



# Hartford Bridge Club

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### April 2022 Monthly Newsletter

Hi Everyone,

It is springtime and our hearts and minds are overflowing with the renewal that budding flowers, chirping birds and warming sun brings. There is also lots at the bridge club to feel good about. Our weekly live games are starting to creep back into the double digits, and we can only hope the warmer weather, returning snowbirds and everyone learning to live with the pandemic brings out more players. Our beginner lessons are well attended, drawing more than 35 different persons to the six lessons, which end on April 3. We hope to provide a second round of beginner lessons sometime soon. We are particularly grateful to our table buddies who make the beginner lessons and assisted play sessions a fun and happy experience for those new players. Those table buddies are Carol Amaio, Peggy Arseneaux, Judy Cavagnaro, John Calderbank, Nancy Calderbank, Mary Eisenberg, Ausra Geaski, Lori Leopold, Betty Kerber, Mary Sullivan, John Willoughby. These folks deserve everyone's enormous gratitude. They typify the best of the club's culture. If you are interested in being a table buddy—a rewarding experience in and of itself—please contact Felix. We can always use more volunteers.

As we hope you have noticed, we are continually trying to get people to come to the club or come back to the club. Some of those efforts are detailed below. We are also constantly exploring ways to enhance our games and make them special. You will see some of those efforts in April. Please read the newsletters. Let us also make yet another plea to make the directors lives a little easier. If you are going to play in a live game, please register. It is simple and takes but a minute. If you need to, call in advance and someone will register you. Also if you find you have to cancel, please do so as soon as you know you can't make a game. Our directors spend a lot of time last minute scrambling to try to fill out a table because of people who show up without registering or others who don't show up who have registered. So please show our directors the courtesy they deserve.

We are also going to continue to celebrate those members who perform well at our games. At the end of the newsletter, we list those who have achieved 70% games or where "C" strat players have placed first in their section in games with six or more tables. Kudos to all who have performed so well.

Among the efforts we have made to get more people to the club is to find every person with an ACBL number within 50 miles of the club who has not been a member of the club. Through Mike Wavada and John Willoughby's efforts, we reached 448 persons. A copy of the email we sent is below. Alas, we only heard from eight people in response to the email. Moreover, just a couple of those eight showed real interest in participating in club events either live or online. If we ever needed evidence that the club and the bridge world is bucking headwinds, the response to this overture provided it.

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**EMAIL TO NON-HBC ACBL MEMBERS IN AREA**

This is being written to you because we have recently received notice that you have moved into the area or live in the area and have been a member of the ACBL in the past. The Hartford Bridge Club loves bridge players like you. Indeed, it has nearly 400 members who are avid bridge players. We would love the opportunity for you to join them and play bridge with them. The club is the largest bridge club in New England. It is member owned, so the members themselves control the games and activities of the club. It prides itself on being a friendly, welcoming place where people make lifelong friends. We also have lots of educational activities for every level of bridge player. If you have been away from the game and desire to return to it, we have just the programs for you.

Despite the challenges of the pandemic we continue to have live games as well as online games. Do you need a partner? Contact us, and we will find someone to pair you with, whether you have lots of masterpoints or very few.

Please take a few minutes and check us out at [www.hartfordbridgeclub.org](http://www.hartfordbridgeclub.org), or email me at [felixjspringer1@gmail.com](mailto:felixjspringer1@gmail.com) for more information. We look forward to hearing from you in the near future.

All the best,

Felix Springer

President, Hartford Bridge Club

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Similarly, we have written to everyone who has been a member of the club in the last few years, but has not rejoined—well over 100 people—and everyone who took beginner lessons just prior to the pandemic hitting in March of 2019 who has not participated in anything at the club since then—more than 60 folks. We have asked what the club can do to rekindle their interest in bridge and in participating in lessons or games at the club. Here we have had some successes; not as many as we would wish for, but we keep trying. Unfortunately for the club, we learned that many people have moved South. One of the headwinds we are facing.

Lastly, as part of this newsletter we thought we would share with you some recent correspondence with the 7NT World Alliance. 7NT World, an alliance of two major Boston clubs, the Bridge Spot and the Newton Bridge Club, along with the old 7NT bridge club in Stamford and the Essex Bridge Center in New Jersey, as well as several smaller clubs primarily in Massachusetts approached us to join the alliance. At the beginning of March, John Willoughby, Sally Kirtley and we two participated in a 40-minute zoom conference call with the three principals of 7NT. They were very eager for the Hartford Bridge Club to join them. We obtained considerable information about what it would mean for our club to join them. The key questions were what would the club gain by joining and what could it lose? In other words, what are the benefits and risks? We did a thorough analysis of those questions and had a thorough discussion at the club's Board of Trustees meeting. Felix was designated to communicate with Joe Grill, one of the principals of the 7NT World Alliance, the results of that discussion. Below is Felix's letter and Joe Grill's response.

That's all for now. We'd love to hear from you. Remember it's your club and you matter to us.

All our very best,

Donna and Felix

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Joe,

Yesterday we had a thorough discussion at our monthly board meeting of the prospect of the Hartford Bridge Club (HBC) joining 7NT World's alliance of bridge clubs. We very much appreciated the information you, David and Dean so graciously shared with us last Thursday. We carefully reviewed that information as well as performed an analysis of the potential financial impact on HBC of joining 7NT world.

Several matters stood out for the board. First, we looked at the last six months of online revenue and compared it with what HBC would receive from 7NT world assuming we had the same number of tables. Essentially, HBC would receive on average about \$75 a month less than we currently receive if we received \$2 a player. The consensus on the board was moreover that it was highly unlikely that HBC members would play at 7NT World games as frequently as they play at HBC online games, let alone more frequently. One, they are a dollar more (HBC games cost \$5 while 7NT World games cost \$6) and our limited game players are particularly fond of playing with one another and indeed are not particularly happy to see substitutes in their games. Further, we struggle to have and maintain our open online games. They cost \$3 a game and still aren't thriving. We lose a considerable number of open players to BBO's \$2.29 games and it again appeared to the board that these players are very unlikely to find 7NT World games particularly attractive if we couldn't get them to HBC open online games. I note also that we are trying to add to our limited face-to-face games at the club and the board was concerned about just how much appetite there would be for bridge among limited players, as many of these players participate in both live and online games and board didn't want anything to jeopardize the viability of these games. The additional masterpoints available and frequency of 7NT World games were just not thought to be a sufficient draw. In short, the board consensus was that joining 7NT World was likely to be a money losing proposition or at the very rosiest projections something close to break even. Second, there was real concern about our directors. There are currently 8 online games and we appreciated your willingness to find slots for them, but the board was concerned about inevitable conflicts and the loss of a tight-knit loyal unit. Further, HBC takes very seriously that it is a club with a heart. Our games are not like tournament games and people are forgiving of other players' peccadilloes, particularly in our limited games. We noted your pride in your "tournament-like" games and the instructions you give directors and that is commendable, but that is not in line with our culture. Third, the board unanimously was very concerned about the loss of the club's identity. We are the oldest club in North America and take great pride in that and the culture that has been built. We have a large number of very loyal members and there was concern that that loyalty and identity would be adversely affected by joining with 7NT World. Joining would affect our educational programs as well as those who are giving freely and generously of their time and money to the club. In addition, there were other issues that the board did not consider, but would have to be analyzed if HBC joined 7NT World, e.g., the effect on HBC's 501 (c)(3) status.

The bottom line is that HBC is not prepared to join 7NT World at this time. As we know, the bridge world and a club's circumstances can change rapidly. I also want to thank you, Dean and David again for generously sharing how 7NT World works. Considering whether to join was a very useful exercise for our

board and I hope the length of this email and the issues addressed convey how seriously we took your overture to HBC.

One last thought—our common enemy is BBO's \$2.29 games. Have you given any thought to a lobbying effort to have some of the money from those games go to clubs? Clubs have been decimated as you and I well know. Any thoughts?

Thanks again and thanks for reaching out to us.

Best,  
Felix

**From:** [Joseph Grill](#)

**Sent:** Wednesday, March 16, 2022 10:10 PM

**To:** [Felix Springer](#)

**Subject:** Re: 7NT World Alliance

Felix,

I thank you for your prompt and very thorough response. I know that your board has already made a decision, but please allow me to respond to your concerns should you wish to examine this in the future. Our real goal is to form an alliance of D25 clubs. Since HBC is the largest and oldest club in D25, we were really hoping you would be a part of our team. This decision is certainly a disappointment to us.

Considering the size of your club, \$75 per month seems to be "in the noise." Wouldn't you agree? Certainly, if it were a matter of \$75, we wouldn't let that stand in the way, but it seems like that's not the main issue. One of the things that we can show is clubs that give their players more options will get their players to play more. We even have a unique loyalty program at our club that rewards players for doing so. I hesitate to bring this up because I don't want to generate any ill will, but a handful of players from your club do play as guests in our club from time to time. Please understand that we did not court any of them. We never ever poach. They found us through word of mouth or came in with a friend who is a member of our club. These players would be credited to your club as they would no longer be our guests, but your members. As for your limited game players, if they want to play face to face, they will. If they want to play online they will choose one of the big alliances who are more than happy to admit them given the relaxed guest policy. They might also choose the new BBO 499er games for \$2. I just hate losing players to Southeast because of the unethical business practices they have employed.

When we created 7NTWorld by combining with the 2 clubs in Boston in 2020, a couple of my 499ers did bring up the fact that they were unsure about playing against "strangers." How does the cliché go? "A stranger is just a friend you haven't met yet." Many of them do things like attend After-Talks, Supervised play and our free lessons. They have gotten to know each other by chatting at the table. I even have a partnership matching service and have paired up players from all over New England. Some have even made plans to meet at Nationals in the summer to play F2F after developing an online partnership! How great is that??? We might even get a cocktail hour together for all of our players. Anyway, while a handful did bring up an objection early on, these objections quickly vanished when they realized that

they would get to meet new people, earn more points and have more game choices.

Our directors are excellent and we focus on customer service. Many of our director meetings on Sunday evening focus on how we can serve the players better. From day 1, when I ran my face-to-face club I asked myself every day-- what does the customer want? How do I make the customer happy? True, we can make very technically correct rulings when needed... but....we use teams to make tough decisions, which frankly come up in the open games primarily. I cannot remember the last time I was called for something like a hesitation in a limited MP game. We have a very gentle approach to our limited games and always consider the level of the game when making rulings. If you would like to have one of our directors join us for a session and see how we actually run things, I'm sure you would be impressed. As for the \$2.29 games, I agree they are killers. However, there's nothing that can be done about these games. Many people have the misconception that because it has "ACBL" in the title on BBO, that the ACBL is somehow running these. These games are not run by the ACBL in any way. These games are run by BBO, using BBO directors, under BBO's ACBL sanction like any private club. The ACBL receives only the 25 cent sanction fee from BBO for these games and the remainder is kept by BBO. The ACBL would have no more means of coercing BBO to hand over this money than they would at coercing your private club to do so. BBO owns the platform and they have an iron-clad contract that runs for 2.5 more years that allows them to run online bridge. I shake my head every single time someone brings this topic up at the Round Table meeting...there's nothing that can be done about these for about 2 years. By that time, it may be too late for many clubs.

Our door is always open. But please, consider the direction things are heading online. The ACBL has loosened the restrictions in steps at every turn and frankly many of the people making the decisions do not understand online bridge. Do you remember the progression? First, there were no guests. Then, clubs could waive their members and allow them into other clubs. Then 5% guests with no guest-guest pairs. Then 15% with guest-guests allowed. Currently 15% with 4 FREE guests per game and anyone playing with club members or free agents don't count as guests! What's the next loosening that will occur? What IF they lift the restrictions and let clubs compete freely? Where does that leave all of us? In my opinion, the only way to survive and keep our players is to work together as a unified D25. Big games get bigger and small games die out. If you joined us and we billed our club as a D25 club, I think we could get others to join. As for a loss of identity, I don't have a snappy reply. Online identity is going to be diluted for sure. We all agreed to give up some of that individuality in order to form this club. Was it worth the trade off? I'm biased, but I say it was a good thing for my club.

Just a heads up about Southeast...the ACBL is allowing them to add new members if the member can show that the player has no "reasonable place to play." If you don't have an open game, your open players can be "justifiably" added to Southeast's include list. Southeast encourages all of their guests to apply for membership at their club and even tells them exactly what to say to Lynn Chapin to get in. It sickens me.

I smell dinner cooking so I'll stop now. 😊

All the best,

Joe Grill

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### **Strat "C" Winners in Open Games- Section Top**

Bernhard Kohn, Jr. and Joanne Lloyd 63.89%

**Strat "C" Winners in Limited Masterpoint Games-Section Tops**

3/1 Cindy Martin and Jane Freeman 63.27%  
3/7 Elizabeth Barnicoat and Alan Dornan 56.04%  
3/14 Jan McLaurin and J. Lewis Corbin 67.64%  
3/26 Margaret and Kurt Muscanell 60.19%  
3/31 Stephen Swigert and Jane Freeman 59.72%

**70% Games**

3/15 Bill Wininger and Barbara Fletcher 70.14%  
3/15 John Lloyd and Donna Simpson 71.53%  
3/19 Robert Yavis and John Yavis, Jr. 76.04%  
3/23 Barbara Willard and Deborah Walsh 71.53%  
3/29 Dan Koepf and Mike Shore 71.56%  
3/31 John Stiefel and Geoffrey Brod 70.14%