

This article will not be a repetition of general COVID-19 precautions, actions and regulations, including the all-important social distancing, recommended by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and/or implemented by various levels of government. Instead, in this article, we (Joann and Meyer) intend to address the impacts of the pandemic on our bridge organizations, on our volunteers and on our players. However, in a Bottom Line Up Front statement of the most important point of this article, we say to you that **YOU ARE NOT ALONE**. You are members of our bridge community and we will stick together through this crisis. We will support each other and do everything we possibly can to help our players weather the times ahead.

We recognize that bridge is just a game and that the world at large and the other, equally or more important, communities you are involved with (family, work, religious etc.) are facing life altering and life-threatening situations. We do not minimize or dismiss the impacts of COVID-19 on your other life communities but because this is a D4 bridge publication, we will focus mostly on the bridge impacts on the D4 bridge community.

First, let's talk about financial impacts on the various levels of our bridge organization. On March 12, the ACBL canceled the Spring North American Bridge Championships (NABC) scheduled for Columbus, OH on March 18-29. At the time, this decision could have had significant financial impact on the ACBL because of the hotel and hospitality commitments. However, since the Governor of Ohio announced a ban on assemblies of more than 100 people, we expect that besides any liabilities incurred up to March 12, the ACBL will not incur any further significant financial loss.

A little before the official ACBL cancellation notice, the D4 Executive Board and Tournament Chairs Melody and Mark Henderson, after continuously and carefully monitoring the burgeoning COVID-19 situation, canceled the Wilmington Regional scheduled for March 30-April 6. Bob Glasson led the D4 team negotiating with the Doubletree in Wilmington and similar to the ACBL with the Columbus NABC, D4 will have no significant financial loss from canceling the tournament. In fact, we have already rescheduled the Wilmington Regional for April 5-11, 2021 at the same location.

D4 will continue to monitor the COVID-19 situation with respect to making Go/No-Go decisions for the Philadelphia Regional at Valley Forge (June 22- 28) and the Burt Garrell Syracuse Regional (August 10-16). We feel we have some time before we have to make any final decisions so these Regionals are still on the D4 Tournament calendar. However, D4 will not only abide by any government restrictions and CDC suggestions, D4 will also always put the

welfare and safety of our players, volunteers and directing staff before financial considerations.

The D4 Grand National Teams (GNT) Finals scheduled for May have been postponed to a date to be determined. The ACBL has postponed the National GNT Finals until the Tampa NABC in November.

Unit 141 was the first Unit in all of the ACBL to cancel a Sectional tournament followed closely by Units 168, 112, 120 and 133. These Units should not be facing any significant losses from the cancellations.

The largest and most damaging financial impacts are on local bridge clubs. D4 has 86 sanctioned Bridge Clubs and almost all, to our knowledge, have closed their doors, respecting government social distancing regulations and suggestions. While we are not clairvoyant and no one can predict the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, many of these bridge clubs that have significant rent obligations might not be able to survive a long period with no income but continued rent payment. Additionally, a bridge club's directing staff whose salaries have stopped may seek other employment so that when clubs eventually are able to resume operations, there is a risk of a shortage of local directors because some will choose not to return to the local clubs. Jay Whipple is leading an ACBL and Bridge Base Online (BBO) collaborative effort to allow local clubs to transition to an online presence. The plan, as we understand it, is to set up a local bridge clubroom on BBO where current local directors and owners will run the games that will be restricted to current players at that local club. The local club will be able to charge whatever card fees they deem necessary, but you will, based upon the club owner's discretion, be able to play only against the regulars that you played against at the brick and mortar local club. When developed, this will be a way to help support your local club and try to keep it from closing its doors permanently. Remember, local clubs are the lifeblood of our bridge organization – they are the most instrumental piece to recruiting and retaining new members.

When attending tournaments becomes routine, it is easy to forget that our Regional Tournament Committees, all made up of volunteers, put a lot of effort, dedication and time into the planning and execution of one of the D4 Regional Tournaments. Our hearts go out to Melody and Mark and all the volunteers for the Delaware Regional who saw two years of hard work go for naught:

Caroline Hughes	Joann Glasson	Nancy Ferguson	Sharon Weintrob
Jess Stuart	Barbara Rhoades	Karin Schwenk	Brenda Vogel
John Strange	Kurt Engleman	Karen Pollak	Debbie Schenkel
Bill Herdle	Dave Legrow	Jeff Ruben	Ala Hamilton-Day
Teresa Spicer	AnnTaylor	Monte Taylor	Trina Williams
Tom Hughes	Lee Davis	Harold Jordan	Bernard Rehberg

Cornell University President Martha E. Pollack sent out a letter to the entire Cornell Community (one of Meyer’s other communities although how he graduated is a great mystery) that we felt captured our thoughts and feelings way better than we could express them. President Pollack wrote:

I am a bridge player—not a very good one, but I do enjoy the game. In bridge, you are sometimes dealt a great hand: lots of high cards, distributed across the suits in an advantageous way. Other times, you are dealt a terrible hand. The great hands are unquestionably more fun to play, but every bridge player knows that you have to play the hand you’re dealt. Sometimes, doing an outstanding job with a terrible hand can be incredibly rewarding. Right now, we’ve all been dealt a bad hand—and we have to play it, and play it to the best of our abilities. So many of our plans have been disrupted, leaving us frustrated and disappointed. But we can rise to meet this challenge ...

It is natural to ask why this COVID-19 crisis is happening to us. For philosophers and thinkers, this question is the very definition of theodicy. Unfortunately, we don’t have answers but we recall that Harold Kushner in his bestseller, *Why Bad Things Happen to Good People*, suggested that maybe that is not the right question to ask. Kushner suggests asking now that this crisis is upon us, what are we going to do about it? As bridge players we’ve all been dealt bad hands but we don’t throw the cards away and ask for a new deal. We must play on so we ask ourselves, “what are we going to do?” As bridge players, we have all been in great contracts with a bad trump break but we don’t give up. We play on after asking ourselves, “what are we going to do?” Let us tell you some of what we will do:

- We believe we speak for the entire D4 Board and all the Unit Boards in D4 when we say that YOU ARE NOT ALONE. We are here to help in any way we can and not just in bridge matters. We care about you and if you need help getting food, medical attention or just want to talk to someone, we are here for you and we will do our best to help you with your problems. We are good listeners if you want to discuss your fears or the mistakes your partners made over the years.

- We will encourage you to play on-line (BBO, OKBridge or any other platform you like). We are not going to argue whether or not on-line bridge is the same as live face-to-face play but for now, “virtual” bridge is a way to play the game with others while maintaining social distancing guidelines. You can maintain your current bridge community players and maybe even meet some new players from all over the world who are looking to play bridge. There are tournaments galore on-line and as we mentioned previously, you will soon have a chance on BBO to play and support your local bridge clubs. There is also an opportunity for online social or kitchen bridge outside of the regularly scheduled tournaments.
- If you have trouble setting up an on-line account, we will walk you through the steps or arrange for someone to make sure you successfully set up your online account to play bridge.
- We will maintain our website and monthly newsletter so we can keep you up to date on all things relating to D4 bridge.
- We will urge you to reach out to the players you have partnered with and/or played against at your local clubs and Sectionals -- not by e-mail, but by phone or video chat so during our prolonged stays at home, our players can hear a friendly voice and see a friendly face.
- We will urge you to arrange games on line with your regular partners even though had they not made all those mistakes you would be a Grand Life Master. We will urge you to make on-line games with partners who trumped your good Aces and passed you in forcing bids. We will even urge you to play on line with players at your club that may not be your best friends but who are lonely and looking to play some bridge.

We are all in this together. So now it is up to you. What will you do?

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