

Conversation between John Lewis, Executive Director of the American CueSports Alliance (ACS) and Chris Ackler, President of the Santa Barbara Pool League

Chris,

I ran the national Billiard Congress of America ("BCA") league system for 14 years (1991-2004) and grew the BCA Nationals into the largest tourney in the world (9,008 players in 2004). When the "BCA" sold its league system to a separate company now known as "BCAPL/CSI", a number of disgruntled BCA operators formed the "ACS." I was asked by the new owner of the "BCAPL" to oversee his new league program, and I respectfully declined – not desiring for the former non-profit structured league system to be owned by someone. I have since spoken with some of the BCA "trade association board of directors" of that time that divested the BCA league system in the manner it did, and they have shared their misgivings in how they divested their former league system to a company at the time. I gladly went to work for the new "ACS." In essence, the "ACS" is the old "BCA" in almost every way. The only difference – the ACS is governed by a board of directors elected by its player membership – not by a trade association board....or an owner, as with the current BCAPL/CSI. As the Executive Director of the ACS, I truly work at the pleasure of the player membership. No one OWNS the ACS. ACS still charges a \$10/player/year sanction fee – just like prior to 2005. We still follow the world-standardized rules of play established by the world-governing body for pool – the World Pool-Billiard Assn.....the same exact rules that you will find in the commercial rulebook you can buy in most billiard retail stores – still published by the Billiard Congress of America (BCA). The "BCA" is now strictly a trade association (and runs the trade show) and is an entirely separate body from the "BCAPL" league system, but the "BCA" still publishes a commercially-marketed rulebook. The BCAPL also followed the world-standardized rules until 2008 when they found that matches were taking longer to play on Diamond tables (no criticism of the table) than on Valley tables, and they needed tools to speed up play. The result: BCA/ACS (the world-standardized rules used all over the world for World Championships, etc.) are if you scratch on the break in 8-ball, you place the cue ball behind the head string; the BCAPL as you are aware is now "scratch on the break in 8-ball, you may place the cue ball anywhere on the table.

After the league sell in latter 2004, the BCAPL Natls entries went down to 6,500 players, and that remained stable while they were at the Riviera. A key ingredient for building up the entry numbers prior to 2004 was the attractive mid-May dates, and the BCAPL inherited those dates. BUT....when they moved to the Rio, they had to change their dates of play – for one reason and one reason only (ignore the "spin" they make): The Rio hosts the World Series of Poker which

takes place mid-May thru mid-July...so BCAPL is now stuck in unattractive dates (late July) in an expensive property off the Strip. Since moving to the Rio, they went down in participation numbers by 13% in their first year there. The next year, they went down 1,000 players (just under 5,500); in the next year they decreased by another 1,000 players (just under 4,500); and this July's event, they went under the 4,000 mark!

The ACS [Nationals] is still smaller than the BCAPL Natls, but we are growing by leaps and bounds (1,800 players in 2016)....and WE NOW HAVE THOSE MID-MAY DATES!!!!at a very nice property on the Strip – the Tropicana – closer to the action and entertainment options than we ever were when VNEA/APA/ACS/BCAPL were at the defunct Riviera. And our Championships are directed by the best tourney director in the world – Gary Benson, who ran the BCA Natls from its inception and ran the BCAPL Natls until they switched to Diamond Tables. Gary also runs the VNEA Natls at Bally's in Vegas in late May. The ACS Natls is a VERY well-run event with player-sympathetic tourney direction and referees. The Trop can handle our growth thru at least 2020.

Many former BCAPL leagues are now getting on board with ACS as an easy/more attractive/less expensive option. Some are dual-sanctioning (sanctioning with both BCAPL and ACS). Let me remind you that your league is an independent pool league. You are not a BCAPL league; BCAPL does not control your league; you are an independent league, and you may choose to sanction with any national group you desire....or you may sanction with no national body. I have just returned from the Louisiana ACS Championships, and I will give you a call if you'd like more clarifications.

The ACS will be shipping your players a player handbook/patch and card once you send in your sanction form/fees and documents requested on the 3rd page of the sanction forms ("League Operator Checklist").

Because the ACS is a non-profit structure and not owned by an owner, we direct any profits generated annually back into the general funds of the association. While the BCAPL Natls is still a larger tourney than the ACS Natls, the BCAPL Natls #s are declining rapidly, while the ACS Natls participation #s are on the upswing! ACS contributes \$39,000 in added \$ to the ACS Natls prize fund (more by far per capita than does the BCAPL) and we only charge a \$25/player greens fee per event (much lower than BCAPL).

We use great software for the ACS Natls (you may follow the action throughout back home on your smart phone or other devices) – Compusport. You may review recent results from past ACS Natls at www.compusport.us.

Does ACS currently have any SoCal leagues? Yes...not many but a couple you may find on our website...www.americancuesports.org.

Does ACS mandate league match formats (like APA) or are leagues free to choose (like BCAPL)?

You may choose any format you desire with ACS, just like when we were the old BCA...and BCAPL now. You may also still use any rules you desire to play...just remind your players that ACS Natls uses the world-standardized rules....not much different from BCAPL other than placing the cue ball on a scratch on the break.

Is there any sanctioning fee other than the membership fee for individuals? No, just \$10/player/annually for every active player in your league. AND a player need only pay that \$10 sanction fee once a year, regardless of how many ACS leagues or divisions the player plays (I believe BCAPL requires a player to pay another \$15 sanction fee if a player plays in two BCAPL-sanctioned leagues!!!) [ACS still charges that one \$10 sanction fee; just as we did in the latter years of the old BCA! We keep our overhead low with no office rental expenses and operation efficiency. I am the primary employee of the ACS who handles most administrative duties here in WI; our referee administrator resides in TX; our graphic designer resides in CA; and our webmaster resides in MA. THERE ARE NO OTHER MEMBERSHIP FEES YOUR LEAGUE PAYS TO ACS ANNUALLY. If you have 40 players, the only membership/sanction fees (other than entry fees for the Nationals) you'll pay ACS is the \$400 for the year.

Does everyone have to pay the membership fee? Eg. Can a one-time sub be excused (like it is in the BCAPL) ACS will allow you to excuse one-time subs, as is BCAPL with your league.

When does your membership year start/end? June 1, 2016 thru May 31, 2017.

Can anyone play in the Vegas tourneys, like the BCAPL? Yes. Players must have 8 weeks of play within one sanctioned session of your league (just like with the former BCA).

Do you have a scotch doubles tourney in Vegas? 9-ball tourney? If so can you please send me last year's entry forms? YES/YES/YES. BCAPL started offering 3-person 9-ball teams in response to ACS Natls offering this. During our team days (May 17-20, 2017) at the ACS Natls, players may compete in 3-person 9-ball teams each morning, and we switch over to the 5-person (4-person women's 8ball teams) 8ball team play in the afternoons and evenings – no conflicts.

How many tables do you have set up at the Nationals? For now – 120. We can expand to 160 in future years – but that will max out Tropicana space. When/if we outgrow Tropicana, we have another casino eager to host us in mid-May!

How many vendors [do you have at the ACS Nationals]? Not a lot of space for vendors. Perhaps 9-10.

Do you use Cyclop or Aramith balls? Aramith.

Are magic racks allowed? We do not provide them, but YES they are if your match opponent agrees.

Is there a three-foul rule at the ACS Nationals? In the world-standardized rules, the 3-foul rule is used for 9-ball...but not for 8-ball. In 8-ball we do follow procedures for determining rare stalemated games.

How would you compare to the restaurants at the Tropicana vs the Riviera and the Rio in terms of price and variety? Trop is more expensive than Riv (Katie's) for sure, but slightly less than Rio. But keep in mind – the Trop is in a better location on the Strip and the action (second busiest intersection in Vegas) than the Rio off the Strip (inconvenient) and even our old fave – the Riv. If you're on a food budget, there's a food court just past the MGM Grand with the same fast-food prices we all pay back home. BUT – 95% of our players stay at the Trop and enjoy it. If players do not stay at the Trop, they pay higher entry fees to each ACS division they enter (so the incentive to stay at the host property!). And that has worked well in the Trop wanting us to come back and grow with us year after year. In my years at BCA Natls 2004 & before, it was built up to 9,008 players on 240 tables, and we would finish all play from Sat thru Sat. A main reason was Gary Benson running the event so efficiently. Rick Jones/Bad Boys Prods. at BCAPL cannot fill Gary's shoes, but they still don't need 300 tables (they now have less than 4,000 players as of the recent 2016 event). It's nice they are there, but it will make it look more like a ghost town over the next two years as their #s continue to fall.

Are all tourneys double elimination? (except 2nd chance) YES! And all 2nd CH 8-ball events are free entry/money-added events. So if you're out of the \$, you just sign up again w/o having to pay to play – teams & singles! If you send 5-person Mens/Mixed and/or 4-person Womens 8-Ball Teams, I highly recommend they also enter the 3-person 9-Ball team divisions as well. All team play is Wed thru Sat, w/ 9-ball teams playing each morning; play stops around Noon; and we switch over to 8-ball team matches for the afternoon and evenings. So you can play in both w/o schedule conflicts. A lot of teams use the morning 9-ball action to warm up for the 8-ball action.

How do the free standard team entries work? With 120 players I see we will get two entries. That is correct. If the teams – skillwise – are Open or Advanced teams, you can use the \$160 “Standard Team” discount (you take \$160 off the Open or Advanced Team entry fees you submit. So if you have no “Standard Team” (like the BCAPL Leisure division) entries, you still can use the discount for two teams.