

It's a Wrap

Toronto 2011 NABC Report

Congratulations to all for a very successful NABC! Kudos have been flooding in from folks and this is a direct result of all the hard work and commitment of all of the Planning Team, Extended Committee, casual volunteers and the outstanding efforts of the ACBL staff.

I have put this report together in 3 main parts.

- 1. Observations**
- 2. Issues, difficulties or problems**
- 3. Recommendations**

All of what is contained in this report is written by me but based on feedback from a variety of sources, primarily, committee members, volunteers, and players. Some of the feedback was provided after the tournament and some during. Notebooks were provided to major work areas during the tournament for the recording of complaints, kudos and recommendations.

So, with a HUGE THANK YOU to all who devoted time to this tournament, please read the following report with the knowledge that it is intended for the benefit of those who run the next Toronto NABC or those who run other NABC tournaments.

To understand this whole process I would liken it to an avalanche. It takes a long time for the snow to build up to the point needed for an avalanche to be triggered but once it starts coming down the mountain it's over before you know it. Your job is to direct it if possible; if not, get out of the way!

Or in the words of my esteemed ACBL contact,

"They come. They play. They go home."

Sally Rewbotham

Tournament Chair 2011 Toronto NABC

Observations

Team Building

We started into this process almost 4 years before the tournament. My major focus was building a team which I called the Planning Team (PT). I knew that I needed folks who could work together for an extended period. The binder available from the ACBL recommended many different people for a variety of tasks. I felt this was too many and would lead to an unwieldy committee. I cut the number considerably. Ex. Instead of a Chair of Partnerships, Chair of Prizes and a Chair of Registration I had all of this assigned to one person (PPR).

The plan was that this person would build a team to which she would delegate responsibilities for these areas but oversee the management and progress of all. Similarly, the Chair of Food/Entertainment and the Chair of the Restaurant Guide (ENTRG) was one person who was asked to delegate some of these responsibilities to others while maintaining control of the whole package. Their job was also to be the conduit to and from the PT. Compounding all of this in Toronto is the fact that the tournament is housed in two hotels which exacerbates many of the jobs to be done. (2 registration desks, partnership desks, prize desks, different menu offerings, different hotel teams with which to meet/negotiate, etc.)

Two different Fundraising Chairs (FC) offered their services to the PT and then quit before doing anything to raise a nickel. The added stress to the Tournament Chair (TC) was too much. People who volunteer come from a variety of backgrounds. Business backgrounds are sometimes in conflict with public service backgrounds or those with limited outside work experience. Different age groups and gender groups approach things differently. Building a team, a volunteer team, requires time to cement relationships.

Generating ideas

A couple of brainstorming sessions was held very early in the process. These worked very well to develop ideas about entertainment, food recommendations, prize suggestions, tourism ideas, promotion items, etc. All of the participants were asked if they would like to volunteer and those names and addresses were kept on file (paper and electronic). A report was shared with them later as to what had happened at the meeting and that their recommendations would be shared with the committee. It was clear that these would form the basis of conversations to be had by the PT but would not necessarily determine the eventual direction of the team.

One of the most successful ideas was to have “bridge bucks” as prizes at the Regional before the NABC. These were good for \$3 off an entry. Most players really liked them.

Other Tournaments

In 2009, I flew to Washington to visit the TC and see the tournament from 1 day before the start until after the first 3 days were done. In 2011 I met the TC again. She told me that when I first arrived she thought I was crazy to come before the tournament got going. Later, looking back on it, she realized it was a very smart thing to do. (I later attended the Orlando Fall NABC and spoke with that TC as well)

One needs to get a sense of what those days are like for the committee and the volunteers. I offered to get involved and the offer was gladly accepted. I helped set up the Registration/Prize area, unpack boxes, set out flyers and travel info and later, worked the registration desk and the prize desk. I later saw the partnership police in action and visited the IN area. I attended a couple of ABTA sessions as well. Because the Washington team also hosts banquets for local celebrations I also worked in the kitchen peeling shrimp etc.

It was here that I first saw the Volunteer Suite in action. Their set up was amazing. The large suite had a full kitchen for food preparation and the local committee had volunteers whose job it was to staff the suite and provide meals and a break area for volunteers. This proved to be impossible for Toronto as we

had volunteers in two hotels without quick access to the suite. The registration area in the Sheraton Centre, once we got it opened up, provided a handy area for breaks and for storage. (We opted for the \$5 “chits” instead)

Selecting Giveaways

Ideas were solicited from many folks and sources (catalogues, other tournaments, etc.). From this a list was made of possible gifts. The gifts were required for Registration and Section Tops. We also had some items for draw prizes and, thanks to the tremendous generosity of Master Point Press, were able to give away a book to each young person in the Youth NABC!

From the lists, the TC and the PPR chair made a few selections. Each contacted various sources and made decisions based on wants, availability and price. The registration selections included an umbrella, bag, and a beaver “stickie” (huge success). The prizes included folding hair brushes, small bottles of maple syrup, chocolate bars and pens. We had books for all of the IN registration gifts and different titles for IN section tops!

When ordering all of the giveaways we needed to determine shipping times and dates. This included when to ship the goods to the businesses with which we were working and when to ship them to the hotels. We needed to make sure that we were not paying for storing these goods for months in some warehouse. We also needed to make sure that they were being delivered to the hotels when we were there to receive them but before the tournament started.

Food, Entertainment and Restaurant Guide

Firstly, we learned that the ACBL considers food to be the entertainment. They were clear that, while most committees spend an inordinate amount of time, energy and money on the “Entertainment” aspects of the event, it is time spent entertaining a very small number of players. The “bang for the buck” just isn’t there. We decided, after much thought and discussion, to do away with entertainment and focus on food.

The restaurant guide was turned over to two keen, and very capable, volunteers who went at the task with a vengeance. They found many restaurateurs willing to offer discounts, special appetizer dishes or the like. They added a couple of their favourites to the list and advertized them as such. These were all well received by players.

Food offered to players at the end of the evening session was problematic starting with the opening gambit of one hotel for hot dogs for \$14.50 per hot dog! When multiplying this by 900 the scope of the problem becomes clear. We spent a great deal of time looking at other options including street vendor hot dogs, Timbits (like donut holes) from Canada's iconic Tim Hortons restaurant and other such options. Bringing food into the hotel from an outside supplier is not allowed by the hotels in Toronto. (I believe that the hotel contact was not empowered by the hotel management to truly negotiate with the local committee since her price offerings only came down to \$10.50/hot dog)

Finally, 1 month before the tournament, we were in a meeting with the ACBL advance team. We quickly made them aware of the issue. They understood our anger. Compounding everything was the fact that the hotel was going to charge us 18% service charge. It was then, and only then, that we discovered that the contract with the ACBL was for a 15% SC. We were also dealing with folks willing to charge us \$5 for a cup of coffee while the discussions with the ACBL were for considerably less.

They took charge and used the power of the total contract to bring down service charges, cost of coffee and lowered the cost of a hot dog to a mere \$6.50!

Note: the following were liked by players: ice cream bars (served twice), hot dogs (served twice), pad thai and pizza. Not as well received were the pea meal bacon on a bun and the waffles with maple syrup. Timbits were appreciated by some but not the fact that they had to go out of the hotel to get them.

IN players felt that they were not really a part of this as the food was served on the lower concourse and they played on the 2nd floor, 3 floors above.

Morning players (10:00 & 2:30 events) were provided \$3 chits for the hotel concession stand and most appreciated this but some complaints were heard about the cost of an apple, a coffee (\$3), or that the \$3 couldn't just be used as a discount on entry fees.

Promotion and website

Many different ideas are available for tournament promotion. Some committees buy and sell t-shirts with the tournament logo and info on them. Some give away "logoed" key chains, pens, fridge magnets, etc. Many committees put out promotional flyers at tournaments and NABC tournaments prior to the NABC. We started with small mini-pens that we delivered to clubs around the world by "Bridge Ambassadors" (mainly friends and bridge colleagues who responded to ads posted at the area regionals for a couple of years before the tournament). We followed up with business cards promoting the event. (I delivered some cards to a club in New Zealand only to discover that one of my ambassadors had been there ahead of me!)

Our promotional material highlighted our website. Recognizing that most players will visit the ACBL website, particularly to access Megahousing, we felt it important to get folks to ours. If we were to be at all successful getting sponsors then we wanted to make sure that having players accessing our website was of value to them. (Airline companies, major department stores, computer companies, Restaurants)

This meant that the website was our first impression on many players. It highlighted tourism information like major sports teams and theatre offerings; provided up to date info about the progress being made in our efforts (sometimes out of date), and showed the NABC schedule when completed. It provided links to the electronic partnership desk. Eventually, when the mobile restaurant guide was completed one could mouse over the page and find addresses and directions for our restaurants.

Caddies

The ACBL Caddy Master is responsible for the caddies. We wanted to make sure that some of our own caddies had a chance to participate in the job offerings for the tournament. I set high expectations and demands. I insisted that caddies fill out an application (in the local Bridge Magazine), meet timelines and get references. I followed up on those and offered positions to some of our local caddies.

Several players ignored the ads and deadlines and thought that they could ask at the last minute to get someone hired. They were wrong. The ACBL Caddy Master did hire many on her own. This is inevitable. It is what it is. They were needed and they have far more experience than some of the locals.

Schedule of Events

The NABC events are scheduled by the ACBL. The regional events and the IN events are scheduled by the local TC in conjunction with the ACBL Director - In - Charge. Putting forth my ideas was easy but I deferred to the DIC. He had the experience and the wisdom. Why wouldn't I?

The naming of events was a different story. We named days for our major sponsors. We promoted them in our Schedule and Restaurant Guide and in the Daily Kibitzer.

We named games for those who purchased the naming rights. I also provided a write up to the Daily Kibitzer on each person for whom a game was named (although I did not write all of them). We also named games for those who had just been elected to the Canadian Bridge Hall of Fame. I made the decision to name a game after each of the key volunteers or donors. I didn't ask first as some are bashful and I felt that their efforts deserved the recognition of their bridge-playing friends.

Fund Raisers

Sponsors are a godsend! We were blessed to have the Canadian Bridge Federation, the local Unit, the BAY (Canada's historic department store), and Master Point Press step up to help sponsor the event. We also had several local

bridge clubs hold fundraisers for us. Sometimes clubs or individuals bought the naming rights to games. As well there are STACs available as fundraisers. Fundraising STACs can be run for 3 years prior to the NABC. I didn't know this when I started nor did I know how to go about it when I found out that it would be possible.

Room allocation

The ACBL allocates a few rooms to the local committee for the tournament. Since we have 2 sites to staff we were allocated a couple of extra over the normal allotment.

Likewise, the ACBL provided for the parking for a few of the folks for whom rooms were allocated. I made the decision as to who got rooms based on the work they would be doing during the tournament and the work they had done during the 4 years of the project. Parking was determined according to who needed to move in lots of stuff or was moving in several people, not just him/her self.

We decided, in lieu of player chits, to give our team of volunteers a \$5 bill for each shift worked. How they chose to spend that was up to them. We decided to have each person sign for this but, rather than have them sign for each \$5 bill; we had them sign for the day's allocation. This process was handled by the Treasurer in conjunction with someone in charge of the different areas.

Moving In

The moving day for me was on the Wednesday before the tournament started. Different members of the committee moved in on different days; most on Thursday. Wednesday was also the day of the volunteer dinner to which I was allowed to invite approximately 40 people to join the ACBL officials and politicians.

(Prior to this day the spouses of the members of the Board of Directors of the ACBL were entertained with a tour of the city, lunch, and a harbour tour. I was fortunate to find a friend of a friend who volunteered to take on the job of

planning, organizing and conducting the day. It would appear that all enjoyed the day.)

Getting the volunteer suite set up on Wed. is important as there is no time on Thursday. Time is needed on Thursday to set up the registration, prize and partnership areas. It was my understanding that the local committee would not be needed until Friday but it turned out that we needed to be ready for partnerships and registration on Thursday afternoon. It doesn't matter where the communication was lost, but lost it was. This meant that Thursday was somewhat chaotic.

We moved in balloons and the key volunteer team wore hats. There was terrifically positive feedback about this. Players felt that it made the whole atmosphere festive and made the volunteers look friendly.

Bulletin Boards

Each partnership area had a bulletin board so that players can post information and requests days in advance of games (the electronic partnership desk available well in advance of the tournament is an excellent source for folks). This self-partnering takes pressure off of the Partnership Desk.

We also needed one for the IN area so that pictures of the winners could be taken and posted for all to see. As well we had a Message Board in both hotels. The Message Board should include a Frequently Asked Questions page which should be prepared well in advance of the tournament. Included in these FAQ's are things like:

Where is the cell phone storage area? Where are the washrooms? Where is the check cashing (ACBL Scrip) desk? Where is the nearest bank/liquor store/coffee shop/place to smoke, etc? Where is the Day Care facility? Where is the Partnership desk (Prize/Registration)? Who do I see about Director issues?

Intermediate – Newcomer Program (IN)

Wow! This sums up the success that we had with this better than anything else. There were 3, that's THREE, outstanding large group presentations to the IN

players (Audrey Grant, Barbara Seagram and Jerry Helms) along with many smaller sessions. The feedback was so positive.

Many IN players came for the lessons and stayed to play. Many came to play one day and stayed for 3 or more.

The red and white balloon pathway to the IN area set the tone early. It was such a hit that they were stolen on the third day! (Except for the few that were stolen on the 4th day) Our volunteers greeted them every day. The Partnership desk was originally in the general partnership area. This was a mistake and we moved it to the IN area.

The team in the IN area worked well with the players who were very enthusiastic. A “family” atmosphere seemed to take over as they bonded over the 10 days, celebrating victories together and commiserating over bad luck.

Registration, Partnerships and Prizes

Registration worked very well at both sites except that we ran out of the first kind of registration gifts (adhere to the ACBL recommendations on this). The IN registration gift of a book was terrific but absolutely unaffordable without the generosity of Master Point Press. The first couple of days were stressful for all volunteers and we could have used a few more. Luckily the area we had set up in one hotel was large enough to accommodate several. This was less so in the other hotel.

Partnerships were less an issue at the site where the NABC+ events were run. The players will look more quickly to the Message Board to see who is looking for a partner. Many of them know one another, at least by reputation. It was more problematic in the other hotel due to the much larger number of events being run and the diversity of player types (very few points to very many, want to have fun, want to win gold, too young, too old, pairs, teams, etc.)

Things became chaotic in front of the Partnership desk on a few occasions. Partnership Police helped alleviate the congestion but it was still crowded. (PP escort players to the area with chairs and encourage the players to wait in this

area. They have players fill out the Partnership Request Card and take them to the Match Maker. After a match is made in heaven, the PP go back to the seating area to match the players, etc.) The idea is that this saves the MM from the stress and noise of the crowd. It's a good idea but would work better if not set up right beside the Registration or Prize desks.

The Prize Desk, on the other hand, was running smoothly with most people quite patient to wait until the reports came from the ACBL to the desk (the next day).

Issues/Problems

1. The volunteer committee as recommended by the ACBL is too large. Generally, smaller committees work better together. The one I selected was too small.
2. Losing the Fundraising Chair was a problem. Having the Tournament Chair pick up this responsibility is not an acceptable solution.
3. Some of the volunteers, some of whom had submitted their names very early in the process, were not contacted and felt left out and ignored.
4. The ACBL NABC Chair's Manual states that the key contact with the ACBL and the hotels is the TC. It seemed not to matter. Many communications were handled directly between committee chairs and the ACBL and/or the hotels. The TC cannot be left out of the loop as this is the person responsible for ultimate decision making.
5. One of the early issues that we dealt with was the question of financial liability for the committee and making sure that we had the same coverage as members of the Unit/District Board. It took a while to clarify this.
6. We had too few umbrellas and registration bags. Some complaints were heard about the umbrellas until it started to rain! Then the only complaints were from those who left them in their rooms. Hair brushes

weren't overly well received and some American travellers thought the maple syrup bottles wouldn't clear customs. (They were small enough but folks were not convinced)

7. Not knowing the details of the ACBL contract with the hotels hampered local negotiations with the hotels.
8. Not having the clout of the \$6 million contract also hampered local negotiations with the hotel.
9. Food (Timbits) could not be brought into the hotel which would have made everything so much cheaper. It's likely that all major cities will not allow this just as Toronto hotels do not.
10. There were some complaints that we did not have group bookings offered at a ball game, theatre production, bus tour or harbour tour. We followed the advice of a previous tournament chair whose experience was to purchase them and then have to give them away at a tremendous discount to what was paid for them.
11. Some, but not many, similar comments were heard about post game entertainment.
12. Promotional materials need to be light enough to be transported.
13. The website needs to be kept current. It needs to focus on those things that are of interest to bridge players and potential tournament competitors. It needs to become an important link for visitors if you are looking to sell this component to sponsors.
14. Friends who want favours like hiring their sons/daughters as caddies is problematic. Inappropriate dress of a caddy was an issue but handled quickly by the ACBL Caddy Master.
15. Arranging to have the Treasurer meet daily with someone to take care of the \$5 bill distribution was not always smooth. Different folks work differing schedules during the tournament. Some are playing and some

are not. Some are up early and some stay up late. Nevertheless, a process must be in place to ensure that the Treasurer has signed receipts for the \$5 chits received by volunteers.

16. Getting the Registration desk and Partnership area ready for Thursday takes a strong commitment from team members. They need to move into the hotel early, even if rooms aren't ready, so that these other areas can be addressed. Things need to be in place for the Educational Foundation game.
17. Setting up the IN partnership area together with the general partnership area was a mistake.
18. Partnership Police needed to be used more frequently and we needed to use more of them. It takes a strong person to do this job.
19. There were complaints from some players re: the 0 – 750 Gold Rush Pairs. Running these games is popular for those in this point bracket. However, it means that the other pairs game has an open Flight A and a Flight B that is 3000 +. Players with 751 – 2000 points often stayed away. The same is true in Regionals. There needs to be an event running to accommodate these other players.

Recommendations

1. That the Planning Team have 10-12 members.

Ideally, a committee should have 10-12 people to be effective. This provides all a chance to provide input into decision making without excessive division or general ineffectiveness due to too many cooks making the broth untenable! At the same time, a committee that is too small means that there is greater chance of one person taking on or being assigned too much work. Those that are burning out cannot address, nor even see, some of the small issues as they arise which could lead to larger issues later.

- 2. That, among others, this PT include the Tournament Chair; CFO; Treasurer; Volunteer Committee Chair; Fund Raising Chair; Web Master; Entertainment and Food Guide Chair; Partnership Chair; Registration and Prizes Chair; and the Intermediate/Newcomer (IN) Program Chair.**
- 3. That time be spent building the team and developing a general, collective sense of purpose. If one member doesn't share that sense either work harder to make it work or thank that individual for his efforts and move on with others.**
- 4. Determine lines of communication for the team; team to ACBL; team to suppliers; and team to hotels. The TC needs to be aware of all communication.**
- 5. The TC should try to attend a few NABC before becoming immersed in his/her own ideas. Go early to see what is involved before the tournament starts. Find time to talk to the TC and other key personnel. (Note: The learning part of this shouldn't be on your own dime. If you're going to stay and play for a few days then that part should be yours)**
- 6. That all offers of volunteerism are recognized with a follow up communication and that an update is shared with these volunteers periodically.**
- 7. Ensure that the Chairs of those committees which are using volunteers get their needs delineated for the Volunteer Chairperson early.**
- 8. Have the VC contact volunteers regularly to let them know of developments and progress being made. As soon as possible, have the VC find out when the volunteers will be available to work at the tournament (subject to changes, of course)**
- 9. Have the VC develop schedules for the volunteers in each area working with the Chairs responsible for each area. Share these schedules with these Chairs and the TC before Move - In Day. Post these schedules in the**

volunteer work area at the beginning of the tournament and post any corrections as the tournament progresses.

10. "Celebrate" the start of the tournament. Have fun! It's contagious. The TC needs to be visible.
11. Use Partnership Police to work with the Partnership Match Maker on all busy shifts.
12. Talk to the ACBL contacts (who are very helpful) about any details of their contract with the hotel that could impinge on your bargaining with them. Bring them into the picture early if problems arise. *(Note to ACBL liaison folks: please make the local committees aware of details that will help ease their situation with the tasks before them)*
13. Serve ice cream bars and hot dogs more than once during the tournament as they are simple and not as expensive as most other offerings.
14. Provide earlier games (2 session games without an evening session) with chits to be used at the concession stand in lieu of food. (The ACBL arranges for the concession stands with the hotel but you need to know what the hours of operation will be and, if possible, what the prices will be so as to determine an appropriate dollar amount for the chits.) (Note: we printed the chits with a watermark, the tournament logo, on perforated paper and separated these as one of the tasks carried out in the volunteer suite.)
15. Determine whether you want to do the same for the IN participants.
16. Consider offering some form of group activity such as the Step On - Step Off bus tour. These tickets might, if not used at the tournament, be able to be used at a later date by members of the committee, prize winners, donors etc.

- 17. Make use of the fact that many of the bridge players are retired and are travelling. They will assist by taking promotional info on cruises, to southern bridge clubs etc.**
- 18. Make sure that you get the big banner to be displayed at other major tournaments at least 3 years in advance. The ACBL transports it from NABC to NABC and it is really good advertizing to get players to start making their plans early.**
- 19. Either the tournament chair or someone assigned by the TC must make regular and ever increasingly frequent visits to the web site to make sure that it is current. All members of the PT should be familiar with the contents.**
- 20. Make your website an important part of a bridge player's information gathering arsenal for the tournament.**
- 21. Ensure that there is a link to the electronic partnership desk on your website.**
- 22. Determine a process for hiring of local caddies and stick to it.**
- 23. Consider naming games for your key volunteers. They deserve it!**
- 24. Sell the naming of a game as a fund raiser if possible.**
- 25. Run STACs for all 3 years prior to the NABC to raise money.**
- 26. Consider assigning the job of running the STACs to a specific individual.**
- 27. Allocate rooms to those who will need them at the tournament. This includes those who are in charge of liaising with the hotel about food, those working many shifts on the Registration, Partnership or Prize desks and someone who handles the \$\$ for worker chits. (see # 20)**
- 28. Determine a process for allocation of chits (\$5 bills?) and a method for accounting for them.**

29. Work with the ACBL coordinators to determine when to have goods delivered to the hotel(s).
30. Determine what bulletin boards you need in advance. Will they need to be decorated?
31. Compile the FAQ's for the Message Boards early. Have them ready to post when you set up at the hotel.
32. Volunteers in the IN area need to work as a team *with the IN players with whom they will soon bond.*
33. Maintain a separate IN partnership desk.
34. Try to run an event for those with 0 – 2000 points on “Gold Rush” days.
35. The ACBL should negotiate a protocol with BBO so that all NABC tournaments are advertized on BBO.
36. *HST! To Americans this means nothing but to Canadians it represents a tax that needs to be understood, and well understood, by the ACBL.*
37. \$\$\$ Spend the ACBL money before you spend your own.
38. Maintain your sense of humour at all times.
39. Recognize that there will be some very stressful times and situations. There will also be many very rewarding times and your memories will tend to be of all the good things.
40. When it's all over remember also,

“They came. They Played. They went Home.”

..... and most of them had a great time!