

# **Bridge Fix needed? -- Try Bridge Base Online (BBO)!**

*Teri Smoot*

Bridge clubs closed? Experiencing bridge withdrawl? Well, you don't really have to. There is an alternative and that alternative is to go online. There actually is a way to get your fix and play this wonderful game with both friends and new friends. Its called Bridge Base Online. Heard about it but haven't got around to trying it yet?

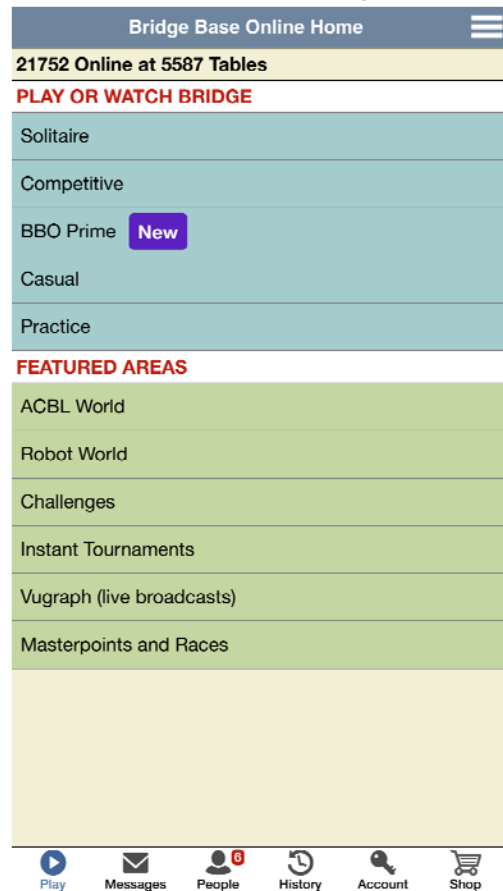
Well I heard some advice on the radio last night, it said to have inner peace, that we should always finish things we start, and we all could use more calm in our lives. I looked through my house to find things that I'd started and hadn't finished, so I finished off a bottle of Merlot, a bottle of Whiskey, a bodle of Baileys, a butle of wum, tha mainder of Valiumun sriptuns, an a box a chocletz. Yu haf no idr how feckin fablus I feel rite now. Sned this to all who need inner piss. An telum u luvum. And two al bee hapee wilst in de instalation.

So, while you have finished off some of the stuff you needed to, lets start on another one. Getting into the wonderful world of online bridge, You actually have several options but the online platform that everyone is moving to right now is Bridge Base Online, commonly known as BBO. And that is the one I am going to focus on right now.

With BBO, you have several options. You can signup for free at [www.BridgeBase.com](http://www.BridgeBase.com). If you go to that page, you will see a big red "Play Bridge Now" button. Click that and it will take you to a "sign up/sign in" page. Click on the "Become a Member" button and enter some nominal information (E-mail, ACBL number if you have one, system information, etc.) and register. You're now a member and can logon and play bridge. (Note, you can play on BBO using your computer. There is also an App that you can use and that is how I normally play. Most of the things I explain below will be based on using the App but I will talk about using a computer as well.)

Once you get signed on to BBO, you have several options. When you first get on, you will see a page very similar to the one shown here. (This is an iPhone screen, the "Play", "Messages", "People", "History", "Account", and "Shop" tabs shown at the bottom of this figure will likely be someone else if you are using a computer -- on the far right on my computer monitor -- and may say something slightly different. Explore the interface to find what you want.)

The blue area on the top of the screen can be used to set up some practice tables, just play bridge in a solitaire more, or to set up more competitive games. The green area below leads to larger games. If you are an ACBL member and purchase Bridge Bucks, you can click on the ACBL World button and it will take you to the pending ACBL games. These take several forms and cost different amounts of Bridge Bucks. You can play with and against robots or can play in competitive



games against other players. And, the ACBL is setting up features that will allow directors to set up games for members of different clubs. Until these features are implemented, you can still support your club by playing in the ACBL "Support Your Club" games. Doing so will help keep your local clubs alive. Once you get on, explore this and other buttons. But read through my discussion of styles and how to play on BBO first. It can be quite a shock the first time you enter into a game!

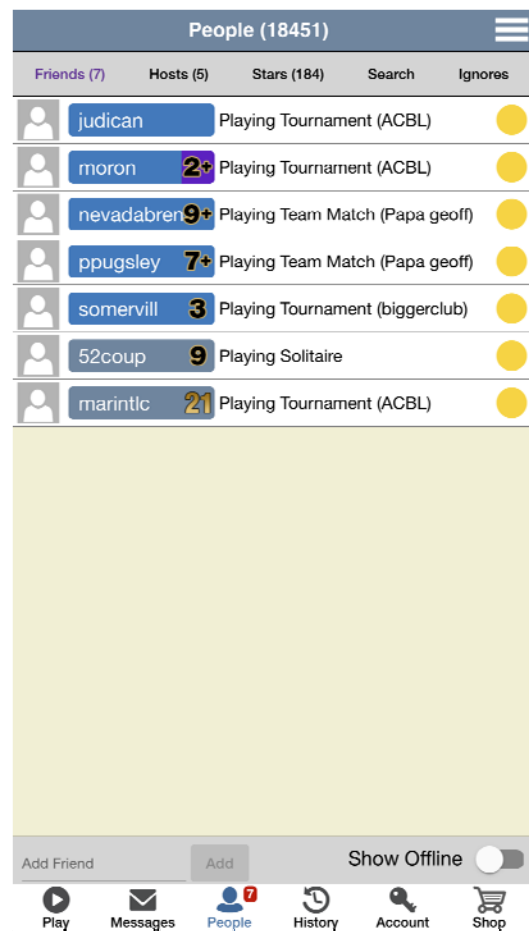
Almost the first thing you do when you register will be to pick a "Username". This is what you will be know as to the BBO community and that is the name that will be used to invite you to tables, identify your convention card, etc. It is important to remember this and to share usernames with other people you want to play with. The importance will become evident as we talk about the tabs at the bottom of the screen (on the iPhone).

The "Play" tab is the first one shown. If you click on this, you will either be taken back into a game you may be playing or be taken to the "home screen" shown in the previous figure. So, use this tab as a general "home" button. The next tab is the "Messages" tab. BBO has a very elaborate Chat function built into it. You can use it to chat with people you knw (more about that in a bit), with people kibitzing a game, or with the Table in general (when you are playing a game). In some of the more informal games, you can also chat with your partner (however, in most of the competitive games this capability is turned "off").

One very key tab is the next one, the one called "People". If you click on this, you will find a screen similar to the one shown here. You can use the "People" tab to add the people you might want to play with to your friends list. You do need to know their username for this and they will show up according to their username. (See the Add Friend space and Add button at the bottom of the screen. If you type in your friend's username and hit add, that friend will be added to your friends list.). When you go to this tab, you will see which of your friends are on line and what they are doing. If the event allows, you can go an kibitz them by clicking on their username and saying "join" on the screen that shows us (see next figure, in the upper right).

Note, you can click the "invisible" button on the signon page and your username won't show up. Also, if you toggle the Show Offline switch at the very bottom, then you can see the usernames of all the people that you have in your friends list. This friends list is very nice once you have a group playing and can serve as a central "hub" for organizing things. If you make yourself "invisible", however, you lose some of the chat functionality and friends won't necessarily know you are there when you log on to BBO.

The tab after "people" is the history tab. I'm not going to go into any detail about this tab at this time. Suffice it to say that once you have played a fair amount, this tab will fill up with all the games you have played. You can go back and review what you and your opponents did both bid by bid and, if you want card by card. There



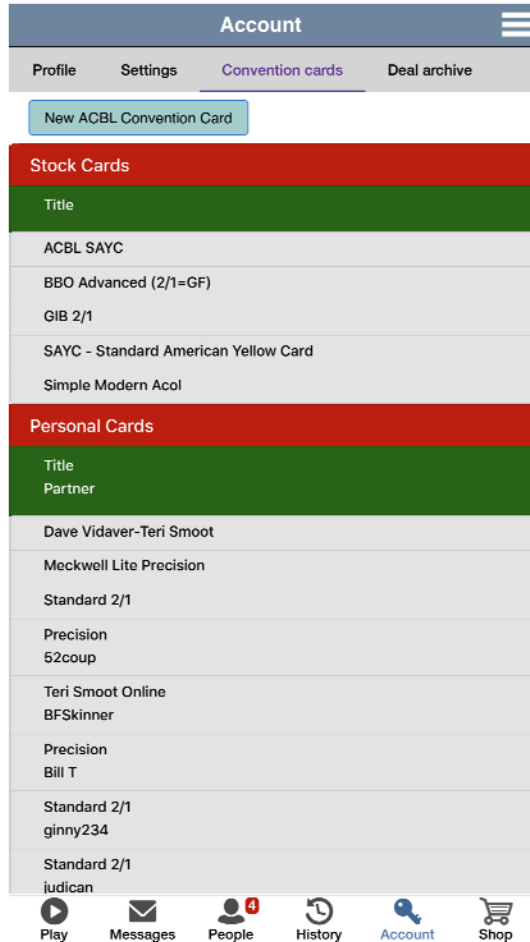
are some other things accessible by this tab but probably of interest only to the real serious player.

The next tab is the Account tab. Again, much of what you find there is not of critical interest and, dear reader, you can explore that on your own. However, there is one part of this that is critical (especially if you are reasonably serious about your systems of play). This is the "Convention Card" area. When you play bridge on BBO, you can play with three robots and just practice. Alternately, you and your partner can set up a table with two robots and play against them. You can also set up a table and invite friends to that table (I will discuss this more below). Finally, you can play with your partner in various ACBL events against other bridge players.

When you play with a partner against others, it will be assumed that you are playing the Standard American Yellow Card. If you want to play a specific set of systems, however, you can "click" on the Convention Card area of the Account tab and use that area to set up different convention cards for each of your partners. The picture at the right shows what this Convention Card area looks like. The button at the top (New ACBL Convention Card) is where you start building a card. When you make the convention card, there is a spot to enter the username of the person you play this card with. If you enter this, then the Convention Card will automatically show up when you start a new game with that partner.

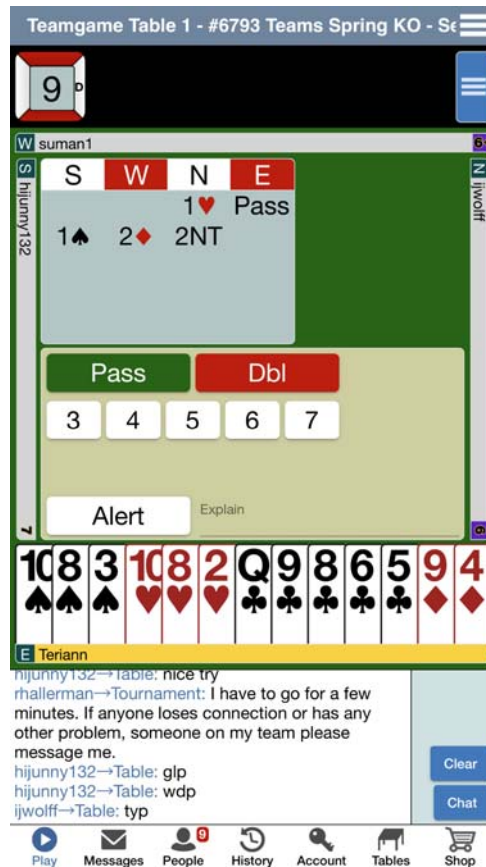
I find that it is as easy (or easier) to use the App on my iPhone for BBO and tend to do that most of the time. I suspect that the generation of convention cards might just be easier on a computer with a mouse. Note, once you have a card, double clicking the name will give you a view/edit/delete/use with partner option. You can use these to make duplicates of cards and have same with minor modifications between the cards.

Ok, let's say you've found your friends and made up a convention card and want to start playing bridge on BBO. And you've bought some Bridge Bucks (shop tab on the iPhone, BB\$ on a computer) so you can pay your way into the game. If you want to play in just a general game (to get the feel of BBO), you can click on the Casual portion of the play screen (see first figure). This will allow you to watch (highly recommended for a first timer) a game in play (use take me to an interesting table, watch) or to have your partner and yourself taken to a table. (You can also go yourself and take "pot luck" as to where you are assigned. I don't recommend using this mode, you might get stuck at a table with a partner who you don't like. And you will likely be dumped down in the middle of a hand. In these tables, opponents and partners also tend to randomly get up from the table and wander away. You might have to wait for someone to join you again. If you go to a table with a partner, these frustrations are significantly minimized.)



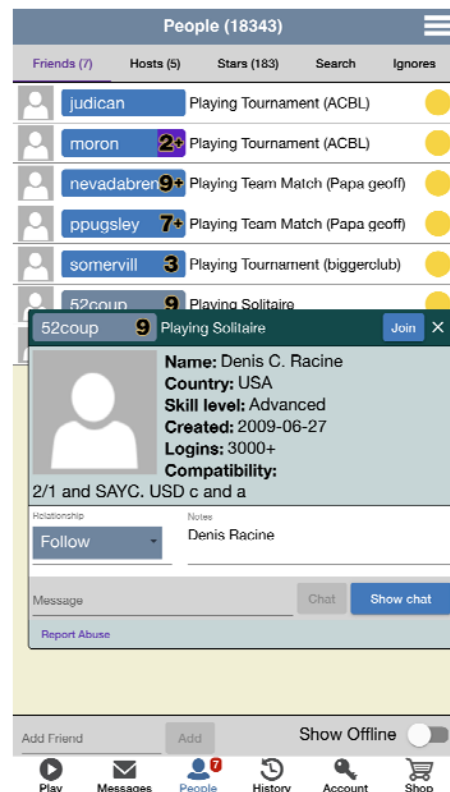
If you want to play in an ACBL game (and, in the near future, in a ACBL sponsored club game -- this aspect in work with BBO and the ACBL), when you click ACBL World, you will see a list of available games (and starting times). Click on the one you want to enter and you will be asked to define your partner (who also needs to be online when you enter a game). Then you wait until the game starts and you will automatically be taken to the table assigned you. One warning I would give is that if you go to a game with the name "speedball", those are games where you are expected to play three boards in fifteen minutes. If you are a slower player and want more time to think, you should probably play in the ACBL 18 board matches. Things may still move a bit faster than you are used to but these games are a bit easier.

Once you are taken to a game, you will see a screen similar to the one at the right (you have options to change the view of this a bit). Your hand will be presented at the bottom of the screen. The people at the table are shown around the edges (and if you click on their username, you will get a summary of how they play and, maybe, their real name). The bids so far are also shown. When your turn to bid comes, you will see a screen that allows you to make your bid (only legal bids are shown). You also get that Alert line below the bids. **One major difference between BBO and regular bridge is that you alert your own bids when you make them.** The opponents see what you type where it says "Explain" next to the Alert button but you partner will not see that. (The correct process is to type in the alert, click on the Alert button, and then enter your bid.)



Once the auction ends and a lead is made, the dummy will come down on the screen as well. As at a regular table, declarer plays both the dummy and declarer hands. The defenders play their own hands. You play a card by clicking on it. If you look at the figure, you will see that the username Teriann is highlighted in yellow (or orange?). This color highlights the person whose turn it is to bid or to play. Pay attention to it since it can sometimes be a bit unclear if the action is yours.

One other thing you will see in the figure is a "chat" window below the bidding/play window. This chat window can be used to "talk" to the other people at the table. (The functionality of this can be variable depending on the type of game you are in. Usually you can not talk to only your partner -- which would be illegal at a club as well. Sometimes you can talk to the Table (i.e., everyone), and occasionally you might need to say something to the opponents only. Kibitzers are also usually not allowed to talk to the table but can usually talk among themselves



using this chat window. Chats also frequently use a "lingo" to shorten the amount of typing. In the figure above, glp stands for "good luck partner", wdp stands for "well done partner", and typ stands for "thank you partner". This event was played against opponents who were very nice (as was my partner). But don't be surprised to see some nastier comments from certain opponents.

A couple other things and then I'll wrap this up. First, the chat window is available in other areas than just the play screen. The picture above shows this window in the People tab (double click on the person's name to get this window to pop up. This chat function works really well to coordinate on what you want to do with partners and when. You can also talk about hands that you just played (once the event is over).

The second thing that I want to mention is that there is a way to have "club" games online. You can designate that only members or invitees of you club can play and most of the entry fees from these games will go back to the individual clubs. There is a process involved in setting up these games that needs to be followed. I'm in contact with the people at the ACBL who set this up and am trying to get the ability to set up club games for unit 505 people -- both for the individual unit 505 clubs and, perhaps for the unit as well. As you might imagine, though, there are many, many people across the country wanting to do the same thing. So it will likely be some time before this comes to fruition.

Finally, if you want to get on BBO and try some of these things and get totally lots, my BBO username is Teriann and you can get ahold of me there. I am also available at (530) 748-5244. There are other Unit 505 players who are on BBO and you can find these and help each other out as well.