

Playing with Robots

Part XLV

By pluckycat

As readers of these articles know, my focus over the last 10 months has been on learning how to become better at playing against robots. I have primarily focused on the techniques and strategies that may help you and me do well against the robots. To do so, I have mainly participated in, and focused on, the most popular games on BBO: the daylong BBO and ACBL games and the Instant games. Up until a week ago, ironically, I had not visited Robot World, thinking of it as an out-of-the-way preserve for oddball endeavors.

Boy, was I wrong. In the last two weeks, I have attacked all of the games in Robot World with a vengeance. They are lots of fun and present their own, oftentimes unique, challenges. This week, I will review almost the entire menu of games on Robot World as well as providing preliminary tips on how to do well on them. At the end of this article, you'll see my favorite hand for the year so far!

The Games on Robot World	Entry Fee
\$1 Robot Reward Best Hand	\$1
\$5 Robot Reward Best Hand	\$5
.25 BB\$ Robot Race	\$0.25
Robot Rebate 55%	\$1
Zenith Daylong Reward (MP)	\$1
ACBL Robot Duplicate	\$1.25
ACBL Robot Duplicate (Classic IMP)	\$1.25
Robot Duplicate (IMP)	\$0.29
Robot Duplicate (MP)	\$0.45

Robot Reward Best Hand is a game in which you are given 15 minutes to accumulate as many points as you can. It's a best-hand tournament in which you have the best hand at the table. It also is a non-duplicate tournament, so the hands are randomly dealt. It's all about speed. The premium is on playing fast—really fast. Some of the keys to doing well: Fold all hands on which you're first to bid and cannot open 2♣ or 2NT. Even that enticing 17HCP 1NT opener. Fold it. You have the best hand, so if you don't have a monster you probably don't have slam or even necessarily game. You want to

bid slams in particular and vulnerable games. Upgrade the hands in which you have 19 HCPs or 18 HCPs and a six-card suit and bid 2NT. Pass all hands with less.

If opponents or partner opens, play those really, really fast, particularly if it's a part score. If others open, bid what you think you can make if it's game or slam, otherwise pass and play really fast. If you can, have your robot play the hand, e.g., bid Michaels or other bids that may allow robot to play the hand, particularly part scores. Robots play at lightning speed. If you loved "Roadrunner" cartoons as a kid, as I did, you will love the speed at which robots play these hands. It's like the Roadrunner on steroids. If the opponents bid, assess what you can do quickly and if they're playing the hand, particularly a part score, play it quickly and be done with it. Minus 110 or 120 is not that important if you give yourself the opportunity to get another slam.

I change my settings so as to not confirm bids or cards. I also put the setting at autoplay for singletons. Remember to reverse the settings when you're done. You're shown where you stand in the field throughout the 15 minutes. With a minute left on the clock, think carefully if you want to play the hand. If you're in first or second place and it's a bad hand, i.e., one on which you're going down or the opponents are making, you can slow-play it and let time run out so you won't have a negative score for that board. Many, but not all, of these tips are contained in a YouTube video that you can google: Robot Race and Robot Rewards Tournaments.

Not that many people play these tournaments. But if you win a \$1 Robot Reward tournament with seven or eight entrants you can win 3BB\$ and .4 BBO points. Smaller fields have smaller returns. You want to try to enter as large a field as you can. But that's usually better than the \$5 Robot Reward, which rarely attracts more than a couple of people playing head-to-head. If you win the head-to-head match, you get \$9BBO and .8BBO matchpoints. Be forewarned, my small sample of these tournaments indicates that the players in them generally are very experienced. I have played four tournaments and won one, placed second in another and out of the money in two.

The **.25BB\$ Robot Race tournament** involves essentially the same strategy as the Robot Reward tournaments. It's a 15-minute, best-hand tournament with the highest score winning. However, it is a duplicate tournament and you're competing against others on the same boards, so you generally have a much better sense of how you're doing comparatively. The attraction here is the price— .25BB\$ for 15 minutes of heart pumping fun as you try to get your mind and fingers operating at maximum speed. These contests generally have few participants as well, so the allure is the price and, if you're tired of the waiting times in most online pairs games, this is a welcome change. You do win BBO masterpoints—just not very many in the small fields—.12 or so.

Robot Rebate 55% is a straightforward best-hand, 12-board tournament in which, if you score 55% against the competition playing the same hands, you get \$1.50 back, and .06 BBO points for every competitor in the field if you come in first. Everyone who scores above 55% gets \$1.50 and, for example, if there are six competitors in the field, the winner would get .36 BBO masterpoints and second place would get .25. Here again, how you do depends on the experience and expertise of the field. I've come in first, scoring 62%, thinking I didn't play well, while I've scored 54% thinking I played well, scoring the best I could on board after board, only to get 50% on each of them. You get

to see your percentage score in real time so you know if you need to make a push at the end or play conservatively to preserve the 55%, if that's your goal.

The ACBL Robot Duplicate games for \$1.25BB and the Robot Duplicate games for 0.45BB\$ and 0.29BB\$ are duplicate contests not unlike the Instant games. You play against a field and how you do depends on the strength of the field, although it is stratified. I do find that the fields are generally weaker than the large field ACBL and BBO daylongs. You can win .9 masterpoints in the ACBL contests for a section top and up to .6 in the BBO contest. These tournaments generally attract between 30 and 70 participants for the ACBL tournaments and about a third of those numbers for the BBO tournaments.

The Zenith Daylong Reward tournament deserves an article by itself and that will be the subject of next week's article.

All of the above-described robot games generally attract at most only hundreds of participants on a daily basis compared to what are usually close to, or more than, 10,000 participants daily in the ACBL, BBO and Zenith Daylong Reward games. Nonetheless, if you're looking to add some variety and spice to your robot play, I highly recommend these games as an occasional diversion, particularly if you like to play fast. But remember to return your settings to confirm your bids and card options and to remove the autoplay of singletons.

My favorite hand: In first seat, both vulnerable, I held ♠J3 ♥AKQJ92 ♣AK1032. I was in a BBO daylong 8-board IMP tournament and I needed a good board. I looked at this hand and thought it had real slam potential, so I opened 2♣. It is a three-loser hand after all, but one I would need to alert if playing with humans. My bot responded 3♦, showing a positive response, 5+♦, ♦KQ, 8+ total points. I bid 3♥. My bot now bid 4NT. I searched for a bid to describe my hand and literally went through the entire range of possibilities starting with 5♣ until I came up with what I think was the perfect bid. Can you guess?

It was 6♥, which showed an odd number of key cards and a void above ♥, 5+♥, 19+HCP, 23+ total points. The void above hearts could only be in spades. It was the perfect deceptive bid to my mind, serving to thwart a spade lead, I hoped. There is something particularly satisfying in robot play about finding a way to deceive the robots. The dummy came down with ♠Q107 ♥74 ♦AKQ874 ♣64. And, sure enough, I didn't receive a spade lead, but the ♦9. Plan the play.

The ♦9 looked and smelled like a singleton. But no matter, this was the opportunity to get rid of my spades. So, I took the ♦A and pitched one spade, and then the ♦K, pitching my other spade, while West did ruff. Back came the ♥6, which I won and played the top clubs, on which East discarded the ♣Q and ♣J. Okay, now I needed to ruff and hoped that East didn't have a trump left, because both outstanding trump were higher than my dummy's ♥7. I played a low club and ruffed and East.....pitched a spade. I now ruffed a spade safely back to my hand and made my slam, for 9 IMPs. Half the field was in slam—those who opened the bidding with 2♣. Those who didn't do so didn't reach slam and went down 6 or 7 IMPs. Those in slam, except for one, made it. As it turned out, all the Wests led their singleton diamond. They led the singleton diamond despite all the others in slam bidding 6♦, which showed a void in diamonds and an odd number of key cards. After which,

their bot bid 6♥. The 6♦ bid was one I rejected as showing a roadmap to what to lead. But this shows that the robots' penchant to lead singletons is strong. They are hard wired to do so. Nonetheless, the deliciousness of the 6♥ bid lingered for me.

The full deal:

<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; display: inline-block;">7</div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; display: inline-block;">D</div>	N Robot ♠ Q107 ♥ 74 ♦ AKQ874 ♣ 64	W N E S P 3♠ P 2♣ P 4NT P 3♥ P 6♥ P 6♦ P P
	W Robot ♠ 9864 ♥ 10863 ♦ 9 ♣ 9875	E Robot ♠ AK52 ♥ 5 ♦ J106532 ♣ QJ
	S South ♠ J3 ♥ AKQJ92 ♦ ♣ AK1032	6♥ S NS: 0 EW: 0

See you next week when we will explore and analyze one of the BBO's most popular games—Zenith Daylong Reward. In the meantime, stay safe and healthy.