

Playing with Robots
Part XLVI
By pluckycat

My review of the Zenith Daylong Reward tournament is long overdue. It's almost invariably the most popular robot tournament on BBO; only the first ACBL daylong masterpoint tournament for \$1.35 comes close. The Zenith tournament regularly attracts 1500 or more players a day. Its attraction is obvious. Its cost is \$1. You get 16 boards for your buck and it is not a best-hands tournament. If you come in at the top you can gain around 24 BBO masterpoints and win \$4.32. Depending on the size of the field—usually well over 1400—if you come in around 300th, you can double your entry fee and get around .4 BBO masterpoints for about a 55% game. Come in around 450th with around a 54% game and you will get your entry fee back.

Recently, I had a 65.19% game in a Zenith tournament, came in 28th of 1494, earned 4.12 BBO\$ and 16.72 BBO points. That being said, I find it one of the hardest robot games on BBO. All the point hungry folks who are Kings, Queens and Jacks on BBO play in it regularly. I regularly look up and see the leftfoot, usla, punxsyphil, Wafiak, and Zdenya-S ahead of me. Let's look at some the challenges and see how you would do, but first let's also look at some hands and see how usla handled the bidding in a Zenith tournament—always an entertaining adventure.

In each of the seven hands below, usla ended up with more than 80% on the board. He finished 12th of 1504 at 68.14%. Usla, you will remember, is someone with whom I have long been intrigued. (See [Playing with Robots](#), Parts VII, VIII, XIII and XXIII.) His bidding is nothing if not unorthodox, albeit highly effective. It relies a lot on the deception of the robots. None of the bids or hands below contain misprints even if you may doubt that. This is a chance to see usla in action in a non-best-hands tournament.

What do you bid?

1. First seat, no one vulnerable: ♠A10853 ♥A1087 ♦A74 ♣K
2. Second seat, after a pass, nonvulnerable v. vulnerable: ♠8763 ♥64 ♦A974 ♣K108
3. First seat, both vulnerable: ♠K103 ♥KJ853 ♦K ♣K952
4. Fourth seat, both nonvulnerable, after P-P-1♥, with ♠AQ4 ♥932 ♦A95 ♣9875
5. First seat, both nonvulnerable: ♠9842 ♥65 ♦AQJ10 ♣J107
6. First seat, vulnerable v. nonvulnerable: ♠J8543 ♥75 ♦965 ♣J107
7. Fourth seat, after three passes, nonvulnerable v. vulnerable: ♠KQ52 ♥863 ♦J9 ♣AQ106

Answers:

- | | |
|-----------|-------|
| 1. 1♣ | 5. 1♣ |
| 2. 1♣ | 6. 1♠ |
| 3. 1♦ | 7. 1♦ |
| 4. Double | |

I need to emphasize that on each of these hands, usla scored over 80%. He appears to have an uncanny knack for creating deception that results in a favorable outcome. Is it risk free? No, there are boards he does not do well on, but oddly they come mostly when he hasn't had a chance to open the bidding. Can I recommend following usla's lead? Hardly. The bids on hands 2, 4 and 6 would never occur to me. I can only admire their ultimate effectiveness and gutsiness. The only bid at unfavorable vulnerability was board six and the openers are typically in short minor suits. If you play in the Zenith tournaments, you may want to experiment with some usla type bids. I know I will. His bidding is a reminder that playing with robots is about entertainment and having fun.

Now for a few of the challenging hands one faces on Zenith:

You hold, not vulnerable v. vulnerable, ♠10 ♥AKJ10875 ♦Q3 ♣J93. The bidding has been 1♠-2♦-4♠-? What do you bid?

It is the last board of the session and choice is between 5♥ and 5♦. No way am I going to pass. In these tournaments, perdition usually lies when you let the opponents have a high-level competitive contract. I need a good result, so I go against what I think will be the grain here and I bid 5♦. Right and wrong. It was against the grain, but it is down 3 while 5♥ is down 2. Lesson relearned: Don't try to operate; bid what you think is right. I got severely penalized for going against the grain. I received 5.56% v. 55.56% if I had bid 5♥. Sometimes my bot will have seven diamonds to the AK and a singleton heart for its bid—not this time.

The full deal:

	N North	W N E S
	♠ 65	1♠ 2♦ 4♠ 5♦
	♥ Q3	P P P
	♦ AK9752	
	♣ KQ4	
W West		E East
♠ AQ872		♠ KJ943
♥ J10864		♥ 9642
♦ A65		♦ 10872
	S South	
	♠ 10	
	♥ AKJ10875	
	♦ Q3	
	♣ J93	
		5♦ N NS: 0 EW: 0


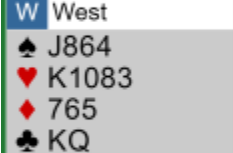

On the next deal, the majority of players, including me, made the wrong choice. See if you can do better:

Both vulnerable, the bidding has gone P- 2♥ -3♣- ?.

What do you do now with ♠AQ953 ♥J95 ♦A104 ♣76? About a third of the group bid 4♥. Most of us bid 3♥. The 4♥ bidders won the contract. The rest of the bidding progressed this way: P-2♥-3♣-3♥-3NT-P-P-? What do you do now?

The choices are double, pass or 4♥. I chose 4♥. The doublers succeed as 3NT can't make and since I was the only person bidding 4♥ after bidding 3♥, I got doubled. As a result, I tied for bottom with those who went down two when I went down only one after a helpful diamond lead by East.

The full deal:

	N North	W N E S
	♠ 7 ♥ AQ7642 ♦ Q98 ♣ 852	P 2♥ 3♣ 3♥ 3NT P P 4♥ X P P P
	W West	E East
♠ J864 ♥ K1083 ♦ 765 ♣ KQ	♠ K102 ♥ ♦ KJ32 ♣ AJ10943	
	S South	4♥x N NS: 0 EW: 0
♠ AQ953 ♥ J95 ♦ A104 ♣ 76		


The next hand also provided choices that are typical of a Zenith hand. I opened 1♦ and then the bidding came around to me:

W	N	E	S
		P	1♦
1♠	2♥	3♠	?

I held ♠K ♥J5 ♦AKJ52 ♣AJ965. The 2♥ bid showed 5+♥, 11+ total points and was forcing. I chose to bid 4♣ and that showed 19- HCP and a twice rebiddable club suit. I took a risk and sure enough my bot put me in 5♣. 60% of the field ended up in 5♣—or higher after a couple of persons decided to bid 6♣ when their bot put them in 5♣. 40% bid 4♥, the winning bid,

but then my bot could have had five hearts and four diamonds or four clubs. No doubt next time when I bid 4♥ it will.

The full deal:

	N Robot ♠ 82 ♥ AK9843 ♦ 86 ♣ K74	W N E S P P P 1♦ 1♠ 2♥ 3♠ 4♣ P 5♣ P P P
	W Robot ♠ AQJ7 ♥ 62 ♦ Q1074 ♣ Q103	E Robot ♠ 1096543 ♥ Q107 ♦ 93 ♣ 82
	S pluckycat ♠ K ♥ J5 ♦ AKJ52 ♣ AJ965	5♣ S NS: 0 EW: 0

I went down two in 5♣. A third of those in 5♣ went down one and a third went down three, and those in 6♣ went down 3 as well. Half of the heart bidders made four and half didn't, but they only went down one. I received 29%.

The foregoing three deals are typical of the choices confronting you on every deal in the Zenith tournament. As I said, it's a challenge, but it also has much to recommend it, particularly if you are desirous of trying to win lots of BBO points for an inexpensive investment.

I've played in the Zenith tournament six times in recent weeks. In addition to the result described at the start of this article, my other scores were in the high fifties, the mid-fifties, the low fifties, the 40s and one in the 30s when I was trying desperately and futilely to overcome a bad start. It is a hard game, not only due to the high level of the competition, but also because of the challenges presented by the hands in the tournament. You don't have the comfort of a best-hand tournament and often you are defending or finding yourself in an unmakeable contract trying to cut your losses. Nonetheless, at the end of my 6 games or 96 boards, I was .72 BBO\$ ahead and had garnered nearly 20 BBO points, making Zenith games an inevitable future attraction for me.

The Spring 2021 NABC Robot Individual Tournament starts tomorrow. Hope to see you there. To see my ten top tips for playing in this tournament, go to [Playing with Robots](#), Part XXXI on the HBC website.