone achievers. The club takes pride in their accomplishments.

We would also like to note that the club continues to thrive at the bridge table. We had a very busy February and our two-month total table count is 1480. That was sufficient for the club to rank 32nd among all ACBL clubs. This is a particularly significant accomplishment because many of those ahead of us are now alliances of several clubs. The game directors are working hard to come up with new games, e.g., the Swiss Team event on March 29, and new schedules that are attractive. The total table count for March isn't final, but remains strong. However, we expect that, as the warm weather continues, we will lose some folks on occasion to other recreational and entertainment alternatives. All the foregoing is by way of saying that we appreciate your loyalty and participation in our games now more than ever.

Stay safe and healthy,
Donna and Felix

Reopening

We and the board have been looking—and will be continuing to look—for guidance from the state, the ACBL, local officials, the CDC, and other bridge clubs as well as other sources. Linda Erickson, as head of our reopening committee, Roger Pikor and Bill Wininger have spearheaded our reopening committee and have done considerable research and other work to get us ready to reopen when we judge we can do so confident that we've taken appropriate measures to ensure the safety and health of our members, guests and directors. Our primary concern is to try to ensure that we do nothing to jeopardize the health and well-being of all who enter our facility.

We've looked at the reopening process in the four categories below. We recognize that much about the pandemic remains fluid; that plans we make may need to be modified. Patience will be called for and adjustments will undoubtedly occur to both the plans and the logistics necessary to implement those plans. We cannot emphasize enough that a safe and healthy environment will always be our primary concern. Before we reopen, we will be publishing our guidelines for participation at the club so everyone has notice of what the club's expectations will be.

1. What adjustments/changes do we need to make to our facility for us to reopen safely?

In this category, before we reopen, we are intent on installing three touchless faucets in our bathrooms, one touchless faucet in the kitchen, three automatic soap dispensers, and three automatic paper towel dispensers. We expect to have hand sanitizers readily available at each table. We are researching—and expect to have bids shortly on—what will be the best air filtration system for our facility. We will do appropriate enhanced cleaning. Based on current guidance from the CDC and the ACBL, our capacity will be 15 tables. We hope that will change, but that total is important to our planning.

2. What will be the requirements for face-to-face participation at the club?

Our current plans are to require proof of vaccination, masks at all times and temperatures taken at the door before entry. In light of our table capacity as well as for planning purposes, we expect to have advance registration for games.

3. What will the requirements be during games?

We are exploring online payment for games but, if not, we will expect payment of exact fees at the table. Only Norths will touch the Bridgemates. Bidding boxes will travel with East-West pairs and we expect to have bidding boxes available for purchase. Initially, we expect no food to be available at the club and will ask members to bring their own wrapped food, if necessary, which may only be eaten in designated areas. Water will be available. The provision of other beverages remains under discussion.

4. What will be the mix of online and face-to-face games?

This may turn out to be the biggest challenge our club faces. It's a huge unknown as to how many will want to return to face-to-face bridge and how many will want to continue playing in their pjs, without makeup or shaving. We know there will be a mix for sure. The directors are formulating initial plans about a mix of games that will be most attractive to our members, but before anything is finalized, we thought a survey would be helpful. In the near future, members can expect to receive a survey trying to ascertain which games they will participate in once the club reopens.

We would love to commit to a date to reopen at this time, but we simply cannot. If all authorities find it's reasonable to open under conditions that we can meet, we're hopeful of opening sometime in June or early July, but we emphasize that is a hope not a commitment. In the meantime, we would love to hear your thoughts about reopening. Email us at either Hartfordclub@sbcglobal.net or felixjspringer1@gmail.com.

This Month's Director in the Spotlight



Susan Seckinger

About 20 years ago I took a break from corporate America to devote myself to being a full-time bridge bum. When Donna suggested that I might want to be a director, I jumped at the opportunity to avoid going back to a real job.

The directing journey began on an extremely hot day in what was then a warehouse (now our back room). No air conditioning then. Covered with poison ivy, I dutifully completed the 4-hour director test and mercifully passed.

As a beginner, I was responsible for directing the small games, becoming skilled at running Howells. My first assignment in a "real" game provided a most memorable and terrifying experience. I was called to the table by national directors Susan Patricelli and her partner Peter Marcus, who were playing in the game. They proceeded to question my ruling. Turned out I was correct.

The role of HBC director has evolved as the club has grown and became more automated. When I started, our software, ACBLscore®, was in its infancy. Masterpoints were handed out on pieces of paper to be accumulated and mailed in to the ACBL.

Being the least computer phobic member of our staff, my role evolved to tech support for all the innovations that followed. First, the introduction of duplicated boards and hand records, then displaying scores on the Internet and, eventually, the Bridgemate. It was my responsibility to develop and implement processes and procedures for each innovation. These were documented (along with basic skills, like how to make coffee) in a manual we call "Directing for Dummies."

Directing online games is a very different experience. Ninety percent of the situations requiring a director in a live game, such as insufficient bids and leads out of turn, do not exist online. Online directing is primarily chasing down slow players and finishing the hands they didn't complete in time and finding replacements for players who have become disconnected from the Internet. I look forward to getting back to real live bridge.

My Cheating Scandal

By Larry Sherman



The year was 1971. A lot was going on in my life. I had just graduated from high school in West Hartford, Connecticut. For those of you who count well, you should now know my age, especially after I disclose that I started kindergarten at age 5 and never stayed back. I had just broken up with my longtime high school girlfriend. I had just decided not to attend the University of Connecticut, since I would run into her for the next four years. I had just received my draft lottery number of 72, which made me wonder whether I should begin college at all. My sister had just decided to go to Israel for the next year to teach instead of starting graduate school. I was working at Bradlees, then the East coast version of Target, in the hardware, sporting goods, and automotive departments. In addition to all of those unimportant facts, it was also the year I played bridge for the summer!!!

My friend Barry Spaulding was also a friend of a mutual high school classmate of ours, Mike Labins. Mike's dad was then a star in the Hartford bridge community. Anyway, Barry and I played at the Hartford Bridge Club, where the **real** bridge players played, once a week that summer. In turn, I introduced another friend, Jonathan Katz, to the game, and he and I played at the Hartford Jewish Community Center, where the other players played, once a week.

In those days, I had a bit of a stuttering problem. My father, who did not stutter at all, told me he used to stutter when he was young. I figured he was trying to ease my mind. My parents took the condition seriously enough to take me to the home of my allergy doctor, who was an amateur hypnotist; well, at least, he was practicing to become one. I'm not sure what faith they put in a fellow qualified to inject me weekly for allergies to grass, trees, pollen, hay fever, etc., to cure my stuttering problem. He tried to put me under to rid me of this condition, but alas, I wasn't falling for that. After all, take away my stuttering and what distinctive features would I have to hold onto?

In any case, back in those days, there were no bidding boxes. You pronounced your calls verbally. My stuttering condition was focused on certain sounds and letters. I recall having difficulty with words that began with the letter "D" and words that began with "S." Thus, bidding spades or diamonds was not always the easiest task for me. I don't recall this shortcoming having any impact playing against the real players at the Hartford Bridge Club. After all, those opponents were licking their chops at the prospect of us visiting their tables.

The Hartford Jewish Community Center was another matter. Back in those days, the local afternoon newspaper, *The Hartford Times*, actually printed the results from the previous day's bridge games. OK, they also printed the box scores from the 10-year-old basketball league games, so there you have it. In any case, I recall one particular pair playing there, Ina and Norman Finkel, who took the results at the HJCC game quite seriously. After all, who doesn't like seeing their names in print? Ina and Norman, particularly Ina, if my memory serves me correctly, got it in their heads that whenever I stuttered trying to make a bid, I was communicating a whole plethora of unauthorized information. Well, they did not call it "unauthorized information" back in those days. They would just call the Director and say we were **cheating**. Yikes! I yearned, I dreamed, I hoped, every time I picked up a hand, that I would be looking at a wad of clubs and/or hearts. Those were my best friends! I cannot recall how the director handled those rulings. After all, I had a draft lottery number of 72 and was wondering whether to enroll in college in two months or move to Canada.

Back in those days, the ACBL was located in Greenwich, Connecticut. Personal computers were being developed in someone's garage, but when we scratched, we were awarded slips of paper about 2 1/2" x 4". At summer's end, this player had earned twelve slips, adding up to the grand total of 1.55 masterpoints. Let's fast forward our story 35 years. Your author has taken a complete break from duplicate bridge; well, I figured a 35-year break plus a 3,000-mile move might get me away from Ina and Norman's scrutiny. OK, they would probably have been about 115 years old in 2006, when I happened to stumble into those twelve slips from the ACBL.

The rest is history. After returning to the game, I immediately saw that my stuttering condition pushed the ACBL to institute the use of bidding boxes. I suspect they were pressured by the likes of Ina and Norman.

Jonathan Katz and I were never found guilty of any wrongdoing. Removed from the watchful eyes of the Finkels, my stuttering mostly went away. The ACBL even accepted my 35-year-old slips worth 1.55 masterpoints when I joined the ranks of Rookie Master. Take that, Ina!

Writer's Note: As a testament to the value that playing bridge has on keeping our memories sharp, it has come back to me that the allergist's name was George Hurwitz and his office was located at 99 Pratt Street in downtown Hartford. Hartford friends, please tell me that there is a Pratt Street downtown.

Milestone Achievers

Bill Watson: 2500 Masterpoints-Gold Life Master



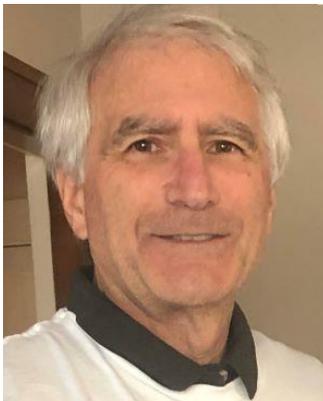
Following my retirement from a career in public education, I was certain that I needed "something" to keep me mentally active and, a few months later, found myself entering the Hartford Bridge Club. A quick tutorial from Dixie and Donna, and I was ready for my first Thursday afternoon Supervised Novice session. Fast forward fifteen years and, ironically, I remain a Supervised Novice regular. As to the accumulation of masterpoints: The pandemic, if nothing else, has taught me that the points are merely a reflection of the many, many enjoyable hours spent at and around the bridge table in the company of so many good friends. Thanks to all.

Pat Salve: 2500 Masterpoints-Gold Life Master



I am pleased to be named a Gold Life Master. I truly believe, however, that this honor is attributable to my longevity as a bridge player, rather than any competency in deploying 2 over 1, 1 NT forcing, new minor forcing or kickback. What will give Joan and me even more pleasure is the opportunity to experience again the comradeship, intelligence, good humor and divergence of views of our dear friends and fellow members of HBC.

Ken Leopold: 1000 Masterpoints-Silver Life Master



I want to thank all of my partners, but especially my wife. It's been fun watching her grow as a bridge player and I have been the recipient of a ton of great bridge knowledge from "the great ones" via Lori.

HBC is truly the club with a heart. Thank you so much to Donna, Trevor, Felix and all the others who have put in so much time and effort for the rest of us.

Bob Tellar: New Life Master



When my wife Carol was introduced to bridge after she retired, she convinced me just to try it after she was playing for several years. Well, I got hooked. She belonged to HBC so I tagged along—I received guidance from several people and feel the people at HBC were helpful. I started going to regionals and slowly started earning points and enjoyed the socialization with new friends. Carol achieved Life Master status about nine years ago and I was determined to catch up. About six years ago, I went to a Boston Regional and received more than five gold points, so I figured it was all downhill from there—well not exactly. The gold came slowly and about four months ago, I was down to needing just 1.42 gold to achieve Life Master status. I usually don't play with Carol, but I convinced her to play with me in a tournament several weeks ago with gold on the line. Well, we did so well, we each received more than 4 gold points. This achievement was not accomplished without the friendship and help of several bridge partners over the last several years, so my thanks go to them—you know who you are. Lastly, the HBC provided the atmosphere that allowed me to enjoy and learn the game of bridge.