

FAQs About On-Line Play at Eastern Iowa Bridge Clubs

Who can play in the Eastern Iowa Bridge Virtual Club games?

Our games been created through BBO to serve the 'regular' patrons of our local clubs. The ACBL has a list of who has been playing at which clubs, and the roster of eligible players begins with the list of our recent masterpoint winners. If you've been away for a while (or didn't win points at the Club in the last year), you can request us to place you on the roster, but the intent is to re-create the normal Club experience on-line, not to recruit outside players.

For the time being, all Virtual Club games are Open games (no masterpoint restrictions).

Must the players be ACBL members?

No. However, (1) members without an ACBL number are placed in the A (highest) scoring strata, and (2) non-ACBL members will not be able to play in limited-point games, when are able to have them.

If you have not entered your ACBL number with BBO, you should do so before registering for the virtual Club game. (To do this, log on, click on "ACBL World", and locate the blue tab that indicates "Update Your ACBL Number".)

Why Should I be an ACBL member?

There are several reasons why you should want to be an ACBL member. You cannot receive masterpoints from ACBL without the membership link. Additionally, ACBL membership gets you automatically included as a player eligible to play in all of our affiliated Eastern Iowa bridge clubs. Stratification in these games is based upon your current masterpoint holding. BBO stratifies the field by thirds. Top third. Middle third. Bottom third. The Bridge Bulletin alone is worth the price of membership. And, finally, the staff of the ACBL has done an immense amount of work making it possible to play sanctioned duplicate bridge on line during the pandemic – they deserve your membership support.

To join or renew your ACBL membership, go to acbl.org. The "join" and "renew" buttons are right at the top of the home page. Or you can contact us.

Do I get assigned a partner, or can I bring my regular partner?

You should bring your regular partner (or a new partner) to the game, assuming they are also ACBL members and have registered with BBO for on-line play. There is an on-line 'Partnership Desk' for each event. It is best if you arrange a game with someone you know. Unattached partners can see each other and can communicate with each other by chatting. If you recognize someone, invite them to be your partner. If your unsuccessful in getting a partner let me know and you will be assigned a partner from the BBO substitute list.

Are robots used in the Club play?

No. You must play with a real person.

Can I earn regular ACBL masterpoints for playing at the Virtual Club?

Current ACBL members can earn masterpoints at virtual club games. So long as 18 boards are played, virtual club games currently award ACBL black points at 150% of the standard club award. The games are stratified according to the Masterpoint holdings of the registered pairs. Awards are (as at physical Clubs) by stratification.

Okay, how many boards will we play?

In this early rollout of virtual club games, we are scheduling 18 board games, 7 minutes per board, 3 boards per round; this will result in a game of about two hours. Based on BBO experience we will likely move the board timing to 6 minutes. Based on your feedback we may increase the number of boards played. Please share your preferences with by sending us email. Eighteen board games award a full club rating with black points.

7 minutes per board!? What happens if I can't keep up?

The computer is keeping track of the time, and if the time runs out in a round, you will be taken directly to the next round (even in the middle of a hand). If that occurs, the computer will determine what would have occurred, and will assign a score. In the event the outcome is not determined, the computer will ask the presiding Director for a ruling, just as at the Club. But play will not be delayed if a table does not keep up a proper pace.

But don't be overly concerned. On line, you don't move boards, count your cards, sort your cards, keep score, or even write down your contracts. All that is done by the computer. After one session of play on BBO, it isn't hard at all to average six minutes per board.

So, is there a Director?

Yes. Your on-line game Director will be one of the regular Directors at the Club. This means that you will probably know the Director. The bad news? They will also know you. So, much like the physical Club, please treat your game Director with some respect...

How much does a session cost to play?

A virtual session of Eastern Iowa Bridge costs \$4. 80% of revenues collected by BBO are returned to the local club(s) to help keep the clubs in business until the CoronaVirus has retreated. Your support is truly appreciated.

... and how do I pay?

Payment on BBO is made at registration time when you invite your partner and they accept your invitation. Payment is through the use of BridgeBase dollars (BB\$).

What are BridgeBase dollars (BB\$), and how do I get them?

BB\$ are simply credits that a player may purchase (through the BBO site). There several methods by which one can purchase BB\$ (credit card, PayPal, etc). Information can be found on the BBO site by clicking on the BB\$ tab at the top right of your screen (next to your name) after logging on.

What else is different about playing on-line?

There are several things that you should be aware of when playing on-line. The pace of play is a bit 'brisker' than at the club. While there remains a social aspect, it usually occurs after the hands in the current round are concluded. And we expect that if you can claim (or concede) the rest of the tricks, you will do so promptly to keep the game moving. There is a "Claim" button on the screen when you are playing or defending a hand.

Additionally, players 'self-Alert' their artificial bids. Unlike the Club, where you Alert your partner's bids, on-line we Alert our own bids and calls. You do this by entering the meaning of Alertable bids on the line provided when it is your turn to call; then hit the Alert button before actually entering the call you are making (bid, pass, double, or redouble). YOUR PARTNER WILL NOT SEE YOUR ALERTS. When you receive an Alert from an opponent, they are NOT CHEATING... remember, their partner cannot see their information to you.

Chatting at the table is permitted (there is a message button available at the bottom of your screen), but anything you say to the Table is public information and can be seen by all parties. You can communicate privately with either or both opponents, but not privately to your partner.

And (fortunately for the game Director) there is no Bridgemate upon which you can enter or approve wrong results. All results are recorded automatically, so you don't have to worry about checking the accuracy of the final results.

When should I expect to find games on-line?

We are starting with games at 11:30 AM on Monday, April 27 and at 6:30 PM on Tuesday April 28. If these games are successful, we will add additional games at the normal times for each of the participating clubs. What we add will be based on your comments.

Remember that the scheduled games will not show up on the BBO website until 2 hours before the start of the game. Registration will be available at that time.

And where, exactly, do I pre-register for a game?

Log in to www.Bridgebase.com. Find the section for "Play or Watch Bridge" (blue stripe). Click on "Competitive". Under "Tournaments" (green stripe), click on "ACBL Virtual Clubs". Look for games identified as Eastern Iowa Bridge. Click on the game to see details about the game or to send an Invitation to your partner for play in the event. Hint: Unless you plan to pay for your partner, your registration will be pending until your partner also logs on and accepts your invitation to play. Please stay on-line until this occurs and you receive a confirmation that your entry has been completed. Once the registration is complete, you do NOT need to stay on-line. Please log back on a bit prior to the game start time to make certain you have no connection issues.

Is there a partnership person available ?

All scheduled games will show up on BBO under 'Competitive', then 'ACBL Virtual Club' two hours before the scheduled game. There is a partnership link just to the right of 'register'; look upper section of the tournament information. Register there if you are looking for a partner.

I'd like to play, but have never done this before, how can I learn ?

If you would like to get familiar with BBO, you can play for free via their casual play. You can play with your own partner, or have one assigned to you. We encourage you to feel comfortable with the BBO software before joining a virtual club game.

A good way to learn BBO if you don't want to jump into a game with strangers is to host a game with three of your friends. Set a time and learn their BBO ids, and set up a game from the logon screen like this:

1. Play or Watch Bridge – **Casual**
2. Find Your Own Game – **Start a Table**
3. Pick the **Scoring** method – **Total Points** (This is Chicago scoring)
4. Privacy Options – **Permission Required to Play** and **Invisible ON**, all others OFF. If you forget to turn Invisible ON, you are likely to have strangers try to join the game.
5. **Reserve Seats** for the four players by clicking on each direction and entering their BBO ID's.
6. **Start Table – Relaxed Game**. Your friends will be invited to your table as soon as they log on to BBO.

Can anyone kibitz a game ?

Security issues here - no kibitzers, no chats while hands are being played.

Are games stratified ?

Currently the BBO software stratifies games proportionally based on the players in each specific game. One third of the game is assigned to each of three stratifications. Later the BBO software may be able to stratify in our more traditional fashion, though it is not yet available.

Can I play on any device ?

We know you can play on a computer and on an iPad. You will probably find playing on a computer easier.

Why can't we have 299er games ?

BBO and the ACBL are trying to come up with solutions to please everyone and every club. Limited games and traditionally stratified games are both on the drawing board right now. And we aren't yet ready to take on more than one section of on-line bridge per club.

Keep in mind that all games are going to be stratified. We encourage you to play: both for fun and to support our Bridge Clubs. If this effort is successful, we will be able to expand and add some limited-point games in the future.

Where will the results be shown ?

BBO and the ACBL have been working to have all virtual club games displayed on Live for Clubs. This function is supposed to be working now – we will find out! It is unlikely we will be able to have club results on our local club sites.

Do you need substitutes ?

You can sign up as a substitute once the game begins. You will see the substitute button towards the bottom left of your screen. Let the game host know that you'd like to sub for us, Eastern Iowa Bridge. Substitutes are not charged.

Game time issues can be a problem.

If you are not online when a game begins you will not be seated. We encourage all registered players to be ready to go about 10 minutes before the announced start. Please do not wait until the last minute to register, it is a busy time for your directors.

Also, be aware that BBO has seen immense growth in use since the pandemic struck, and its resources are stretched to the limit. There are times it will be hard to log on, and getting dropped from games happens occasionally. If that happens, log off and back on, and you will be re-seated at your table. But don't be surprised if a glitch or two happens during a session. We'll figure out how to work through it.

How do I load a convention card ?

The right-side tab Profile will let you load a stock convention card (many available) or create and edit your own card. You can have separate cards for different partners, and BBO will load the appropriate card when the partnership is "seated" at a table. It is okay to ask the table for help if you get stuck. Remember, on BBO we alert and explain our own calls. Learn how to private chat your opponents too, it's easy.

Convention Card?

Casual players have been known to play without a convention card. In sanctioned duplicate games, they really should have one. If you don't have your own card, BBO defaults you to Standard American Yellow Card (SAYC). SAYC is more complicated than how most casual players bid. For example, SAYC includes Michaels cue bids. If you are using the default convention card and not playing Michaels, you are misleading your opponents about the meaning of your bids. You should really fill out a card. At a minimum, let your opponents at each table know, via chat, that you are not playing the conventions on the card they see if they look at yours.

Very Important

If you and your partner are playing at the same location, you are honor bound not to discuss the hands, bidding or play during the game. BBO has ways of identifying cheaters and they will not be tolerated.

We are standing reading to pass along any information as it comes our way. If you have other questions please feel free to write to EasternIowaBridge@gmail.com.