

District Director Report – February 8, 2021 D16 meeting

I was selected to chair the Strategic Committee again this year and continue to serve as a member of the Governance Committee.

Overall membership is currently declining at a rate of 8.5% per year. We finished the year 2020 with 154,600 members versus 162,500. Realistically, our only hope to reduce the loss rate before a full return to face-to-face bridge is to focus on getting more members playing online. Marketing has developed a toolkit for use at the unit level and communications have been sent to all Unit and District Presidents. I want to encourage every unit to have a calling campaign to engage those not playing online.

Key items for the Board in 2021 in my view are:

1. Determine the role of face-to-face and virtual clubs in post-pandemic bridge and set goals for management in this area.
2. Continue to move bridge related activities to management as we prepare to shrink the board to 13 members by the end of 2024.
3. Plan for an aggressive membership growth campaign post-pandemic which will include reaching out to lapsed members and encouraging them to return. On January 25, the Board approved the 2021 budget which included funds for Marketing to begin this campaign.

The outlook for tournaments to return to face-to-face prior to summer is not good. Vaccine supply remains limited and the mutations of the virus are producing more virulent strains. ACBL will continue to prioritize employee and player safety very high versus the desire to see face-to-face tournament play.

The discipline pipeline of alleged online cheating cases is actively being worked. Most involve lower-level players and the total number of cases is <50 at this point. The National Recorder's office has more under investigation. ACBL has worked to ensure that everyone is fairly treated and the process has several defined steps including review by the Appeals and Charges committee of the Board.

With over 45,000 members playing in sanctioned online games, I don't believe cheating is "rampant". As a virtual club manager, I've had one pair that I believe was cheating the one time they played in my game and they are no longer allowed to play in it. A player memo was filed by one of their opponents. I've had several lower-level players allege cheating by the opponents, but when I've investigated or asked higher level players to investigate, cheating was not indicated.

I bring this up to say that while we should encourage players to file player memos if they believe someone is cheating, we should also encourage them to report suspicious activity to their club manager for review.