

2018 AGM: President's Report

Volunteers

We cannot hold back the tide (the ravages of time), but we can try to minimize the damage impact for as long as possible. We need to be proactive in recruitment of new blood, proactive in retaining this blood, and proactive in providing a quality night or day entertainment for existing players to compete against the ever increasing options they have. And achieve all this with an ever diminishing band of Volunteers. Why are they diminishing? Because they don't get the respect and/or encouragement they deserve. A few of you have a "gimme, gimme, gimme" approach. For example, Directors receive backchat or worse when they try to improve the quality of the playing experience for the majority of players, usually by trying to get snails to move faster. The result is fewer directors willing to direct. We are now on Plan A with the current Director list – there is no Plan B. If anyone at your table engages in backchat related to a Volunteer you should tell them firmly that it is inappropriate. Remaining silent is implicitly condoning that negative behaviour.

We must strive to use technology as much as possible to reduce demands on Volunteer time. We still do some things probably pretty similar to 50 years ago. For example, table money. This is dutifully collected mostly in cash by a Volunteer, a form manually filled out by that Volunteer, placed in the safe, retrieved from the safe by another Volunteer and banked with yet another form filled out by the Volunteer for the benefit of the long suffering Treasurer (another Volunteer) who has to make sense of handwritten paperwork and match that with the banking. Is there an easier way? Of course. Same with tournament entries and payment. We often end up with a large hassle of cash collection on the day by Volunteers, which is a needless pain for them.

The Committee has debated extensively on what remuneration should be paid to Volunteers. The general principle that emerged was that paying for specialised skills was OK, but simply paying for time expended was not as it leads to situations where X may be disgruntled because Y got payment for one situation and they didn't for another. So directing and teaching are skilled functions which should be paid for, as is the Treasury function and Administration (which requires expertise in the Scorer software, technology hardware, and website maintenance/updating). Whether this is perfect or not is moot, however it does provide a demarcation reference point against which the decision to pay or not pay can be assessed. So... the President doesn't get paid, nor the Secretary any longer, as you will see under the Honoraria agenda item.

NZB has a Club Volunteer of the Month award. PNBC has not participated in this. It requires choosing a 'most deserving' amongst a set of dedicated volunteers. No way!

Report card

So what is the report card like?

Recruitment and Retention

In 2017 recruitment was attempted via different media, facebook advertising, 5000 home leaflet drop, "Neighbourly" type advertising. In addition, a "Mini-Bridge" open day was held. I believe we should get say 15 new recruits to enable the Club to maintain if not grow. However, the result of this somewhat costly advertising was the usual nine or so people enrolled in Beginners lessons. For 2018 we are co-operating with a NZB initiative, with a shared cost amongst other participating Clubs, on

radio advertising (a few clubs who had previously trialled radio advertising were positive), along with the Neighbourly style ads.

NZB now provides complete Beginners lesson material and we have an excellent 'frontman' in Ken Bateman. However, it is a 10 lesson set, plus we provide an additional 4 mentoring nights before they enter the Novice Plus room. This is a huge burden on an organization the size of ours, thus it can practically be done only once a year. The problem with this is that occasionally we have an unsolicited enquiry for playing bridge, let's assume it occurs in August. We have to say, "sorry, u have to wait until May next year for our next lessons." The chances of that person joining the lessons in 10 months time are close to zero. I am a big fan of Mini-bridge as it can give people a taste of bridge with minimal introduction, and it could help "bridge" that 10 month gap, ie keep them interested until the next lessons start. However, this does require some Volunteer resource and that is a significant hurdle to overcome. Are people willing to step up?

We don't stop at Beginners lessons. We significantly improved the playing experience on Novice Plus night (reduced number of boards, little time pressure, Champs shifted, teams eliminated), then ran a mentoring programme in December on "casual" Monday Summer nights, with some mentors continuing through January. Still not stopping – we provide several Refresher lessons in the early part of the year (in 2018 Ray Kemp with self prepared lessons), and finally a 10 lesson Improvers set based on NZB material run by Ray Kemp in 2018, after taking over from me during 2017).

This is an enormous team effort, so a big thank you, not only to Ray and Ken, but also to their on-the-night helpers, as well as the "sight unseens", eg board dealers. Special mention to Julia Flavell for assisting with the redev of Monday night and the administration of it.

Sessions

Our day programme has been largely untouched. Our night programme has had quite a significant make over.

Monday night. This had a radical makeover during 2016 with programme changes and the entire approach to it, with early finishing a priority, as well as better structured events. This seems to have worked successfully with a hi-level of retention.

Tuesday night. Low table numbers means Tuesday is in the endangered species category. Low tables not only reduce the 'vibe' but also render somewhat pointless duplicate scoring. In 2017 a shorter programme with more trophy style events was trialled without success. In 2018 a different approach has been adopted with quasi-teams style events which provide incentives for developing partnerships. Will it succeed?

Thursday night. Prior to 2016 Platinum and Gold players could only play if partnering with a player from a lower grade, and certainly not during Champs. Now anyone can play, any month, as part of the philosophy "play with whoever u like, whenever u like". In 2016 partnerships involving a Platinum/Gold could not win monthly events; in 2017 partnerships involving a Gold playing with a Silver/Bronze could win a monthly event; in 2018 some events became dual graded (allowing both Gold and Silver winners), however this is seen as part of an as yet incomplete transition process where Thursday eventually becomes dual graded on all non-handicap events. Issues such as "EW has too many Gold players and its unfair" can be easily dealt with by initial seating and also by using X-Club which was trialled successfully in 2017. However the #1 problem is... see Volunteers above.

All nights in 2017 had Socials which had a Back to Future Theme, playing old Bermuda Bowl boards in a Butler IMP with Barometer scoring, and incorporating the results of the giants of yesteryear in the result output. Fun but hard work for Volunteers. Feedback both positive and negative was... zero.

Tournaments

Our tournaments are holding their own at the moment. However, clear signs have emerged of a dwindling Volunteer commitment to these. This has resulted in the payment to external parties for services such as morning tea help and caddying. I believe it is time for the Club to address the number of tournaments it holds given the extensive Volunteer input to these. In general, to date we have put on more tournaments than most other Clubs. The Junior/Intermediate tournaments were kept separate but held in parallel on the same day which saved considerable volunteer resource. The in-house mid-winter tournament has not been overly successful re numbers so needs careful consideration as to continuing to hold this.

Some pressure has come on the Club from NZB to agree to hold a national tournament, such as the NI Teams just completed, on a bi-annual basis. We have rejected this. While we have the facilities to hold such tournaments they require considerable Volunteer commitment with little if any overall benefit to the Club and/or its predominantly club session playing members. Doing so on a bi-annual basis would be far more than “just doing our bit” for NZB. I believe NZB needs to rethink its current policy of outsourcing many tournaments to be serviced by Club Volunteers. A Club should be focused on providing a quality experience for its playing members which includes how to most efficiently use its limited Volunteer resource- using some of its Volunteer resource to service NZB is counterproductive.

Maintenance

Following the chair upgrade in 2016 a carpet replacement has been just finished. Both of these have significant grant funding (chairs - \$5k of ~\$8k; carpet -\$11k of \$18.5k). This is a process of maintaining and/or improving the interior premises to a high level to provide an enjoyable playing environment. Tony Clear was a big help on the carpet install as well as the earlier external wheel stop install (grant \$2.1k). I believe this improvement programme should be continued with an interior repaint and double-glazed windows. Exterior is maintained to a high standard by Carolyn Brodie (and team).

Technology

While there has been a considerable investment in better technology, there is still a way to go – as evidenced by our computer malfunctions since last December! We have invested in new tablets (fully funded by \$5.8k grant), new website (Pianola) with new functions such as Partner Finder, new soundsystem, new timer by Duane Griffin, but the uptake has been sporadic and needs to be ‘driven’ more.

Finance

Generally, the Club is in very good financial health, with a strong balance sheet (and with building and carpark ex land insurance valued at >\$1.2M), with cashflow at roughly break even. This has enabled us to consider using financial techniques to assist playing numbers at sessions eg discounts for those struggling financially and/or discounts for newcomers and “out-of-towners”.

We have >\$60k in revenue (ex grants) and similar in expenses. We have an obligation to ensure all practical steps are taken to increase security. This extends beyond “2 signatory” banking (which is still on the “to do” list), to other major areas such as cash handling of tournament and session monies, as well as external rentals. I think we have dropped the ball a bit here.

Governance

In 2016/2017 NZB was in disarray with poor governance displayed leading to a 'whistle-blower' affair. PNBC took an active role in sorting things out. NZB now seems to be functioning much better, with virtually a complete new board. An PNBC AGM remit in 2017 required a PNBC SGM to be called if NZB didn't enact certain constitutional reforms. It did and no such SGM was needed.

As to our own governance, I am standing down as required under the Rules. I do think the Club needs more flexibility on limiting the President's term to 2 years. I think this rule harks back to days when the role was seen as 'holding the fort' rather than a more proactive approach which is I think required now. Two years is also rather stifling when you consider that most of the first year is mostly locked in stone with the Session Programme in place thru to end of year. A change to the rule was initially proposed by Tony Clear, and Committee debate led to the final wording of the proposed Remit which recognizes that new blood is essential but tempers that with the practicality that new blood may not always be immediately forthcoming.

The new Committee up for election has I think a suitable blend of new enthusiastic blood and old experienced blood. I wish them every success.

Over and out!

Graeme Thomson
President