

DISTRICT 4 TOURNAMENT COMMITTEE REPORT

JUNE 2018

INTRODUCTION

The ACBL and its districts have reached a critical time. The ACBL claims to be holding steady on membership, but the players are aging rapidly and fewer young players are joining the game. There is growing concern that the membership has reached a “cliff.” Tournament attendance, particularly at regionals, is falling quickly.

The ACBL’s Tournament Task Force July 2017 Toronto Nationals report, looking at data from 2013 to 2016, found that:

- table counts at Regionals are down 6.7%
- the decline from 2015 to 2016 was greater than in the previous years, and down 5.8% from 2016 to 2017 in the months where data were available
- the number of members attending Regionals was down 5.2%

Two broad movements are underway to address these concerns. At the behest of ACBL CEO Bahar Gidwani, a “Big Idea” has been floated to change or restructure tournaments across the board. It is not clear whether any specific changes will happen, what they might be, or how long it will take to implement them.

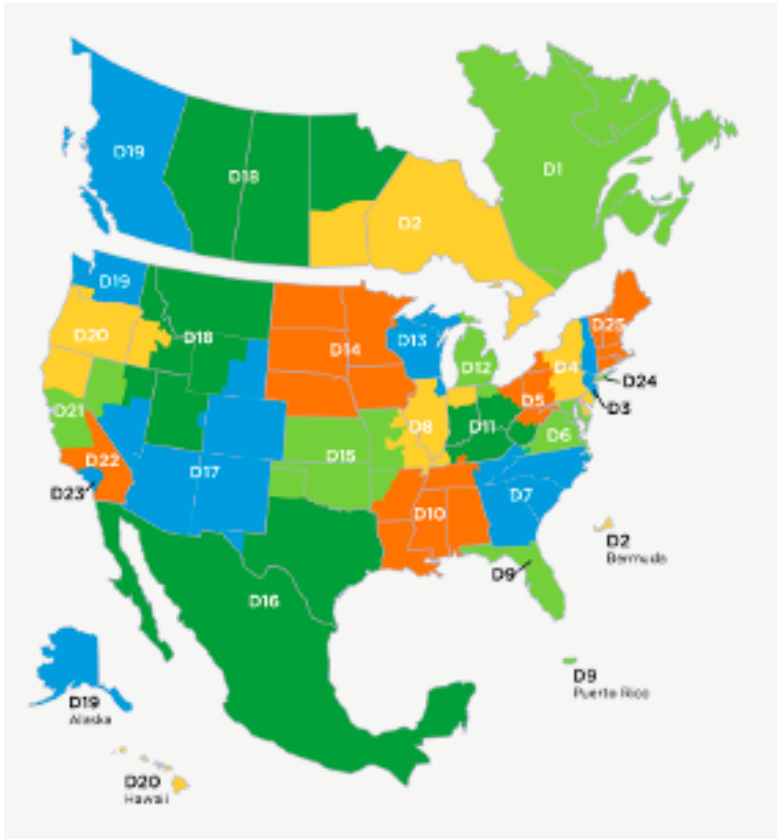
In the meantime, District 4 President Meyer Kotkin has asked for faster district change to address tournament concerns. He aims to make District 4 a model for all tournaments by cross-pollinating our successes across the district and continuing to find improvements. This report kicks off that process. It documents where our tournaments have been, where we are, where we would like to go, and how we can get there together. Our goal remains clear: to host the most efficient, sustainable, forward-thinking, and enjoyable tournaments for all of our players for many years to come.

BACKGROUND

WHO WE ARE

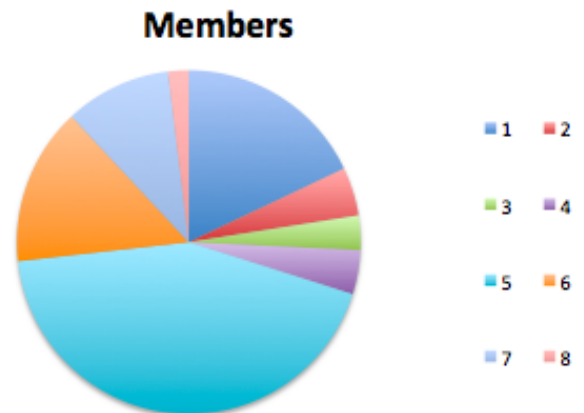
District 4 is a varied district, spanning five states. It stretches from the Canadian border in the north to Northern Maryland in the south and includes parts of Central New York, Eastern Pennsylvania, Southern New Jersey, Delaware, and Northern Maryland. It encompasses rural, suburban, shore, and urban areas, including the country’s fifth largest city.

This map shows D4 in context. The borders of the units within the district exist as multiple scans of old Rand McNally maps provided by the ACBL. These maps are too cumbersome to show here, but are available.



As of October 2017, the ACBL membership of District 4 was 6,455, unevenly divided into eight units as follows:

	Unit	Members
1	112	1159
2	120	294
3	121	209
4	133	268
5	141	2797
6	168	957
7	190	646
8	217	125



District 4 membership is declining, as it is across almost all ACBL districts.

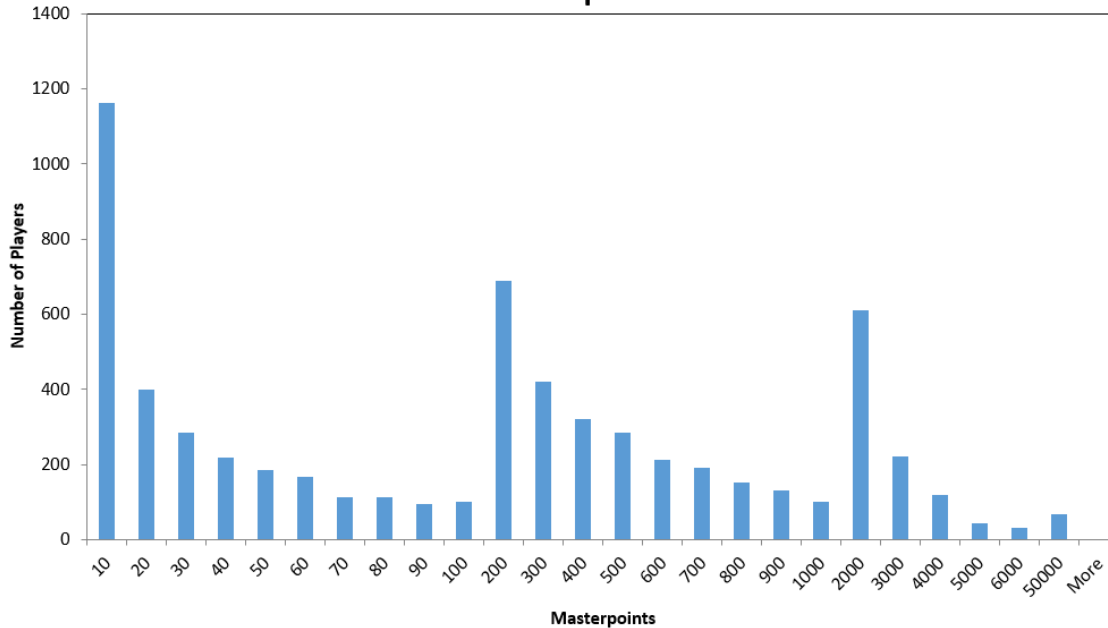
Unit	Oct. 2015	Oct. 2016	Oct. 2017
112	1,140	1,162 (+1.93%)	1,159 (-0.26%)
120	301	292 (-2.99%)	294 (+0.68%)
121	222	206 (-7.21%)	209 (+1.46%)
133	282	279 (-1.06%)	268 (-3.94%)
141	2,810	2,832 (+0.78%)	2,797 (-1.24%)
168	1,046	1,029 (-1.63%)	957 (-7.00%)
190	699	696 (-0.43%)	646 (-7.18%)
217	129	131 (+1.55%)	125 (-4.58%)
TOTAL	6,629	6,627 (-0.03%)	6,455 (-2.6%)

Here is a look at membership by masterpoints.

Masterpoint Level by Bin	Number of Members
0	256
5	601
10	306
20	398
30	284
40	218
50	184
60	167
70	114
80	113
90	95
100	100
200	690
300	420
400	321
500	285
600	212
700	190
800	152
900	131
1000	101
2000	611
3000	221
4000	120
5000	43
6000	31

10,000	44
50,000	23
more	0

Distribution of Masterpoints in District 4



WHAT WE DO

The district's Tournament Coordinator (Elaine Weintraub) manages a full schedule. District 4 hosts four Regionals each year on a schedule that alternates locations on odd and even years. This *has been* the schedule.

Even years:

Delaware -- January or April

Valley Forge -- late June/July

Syracuse -- August

Lancaster -- late October

Odd years:

Wilkes-Barre -- late February/March

Rochester and Harrisburg (split site) -- early May

Valley Forge -- late June/July

Lancaster -- late October

In 2017, each unit hosted the following number of Open Sectionals (not including I/N or Non-Life Master sectionals):

Unit	Approximate % of District Population	Number of Sectionals
112	18%	8
120	4.5%	2
121	3.2%	0
133	4%	2
141	44%	4
168	14.5%	4
190	10%	5
217	2%	2
TOTAL		27

[Note: Most of Unit 112's sectionals are two-day sectionals.]

The district itself and its units also run STaCs. Other units can participate in those STaCs, but the host unit collects the fees, pays the ACBL, and keeps the profits. In 2017, there was one "district" STaC and four hosted by D4 units as follows:

February 13-19: Unit 141 STaC (all D4 units except 168 as well as U135 (D6))

August 14-20: U112 STaC (all D4 units except 168)

August 28-September 3: District 4 STaC (all D4 units, as well as U135 (D6))

November 13-19: U168 STaC (U121 and 217)

December 4-10: U141 STaC (U112, 120, 133, 141, and 190)

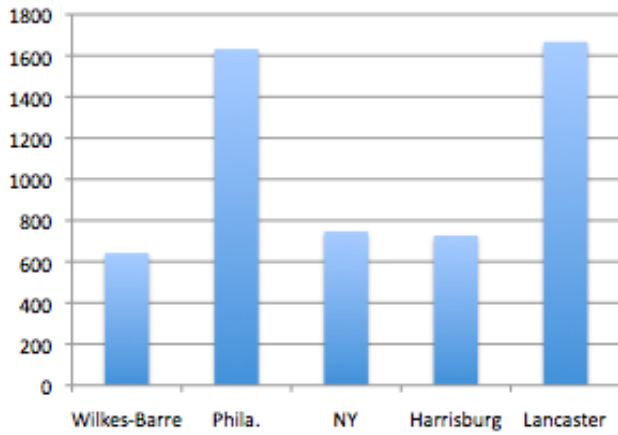
District 4 also participates in the NAPs and GNTs. The NAP district finals for the NAPs typically run in October and the GNTs in March or April. It is not the purview of this report to consider the management of the NAPs or GNTs, other than to consider their relationship to an already full tournament calendar.

TOURNAMENT HISTORY

Since 2013, overall table count has held reasonably stable at about 5,000 tables. Some regionals have been consistent, while others have been more variable:

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Wilmington	1,174		873		905		923	
Wilkes Barre		706		599		426		642
Philadelphia	1,533	1,079	1,061	1,340	1,428	1,596	1,535	1,632
Syra/Roch	845	746	930	991	1,002	969	849	747
Harrisburg	537			640		724		727
Lancaster	1,787	1,968	1,509	1,613	1,539	1,365	1,646	1,667.5
	5,876	4,499	4,373	5,183	4,874	5,080	4,953	5,415.5

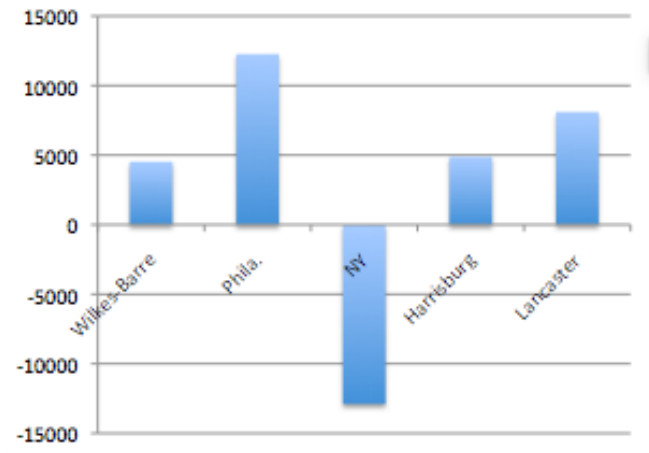
Here is 2017:



The financial picture for each regional across those same years has been up and down. Red numbers indicate a loss:

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Wilmington		(\$2,197)		\$10,626		\$10,483	
Wilkes Barre	missing		\$7,178		\$873		\$4,527
Philadelphia	missing	(\$62)	\$12,348	\$8,484	\$588	(\$3,561)	\$12,264
Syra/Roch	(\$1,091)	\$7,427	\$9,599	\$5,315	(\$946)	(\$1,529)	(\$12,889)
Harrisburg			\$8,279		\$7,052		\$4,880
Lancaster	\$7,903	\$1,027	\$1,698	\$7,895	(\$1,594)	(\$5,196)	\$8100

Here's 2017:



There is a lot to interpret in the financial data, but consider:

- an increase or decrease of 100 tables can make a big difference in the financial success (or struggle) of a tournament
- financial health can turn down or up quickly
- a tournament can make too much money; great amounts of excess profit should be spent on the players at the tournament
- although not necessarily clear in the numbers shown here, hotel contracts can be key to financial success

THE CALENDAR

The calendar is very full. Once dates for holidays and major events such as NABCs and Gatlinburg are blacked out from the schedule, only about 35 weeks/weekends remain to slot the four Regionals, 27 Open Sectionals, as well as approximately 10 I/N sectionals not already enumerated here and the NAPs and GNTs. Given that winter dates in January and February are not always optimal because of weather issues and snowbirds down south, the schedule becomes even more restricted.

There are geographic restrictions that limit sectionals and regionals. The ACBL will restrict sectionals from taking place on the same weekend in locations within 120 miles of each other. They will flag any two concurrent regionals that are within 500 miles of each other. Both districts/units then have to agree that the concurrent scheduling will not have a negative impact. If they don't both agree, the entity that either got the sanction first or traditionally has held a regional during that time period for two of the last three years will have priority.

The first key step we are taking to deal with scheduling issues is to have the Tournament Coordinator proactively organize all of the events now with an eye to the future. Part of that effort is to determine the best spot for repeatable events (such as the GNTs, NAPs, and STaCs) set them in regular time slots. For example, the GNTs have been run the last few years around April. **If that makes sense, then April should become GNT month with dates selected for future years as early possible. STaCs should be slotted into fairly regular slots with dates chosen as early as possible.** Another step is to reduce the number of some kinds of events. More on this issue later in this report (see "STaCs" and "Sectionals.")

MISSION STATEMENT

If you want to build a ship, don't drum up people to collect wood and don't assign them tasks and work, but rather teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea.

– Antoine de Saint-Exupery

For us, what is the immensity of the sea? What do we care about? Our most important goal should be to provide a *quality experience for all of our players*. To that end:

- 1. We put the players first. We strive to provide a great product that gives the players a satisfying and enjoyable time both at and away from the table.**
- 2. We always ask, Is this idea or change or expenditure good for the players?**
- 3. Overall player experience ranks above profits or even attendance. The latter will follow when we focus on the former.**
- 4. We use policies and work with staff to create an environment where all players feel welcome, healthy, safe, and happy.**
- 5. We plan tournaments that work for players at *all* levels, from people who want to learn the game to experts and everyone in the middle.**
- 6. We consider efficiency, sustainability, and stability.**
- 7. We aim for tournaments that are financially secure, but don't make profits the primary goal.**
- 8. We work and spend smart. We put in extra effort in areas that make the tournament better for the players. We simplify in areas that give little return or are inefficient.**
- 9. We cooperate across tournaments and liberally borrow and share ideas, systems, paperwork, etc. from others.**
- 10. We are not afraid to try and fail. Well-researched experimentation leads to new successes.**

RECOMMENDATIONS

STaCs

We recommend changes to the current STaC system, beginning in 2019. **The recommended new plan** will:

- help resolve an overscheduled calendar
- create financial equity across the units
- streamline the complicated process of managing STaCs

- encourage greater participation from non-host units

Under the new plan, there will be four annual STaCs, approximately one per quarter. All of the STaCs will be district STaCs, rather than unit STaCs. The District would bear all costs and there will be a revenue-sharing plan that returns profit back to the units based on participation. Units that currently do not host a STaC will now be able to share in some of the revenue. Units that do currently host STaCs should not see a drop in current revenue, assuming their current participation holds steady.

1. The revenue would be shared as follows: 25% to District 4 and 75% returned to the units proportionally based on table count. Revenue distributions to the units would be determined formulaically, but on a STaC-by-STaC basis based on participation by the units' total tables.
2. The revenue would be collected and redistributed by the District Treasurer or a designee, who would be paid \$250 per STaC for the effort. The District 4 board should revisit this amount every three years, starting in 2021, to make an appropriate increase as needed.
3. A unit would revenue share in any STaC in which they participate. They can opt out of any one (or all) STaCs, but they would not be eligible for revenue sharing in that STaC.
4. Additional units outside the district would be encouraged to join the D4 STaCs (U135—Baltimore, for example, currently joins U141 STaCs) as a way to increase the district's revenue, but non-D4 units would not be eligible for revenue sharing. Any plan to create "super STaCs" would also not impact revenue sharing with units outside the district.
5. D4 units can join other district's STaCs, but this type of participation would have no bearing on the D4 STaCs revenue plan. Our units are discouraged, however, from joining other district's STaCs since that participation generates revenue for other districts while potentially conflicting with D4 events on or near those dates and diminishing participation in D4 events.

SECTIONALS

BACKGROUND

Units must hold an Open sectional once every two years. There is no upper bound and only geographic restrictions limit their ability to receive a sanction for sectionals. There are limitations on one-day I/N sectionals (a unit can run three of those in a year), but no limit on two-day I/N sectionals. The ACBL has little concern about geography, frequency, or even late additions to the schedule when it comes to I/N sectionals.

The ACBL has concerns about the very large number of sectionals across the country each year—there are over 850—and the struggle all tournaments have competing for a shrinking population of players. Headquarters has floated a “cap and trade” plan for sectionals. The idea is to cap the number at, say, 500 and give units the ability to trade with one another for sanctions. Under this plan, units will have to consider carefully the value of a sanction and what they can afford to pay for one. At the moment, the ACBL Board of Directors has rebuffed this plan, but we expect it to be revisited over the next year or so.

CURRENT SITUATION

There is legitimate concern that units need to reduce their number of sectionals voluntarily, intelligently, and cooperatively. Without change many sectionals may find themselves quite suddenly and unexpectedly out of business as attendance falls below a sustainable level in the not-so-distant future.

I/N sectionals have had good turnout over the past years and they offer the possibility to help grow total tournament attendance by encouraging new players to try tournament bridge. But fitting these events into the schedule without creating conflict that drains from other events is a significant issue. There were eleven I/N or NLM sectionals in 2017 and the 2018 calendar shows nine planned, with more possibly to come.

RECOMMENDATIONS

When it comes to sectionals, there is no Draconian solution to these issues; units need to work together for the universal good.

1. We encourage the leadership in units with fewer than 1,000 members that schedule more than three annual sectionals to consider eliminating a sectional starting in 2019.
2. We ask I/N coordinators to keep a close eye on possible conflicts with their neighbors.

REGIONALS

NEW SCHEDULE

Starting in 2019, there will be a change to the regional lineup in order to resolve an unsustainable conflict between Harrisburg and Hunt Valley in August. The schedule will now look like this:

Odd years:

Harrisburg – date of choice from January to early May

Rochester and Wilkes-Barre (split site) – August

Valley Forge – late June/July
Lancaster – late October

Even years:

Delaware – date of choice, likely early May
Valley Forge – late June/July
Syracuse -- August
Lancaster – late October

Three points:

- Tournaments that share a grandfathered, concurrent sanction are required by the ACBL to run during the same *week* each year they run. That is, one tournament cannot take place during the week of (say) August 4 and the other the week of August 11. The tournaments do not, however, have to run on the exact same days. If at some point, one regional were to decide to run only M-F while the other ran T-Sun, the ACBL would allow the difference as long as the weeks started on the same Monday.
- In even years, Syracuse cannot run on the identical week as the Montreal Regional (also traditionally in August). The ACBL will allow the two tournaments to run on consecutive weeks, but the sanctions will need to be arranged each time to avoid an exact overlap.
- We see no reason at this time for any D4 regionals to move to a shortened schedule, such as a five-day M-F regional schedule, but we know of other districts that run these kinds of regionals with success and want our tournament chairs to know that the option exists. We should make new efforts to retain weekend players with innovative programming and certainly Dupli-Swiss on Sunday, but continuing weekend attendance decline and increasing costs might make this shortened, weekday only regionals attractive in the future.

ACBL CONTEXT

There are at least three topics under discussion at ACBL headquarters that could impact regionals over the next few years.

1. The main and most likely event to impact regionals is the ACBL REACH program. REACH are regional tournaments at clubs—think STaCs for gold points. Players purchase an entry for \$30 and can play in any or all sessions during the week the REACH runs. The two best sessions can combine for gold. The ACBL ran several trials in late 2017 and early 2018 with financial success. It claims to have no future plans for additional REACH, but we expect REACH to become a regular feature of the ACBL schedule. How it will impact

regionals is unclear and will depend on the frequency and regularity of REACH, among other things.

2. ACBL headquarters, concerned about the large number of regionals nationally and declining attendance, floated the idea of eliminating one regional sanction from each of its 25 districts—irrespective of population or geography. The Board of Directors has rejected this idea for now, but it is possible that this idea or some version of it will come back in the future.
3. Just as ACBL headquarters likes the idea of a cap-and-trade program for sectionals, it is possible that they will try to implement a similar plan for regionals. At this time, the idea has little support with the Board of Directors, but ongoing losses in tournament attendance might force a change. It is not clear how our district (with its grandfathered sanction situation) would be affected. The best guess is that all previous bets would be off, and we would be plopped into a competitive pool to bid for sanctions like everybody else.

MAJOR TOURNAMENT ISSUES

There are several major tournament issues. We address many below, but others do have a simple, definitive solution.

1. knockout structure
2. newcomer drop-off
3. weekend drop-off
4. site issues: hotel contracts, rising hotel costs, finding firm and reliable sites
5. technology
6. too many tournaments across the district and country, including growth of I/N events
7. declining age of players, players losing interest in tournament play and travel as they age

PRICING

Until 2017, the district board set an across-the-board regional card fees pricing policy for all of its regionals and would vote periodically to set that price. In 2017, this pattern was broken when the board passed a motion that allowed Valley Forge flexibility to set its own card fees given the higher local hotel, hospitality, and other costs. We think the time of fixed pricing has passed. Tournament chairs need flexibility to set card fees for their tournaments since they know their market, costs, and tournament details best. **We recommend that the D4 board pass a motion removing restrictions on regional card fee pricing.** The board might consider setting a floor, but if limitations are set we suggest they be revisited at the Valley Forge Board meeting in 2020 with input from tournament chairs.

BEST PRACTICES

This report is not intended to be a manual for how to run a tournament. Experiences in recent years from our own regional successes and other tournaments around the country, however, have shown that running quality tournaments can stem the loss of attendance and aid profitability. Certain best practices are key to those successes and here is what we recommend at a starting point.

1. Regional chairs should make decisions that work best for their location, dates, and players. In general, though, we believe that a simple schedule that caters to players of all levels is best. Specifically:
 - a. Regionals should start on Monday afternoon, not Monday evening.
 - b. The ACBL now allows Golden Mid-flight events to run every day; this change to the schedule is encouraged.
 - c. The ACBL now allows Gold Rush to run in three strats when there are concurrent A/X and Mid-Flight events; this change is encouraged.
 - d. Regionals have experimented with a “kickoff” event on Monday early afternoon. Many have found that a free lecture and I/N game works well and grows quickly over time. We suggest that each regional do something to kick off the tournament.
 - e. We encourage a (roughly) 10 AM and 2:30 PM schedule.
2. All regional pair games should aim to maximize number of players played and minimize the number of boards in play by running web movements as needed. Boards should be prepared in advance for this contingency and directors made aware of the goal and expectation. Although sitouts can usually be managed at large events like regionals by moving pairs among events, we should be prepared to use BBO robots to eliminate sitouts.
3. Run Dupli-Swiss. By Valley Forge 2018, D4 will own enough boards so that our tournaments can preduplicate boards for Swiss Teams events. Dupli-Swiss is not only a more equitable and a fun event, but surveys show that it draws players and increases player satisfaction with a tournament. We have the equipment and know-how to run Dupli-Swiss at all D4 regionals and think it should be a defining feature of all our tournaments.
4. Follow D4’s recommendation on the updated Knockout structure. This plan runs the first two rounds as a 2-session Round Robin or Swiss. The top four teams qualify for the semifinals with no carryover. This new format enables all players to play a full day in the KO, reduces the uneven/unlucky pairings of teams with disparate numbers of masterpoints in the early matchups, and eliminates the need for a side Swiss. It creates more balanced brackets and increases masterpoint awards in small brackets. We believe in the fairness of this structure as well its appeal to players of all levels. John Dickenson and Mike Giesler can advise on this system and its implementation. There is a

complete set of conditions of contest on the District 4 website to explain the details.

5. Director costs are a big part of a regional budget (eliminating one director for a week saves a tournament about \$3000) and the front line in customer service, so staffing a tournament well is critically important.
 - a. Tournament chairs should carefully consider a choice of DIC and, as much as possible, opt for someone they can work with cooperatively, bearing in mind that the wishes of the tournament chair and the needs of the tournament supercede the expectation or past experiences of the DIC. If a tournament wants a Dupli-Swiss, for example, it should go forward despite some reluctance from a DIC who is unfamiliar with the process.
 - b. Staff D4 directors first. That choice supports our directors as they become more familiar with D4 Regional procedures, policies, and practices. It also saves our tournaments money on travel expenses.
 - c. Use a metric to staff the tournament. Use as a base rate 25-30 tables/director session for the first director, 55 tables/second director, and 90 tables/third director. Adjust based on the space arrangement (one giant room as in Lancaster requires fewer directors; Valley Forge in multiple rooms and on two floors needs more). Use the available calculator the help with planning.



D4 Tournament Ta
Director Sessi

- d. Staff flexibly. Tournament chairs should consider whether it makes sense to have some directors scheduled only for morning sessions only (second sessions require fewer directors) so the director doesn't need a hotel night and get a per diem. Work the schedule so directors can be sent home easily if the weekend drop-off is more dramatic than expected.
- e. I/N events do not require a tournament director; that is, these events can be staffed with an ACBL club director at a much lower cost and as a way to develop directing talent.
- f. Tournament assistants (TAs) are significantly cheaper and allow for much more flexible scheduling during a tournament. Although there is a movement at the ACBL to eliminate TAs, they are still allowed and can be used to staff a tournament. TAs must be certified in order to be covered by ACBL liability insurance. We should resist the elimination of TAs.

6. We believe that hospitality is one of the best ways to draw players and create player satisfaction. Hotel contracts should be structured to minimize or eliminate payments for playing space in lieu of food and beverage charges wherever possible so that we can spend on the players. Without creating financial risk to the tournament, we believe profit should be returned to the players – largely in the form of hospitality. It has been our experience that hospitality is a better way to serve all players as opposed to, say, prizes, which serve only a few. We know that many of our tournaments already focus attention on hospitality, but want to keep our eye on this prize. Hotel costs for food and beverage are high, but still a good way for us to spend money. As much as possible, use free lunch as a way to minimize the break between morning and afternoon sessions so the afternoon session can end as early as possible. (Even without free lunch, try to keep the lunch break as short as possible to achieve that goal.) Hospitality can take the form of purchased food from the hotel or redeemable chits purchased from the hotel and given to players for the hotel concession stands. Other districts have found that smaller denominations offered more frequently work better.
7. Hotel contracts are a key component to success, given that they comprise a huge part of the budget and go a long way toward making the experience pleasant for the players. Choosing the site and negotiating the contract are local decisions and we will not offer detailed information on how to handle this part of the tournament. We strongly recommend, however, that tournament chairs share information with each other about their contracts in order to best identify negotiating practices and contract details (F&B, attrition clauses, etc.) to help each other obtain the best results in each case.
8. Try to brand the tournament. A slogan, new logo, or both can help players identify the tournament. We think it would be worthwhile to consider a set of D4 regional logos that had a similar “look” that would tie all of the regionals together visually.
9. Use online marketing and eliminate print (except for a flyer). An online targeted publicity effort would include:
 - a. flyers at clubs and tournaments along the eastern seaboard
 - b. email blasts to D4 through our Constant Contact service
 - c. email notices through the ACBL (reaches a group within a radius of the tournaments, but potentially outside the district)
 - d. BBO (for \$150 month, BBO will run banner and skyscraper ads to 6 states)
 - e. BridgeWinners (an option, but more expensive than BBO and not as wide an audience)
10. Improve and expand signage at the tournament. Label everything, from the hand records table to the information desk to each line where an event is

being sold. Players really appreciate the information and it reduces the number of volunteers needed as well as the demand on directors to answer basic questions for information.

11. Use volunteers to man the partnership desk, manage queue control, and provide help for any new ideas activities (see below) as needed. Compensate volunteers liberally with free plays. Use visually recognizable volunteer badges so players know who to turn to for information.
12. Space plan. Imagine how players will navigate through the space and make it easy for them. Don't cram players; space is a luxury and makes it feel good to be at a tournament. If at all possible, use 9- foot centers. Create space between the playing tables and the director tables; no player wants to listen to a printer while they playing.
13. Develop and/or maintain a strong I/N program. Provide as much Gold Rush and Mid-Flight event opportunities as possible in the schedule. Take advantage of online bulletins to include rank advancement notices for newer players throughout the week. Have I/N chairs talk together about what works well and maintain those best practices.
14. There are some things that are traditionally done that we recommend be updated or eliminated.
 - a. Eliminate the registration desk and gift. Players like the stickers, but they can be given out at the information desk.
 - b. Eliminate prizes, except possibly for the I/Ns. Prizes are expensive, difficult to manage, and only serve a small number of players.
 - c. Consider the value of the speaker series. Tournament chairs can decide if it still serves a fair number of your players or there would be hue and cry without it. But if few people attend and it's a major effort to organize, it might be time for a change. Does a particular tournament need a speaker series at all? Could there be fewer speakers across the week? Could there be something else, such as an "Ask the Expert" table for 15 minutes after each session or a featured panel discussion once during the week that would be more dynamic?
 - d. Use online welcome and daily bulletins. Some tournaments have found that printing a Welcome Bulletin still has merit, but with online resources, it's possible to save money by printing many fewer copies. The online daily bulletin also makes it easy to publish photos of new life masters, event winners, and other highlights of the day. Players love to see themselves published, so encourage your I/N chairs, directors, and other volunteers to capture daily photos and publish them online liberally.

15. We recommend that D4 run a regular TAP class at one of its regionals, perhaps Valley Forge where it has been in years past, and that the district continue to subsidize the cost for D4 players. The ACBL is undergoing a major overhaul of the TAP program and education support, which argues strongly for a regular, annual TAP class starting in 2019. The key is that the class be a regular, so players can depend on it, and not sporadic (which makes it harder to market and run).
16. It is imperative that each tournament enforce the district's fragrance free policy, including how it applies to smoke. Tournament chairs must make it clear to directors before each tournament that the directors are not only empowered to enforce the policy, but expected to do so. Directors should be clear on the policy and consistently enforce it. Part of the reason we enforce the policy is to educate the players. The district has seen a drop in fragrance issues as players have become aware of the problem through our flyers and enforcement. We need to continue that work and extend it to the smell of smoke. The consistent application of our policy by the directors will continue to educate our players and improve the health and enjoyment of the game for all. As an aside, this logo from Harrisburg is clear and visually impactful; perhaps it should be adopted by all?



Here's a link to the policy:

<http://district4.info/Frangrance%20Free%20Policy.pdf>

17. It is also imperative that each tournament systematically and consistently enforce the D4 ZT policy across our tournaments. It is fine to remind players of the policy, but bossy announcements about ZT tend to put players off without actually getting players to "play nice." It is much more important for our directors to professionally and consistently enforce ZT, including immediate cell phone penalties ("turn off your phone" doesn't cut it). Again, it is incumbent on the tournament chairs to make it clear to the directing staff before each tournament what is expected and empower them to enforce the policies already in place.

<http://district4.info/Zero%20Tolerance%20Policy.pdf>

18. Follow up each tournament with a meaningful survey. If at all possible, implement the worthwhile changes and respond to the comments from the responders with some feedback.

19. Details:

- a. use a PA system in large rooms
- b. replace old cards always; crummy cards drive players crazy
- c. if at all possible, replace worn out tables or identify them so the district can take action to replace them
- d. consider noise issues in the playing area and actions you can take to reduce them
- e. consider lighting issues in the playing areas and actions you can take to improve them
- f. manage lines by setting up enough selling stations and using double lines for entry sales, free lunches, concessions, etc as appropriate. Players hate lines, don't you?
- g. start events on time
- h. keep directors on top of slow play appropriately so events finish on time

20. Money and insurance:

- a. The ACBL has turned over the responsibility of depositing money collected at tournaments from the DIC to the tournament officials. This change is evolving and more information will come.
- b. Similarly, changes about insurance are evolving with more information to come.
- c. Use the standardized financial form to report regional expenses to the District treasurer to help streamline reporting.



Sample Regional
Financial.xlsx

NEW IDEAS

1. Encourage new players and stem the weekend drop-off with a weekend program for friends and family and/or entirely new players that has a local activity in the morning and Mini-bridge in the afternoon (or vice versa). Valley Forge, for example, has the tour of the battle site and a factory tour of Asher's chocolates for fun in the morning and then there would be Mini-bridge in the afternoon to get the new players playing as quickly as possible and whet their appetite for the game.

2. Run a seminar before each regional to introduce newer duplicate players to tournament play. Unit 141 has been running such seminars that include a series of short talks on various subjects, such as director calls, imp scoring, etc., a Q & A with a panel of experienced players, and short mock Swiss Teams. We encourage each regional chair to establish a similar seminar about a month before the regional. We have found that it encourages new players to attend.
3. Many I/N players fail to transition to Open games. They work their way through I/N then Gold Rush and perhaps Mid-flight and then drop out. We don't know exactly the reason, but lack of familiarity and fear seem part of it. Mentor programs can be logistically challenging to implement, but are happening at the club and unit level in our district. One club we know that runs both Open and I/N sections, for example, asks each Life Master to play once a month with an I/N player in the Open game and offers that player a free play for doing it. It would be interesting to see if the model could translate in some way to our regionals.
4. *Ask the Expert* feature for the I/N room after morning and afternoon sessions.
5. We have encouraged the ACBL to set up forums for districts to share ideas and forms, but the district should also make an effort to share equipment and other resources, ideas and experiences, paperwork and files, questions and answers among tournament chairs, teachers, club managers, etc. We will have 100 sets of boards by VF 2018 for use across the district, and plan to establish a google docs for forms that tournaments will find useful.
6. District cooperation that incentivizes club owners and managers to urge players to go to tournaments.
7. A social bridge/rubber bridge program was tested at the 2018 Philly Nationals to great success and the ACBL sees the social bridge player as a great source of new membership. Regionals could cooperate with social bridge as part of their tournaments, including a social/rubber bridge room at very little incremental cost and effort. We welcome other ideas on this subject going forward.

A WORD ABOUT THE LOST MIDDLE

The lost middle is a set of players with somewhere around 1,500 to 3,000 masterpoints that drop out of tournament bridge. This group differs from newcomer drop-off. Newcomer drop-off occurs when players either attain lifemaster status and drop out (having attained their goal) or graduate from Gold Rush and decide not to move to open events. The lost middle is players who have advanced into open events for a while and perhaps: lose interest; feel underserved; or do not like playing in events where they can compete but have little chance of winning. In

Knockouts, for example, they often compete against pro teams or highly rated local A teams and feel like they never “win.” In Swiss Teams, X teams get very little reward for a day of heavy competition. Pairs can feel like a crapshoot.

According to one advisor to this committee, “This [loss of the middle] is a very important issue...The anecdotal belief, which I admit would be a challenge to test statistically, is that the number of players who play above a certain tournament level competency (again ill defined) has decreased much faster. I have not seen the Board or the CEO address or even acknowledge this issue although I could have missed it. I do not see it addressed at all in the Big Issues discussion.”

Another: “The trend for the past several years has been to encourage all players to play at their least common denominator. At the largest regional, 8 simultaneous flights/strats are available. The result on the flight A players is to have them play in an event almost as hard as playing in a national pair event...So, I think we have reduced the recreational enjoyment for A level players at tournaments, particularly regionals, over what was in the past.”

The problem is compounded by the ACBL masterpoint strategy. As mentioned, X pays few places. Without the new KO strategy, KOs can be a tough go for teams with just enough masterpoints to play in the bottom of a bracket that has a wide spread. There are only so many things a regional can do to fix these issues, but adopting the new KO strategy, paying attention to a schedule that accommodates all players, and generally being aware of this issue is a start.

AREAS WHERE HELP IS NEEDED FROM THE ACBL

There are key areas where all tournaments can only make progress with help from the ACBL. There is some hope that some of these improvements are coming, albeit very slowly.

1. technology
 - software for running and scoring tournaments that interfaces with outside systems
 - integrated online preregistration and payment system for all events
 - software for managing Teams events including scoring and table assignments
 - results displays
 - online forums for tournament officials to share questions, ideas, software, paperwork, etc.
 - improved online partnership desk
2. improvements to, and simplification of, masterpoint awards
3. improvement in directing

FOOTNOTE

On April 30, 2018, the ACBL Board of Directors dismissed CEO Bahar Gidwani. The reasons for this dismissal remain shrouded in mystery with “legal reasons” being cited for the opacity of the circumstances. Joe Jones, CFO, has been placed in the position for the time being, with a search committee formed to identify the next CEO. Until we know the reasons behind Gidwani’s removal and the identity of the next person to take up the position, there is no way to know if and how any of the initiatives started under Gidwani (such as tournament cap and trade or any of the “Big Ideas”) will proceed, what direction the ACBL will take with any of the steps required from them, or how this transition will slow or even halt needed reforms.

THANKS

The committee received helpful input from many sources. Thanks to:

Elaine Weintraub, District 4 Tournament Coordinator

District 4 Regional Chairs:

- Deb Klinger
- Meyer Kotkin
- Judith Gwaltney
- Bob Priest

Kathleen Del Corso

Regional Chairs from around the country:

- Pete Misslin, D7, Gatlinburg
- Michael Carmen, D8, St. Louis
- Shannon Cappelletti, D9, Florida
- Pat Williams, D10, Nashville
- Hubert Henry, D17, Denver
- Len Koltun, D19, British Columbia
- Mike Wavada, D25, Connecticut

Respectfully submitted,

Allison Brandt