

## **An interview with the CBF President**

*A lot of players are unaware of the Canadian Bridge Federation (CBF), or do not have a clear understanding of its purpose, and how it relates to the ACBL. Neil Kimelman is the current President of the CBF. In a recent interview, he helps readers to better understand this organization.*

### **Neil, what is the CBF and what are its goals?**

The CBF is the official National Bridge Organization (NBO) of Canada. It is a non-profit association. Every country in the world has a governing body such as ours. The American equivalent is the United States Bridge Federation (USBF).

The mission of the Canadian Bridge Federation is to promote bridge within Canada and protect and advance the national interests of Canadian Bridge, including the selection and support of Canadian bridge teams and players for international bridge competition.

In other words, our mandate is to promote this great game in Canada. Improve participation in bridge, facilitate players improving their skills by providing access to learning and game opportunities.

We are also responsible each year for organizing a process by which to select Canadian players who are most deserving to represent Canada in World Bridge Championships. Finally, we are the official voice of Canada in World Bridge.

Besides the tournaments and special games listed below, we have a **Canadian Bridge Hall of Fame**, a fabulous **Junior development Program**, a critically acclaimed **Bridge Canada** magazine published six times a year, Canadian **Mini-Richmond masterpoint races**, and a **Charitable arm** that annually raises monies from specific games to help targeted members of the community that are in need of support.

### **So where does the ACBL fit in?**

The ACBL was formed prior to the concept of NBOs. It provides tournaments to attend, with the main draw being the earning of masterpoints. We work closely with the ACBL, who sanction CBF tournaments so that our members can earn masterpoints at our tournaments. This partnership is unique in the world of bridge, and has benefits, but also a few downsides. We have from time to time looked at whether it would be better for Canadian players to have a National Bridge Organization independent of the ACBL. This is especially relevant now as the costs for attending tournaments across North America have been rising dramatically.

We have recently reached out to the ACBL Units and Districts officials, to examine ways we can work together to look at ways we can promote Canadian bridge.

### What are the specific programs you have for the 'average' bridge player?

52.3% of CBF members have less than 500 Masterpoints, while 67% have less than 1000. As such the CBF has a number of membership features that specifically cater to this group:

- In the bi-monthly CBF online publication, *Bridge Canada*, there are 3 regular features for less experience players: **The New Players Spot**; **Bridge Basics**, and **The Intermediate Spot**.
- During the Canadian Bridge Championships (CBCs) besides the open teams we have two team championships for players not quite ready to play in the Open, the B event is for players who have less than 3500 masterpoints, and the **C event** is for players with less than 1000 points.
- We have **2 Rookie-Master games annually**, the Erin Berry in the fall and the Helen Shields in the spring, to help new players learn from playing with more experienced members.
- We hold Sectionals at local clubs (**STACs**).
- Every year have **Mini-Richmond** trophies and recognition for the top masterpoint winners for all categories of players.
- Each year we plan on holding **2 CBF regionals** for all levels of players.
- We have a very active and growing **Junior Program**, for players under the age of 26. We fund different junior age levels to represent Canada at World Championships.

### How is the CBF organized? Do you have a lot of employees?

The CBF has a Board of Directors made up of 6 volunteers, representing 6 geographical regions across Canada. There is 1 full time employee, Ina Demme. Ina is responsible for the day to day operations, scheduling, arranging, and coordinating all games and tournaments. The largest is the Canadian Bridge Championships, held in late spring, to select our teams and have a national tournament for all of our members. A significant part of her time is spent responding to individual member and bridge club enquiries and liaising with ACBL officials.

We also have a few part time positions: a Webmaster and a part time bookkeeper who takes care of all financial interactions, and ensuring we manage our resources to maximize the programs we can offer our members. Read below about the newest member of the CBF team.

### Speaking of which, how much does it cost to be a CBF member?

\$20 a year. We have had to raise our fees over the last few years for two reasons:

- Increased costs to hold the Canadian Championships. Hotel rent is increasing dramatically, as is the charge we must pay the ACBL for the Director Staff salaries and travel expenses.
- Increased sanction fees we pay the ACBL to hold events that award masterpoints.

### **How many Canadians belong to the CBF and ACBL?**

We have almost **5,000** members, but the ACBL membership includes **15,000** Canadians! I find the difference in these numbers very frustrating. A large reason for this disparity is that the ACBL, who has traditionally collected one membership fee for the both organizations, separated these fees a number of years ago, and made ours optional.

Unfortunately, a lot of players do not have a good grasp as to the difference between the two organizations, and just pay the ACBL fee. I think that many of these players would not mind paying the extra \$20 if they knew how much we did to promote the game in Canada, and ensuring we were well represented in world competitions. Just think of the thrill we all get during the **Olympics**, cheering for the Canadian skiers, hockey teams, and other athletes as they compete against the world's best. Bridge is no different.

### **Is there anything new the CBF is currently planning in the near future?**

Canadian Bridge faces the same challenges as all bridge organizations across the world: an aging membership. Up to now we have held our own, maintaining our numbers, but we know, with an average member age of 70, we are going to have a large attrition during the next decade.

As a result, we have taken steps in improving our communication with our current membership, with the goal of becoming more relevant. At the same time we are using social media and other methods to reach out to prospective members, making them aware of the advantages of playing this great game: it is very affordable, social in nature, and a highly recommended way to maintain your mental health as you age.

Last year we contracted with a Montreal consulting firm, Atypic, to look for affordable, tangible, and effective steps to meet these goals. We are in process of implementing their recommendations. The first step we took is hiring a Community Manager, Matthieu Dallaire.

### **Anything else?**

We are always looking for feedback and volunteers. For more information on the CBF please contact Ina Demme at [canbridge@rogers.com](mailto:canbridge@rogers.com), or Matthieu Dallaire at [info@mdallaire.co](mailto:info@mdallaire.co).