

ACBL Virtual Club Games – Visitor Policy (version 4)

When the COVID-19 pandemic shut down face-to-face bridge, the ACBL moved quickly to allow bridge clubs to start playing online on the BBO platform. There were three main objectives to an online social bridge club project, branded as Virtual Club games:

(1) Allow bridge clubs to continue to operate and generate income so that they could survive the period during which their club was shut down.

(2) Allow our players an opportunity to play with friends from their local club. The social aspects of bridge cannot be understated. Everyone could have played in Speedball games or Support Your Club (SYC) games, but a large majority of our players want to play with people they know.

(3) Replace some of the table fee income that ACBL lost.

To implement Virtual Club games, a list was created for each club. The list included players who had played in that club from January 2019 through February 2020. New ACBL members who listed a particular club as referring them were also added to the referring club's list. What has in effect happened is that we have turned every club into an invitational club, but the ACBL is still awarding full masterpoints.

Why did this need to be done? Why not just let everyone play wherever they want? While allowing a totally free marketplace may have helped objective #3 above, it would have destroyed objectives #1 and #2. If every player could play everywhere, the friendly club atmosphere goes away and, even worse, price wars could start as clubs realize that pricing their games lower than others would attract more players. Without this invitational club concept, the ACBL might as well have just started running SYC games all day every day and forgotten about Virtual Clubs.

Virtual Club games have worked quite well, but one issue is that the ACBL cannot prevent clubs from allowing players who are not on their authorized players list – (also called the Include List) – into their Virtual Club games. This is due to some BBO technical limitations, particularly when it comes to non-members. There are some genuine reasons why it might be right to allow someone into a Virtual Club game who is not on that club's Include List. As such, this Policy will be reviewed routinely, and it is subject to change. We joined the online world more than 2 years ago, yet we regularly learn new things. The main objective is, as always, to do what is best for our members and our clubs.

Revised Visitor Policy

Your online club, as an invitational club, is not required to allow anyone into your Virtual Club game who is not a member. For Virtual Club games, a member is someone who appears on the club's Include List. You may, however, allow non-member players into your Virtual Club Games with the following stipulations:

1) You may allow anyone who played in your club January 1st, 2019 through end-February 2020, and who was left off your initial list of authorized members. (To report these omissions, please email VACB@acbl.org and request they be added to your Include List.)

2) You may allow your members to play with a visiting partner. When a visitor plays with a club member, they will not be counted as a visitor for that game. The number of visiting players should be kept to less than 15% of your field, on average. (The ACBL will consider numbers in the aggregate, weekly. Presently the "weeks" are calculated Saturday through Friday. The start/end days of the week are subject to future change.) **IMPORTANT NOTE: Clubs with games totaling 50 tables or less per week will be excluded from the 15% Visitor Policy cap.**

3) You are not to solicit outside players to find a partner and come play at your club. You may communicate with your members to tell them they are welcome to bring a guest (as in #2 above). You may also allow occasional visiting pairs, but remember that this will count as two visitors toward your weekly total.

4) ACBL will allow each game to have 4 visitors "for free," prior to calculating the weekly overall percentages. If a club exceeds 15% after this step, the club will be considered in violation of this Policy.

The mechanism to allow a visiting player into your Virtual Club Game is to "follow" them on BBO with your VACB ID. Once you have "followed" them to allow them to play, unless you restore their relationship back to "neutral" after the game, that player will be able to register for your future Virtual Club games without visibility to you. You are responsible for keeping your visiting players under 15% of your total entries.

Violations of Visitor Policy

Repeated violations of this Visitor Policy will lead to consequences up to and including removal of the club's ability to run online games. The process is as follows:

- 1) The first time a club exceeds the 15% visitor limit, they will receive an email advising them they've erred, and asking the club to be vigilant.
- 2) If a club exceeds the limit two weeks in a row, or 3 weeks out of any 5-week period, they will incur an erasure of their "friends list," (defined as the list of players that have been "followed" by the VACB).

- 3) If your "friends list" is erased twice, your club will be prohibited from running online games for a period of one week.
- 4) If your "friends list" is erased a third time, your club will be prohibited from running online games for a period of one month.
- 5) If your "friends list" is erased a fourth time, your VACB will be revoked, and you will no longer be able to run ACBL games on BBO.

Please remember that the ability to run your club games online is a privilege, not a right. None of the ACBL's club sanctions include anything regarding running games online – sanctions are solely for face-to-face games.

While most bridge clubs have shown a great sense of cooperation and community, there have been instances of what the ACBL considers unfair business practices. Examples include, but are not limited to, unreasonable price undercutting, purposefully scheduling games to mirror a competitor's schedule, and naming events to appear as a competitor's events. Depending on the flagrancy and level of any violation, warnings, suspension, and revocation of a club's VACB rights will be considered.

The existence and severity of any violation, and the implementation of any corrective action, will be determined by the ACBL in its sole discretion.

By running an ACBL Virtual Club, you have agreed to the terms of this Visitor Policy.

Effective Date: June 1, 2022