

# Playing with Robots

## Part L

By pluckycat

This is the final installment of this series. I am at the round number of 50, so it is a good time to finish. It has been almost a year since I started writing these articles and I never envisioned they would last nearly this long. What started as somewhat of a lark—I had never played bridge online before late March of 2020—became a serious endeavor, albeit replete with humor and pratfalls. I wanted to learn how to play effectively with robots and then, I wanted to learn how to play better and to share what I learned. Remarkably, it has never been a chore to write any of these articles. There has always been lots to write about and my enthusiasm for the task has never waned. I hope the 49 previous articles and hundreds of hands I have reviewed provide convincing evidence of that enduring enthusiasm.

Bridge remains a thoroughly fascinating game for me and playing with robots adds a layer of complexity and adventure that I find consistently rewarding and enjoyable no matter how frustrated I become with myself and, admittedly, on occasion, with my mechanical friends. So, in this last article, I wanted to tell what I will be doing to keep educating myself and learning about robot play as well as provide a few parting tips.

I intend to keep reviewing and analyzing the play of expert robot players. The way I do this is to go to the daylong games, particularly the BBO \$.39 daylongs, then click **Complete**, which gives me the results of the previous day. If I haven't played in a particular game, those results are only available for the next day. I then scan to see if leftfoot, usla, punxysyphil, Wafiak, razorsharp or Zhenya-S (all Kings on BBO) have played in the event and done well. On almost all days, I will find one or more of them at or near the top of an event. I click their names and their results and the boards they played appear. I find it a very useful exercise to look at these experts' bidding and play and ask why they did what they did. BBO's movies of these hands provide a great teaching tool. I won't find Leo LaSota, the Ace, in the BBO daylongs, but he does play the ACBL daylongs, and I can almost invariably find him there near the top on any day.

Before departing this stage, I want to give a few more tips. I can't help myself. I will not repeat what I said in [Playing with Robots, Part XXXI](#), but that is a good place to start if you want to review important tips on robot play. My number one additional tip is to remember—and take into account—that most robot contests are best-hand tournaments, which means you either have the best hand at the table in terms of high-card points or, at best, everyone else—including your partner—can only have an equivalent hand in high-card points. This often helps enormously in the bidding and play of the hands. If an opponent has already shown up with eight high-card points and you have 11, you know that robot opponent cannot have a missing Ace. Similarly, in the bidding of a hand, if your robot has passed and you have 11 HCP, it's unlikely you will have game—certainly possible, but unlikely.

My second tip is to play close attention to when a robot's bid is described only in total points. It is most frequently a distributional hand that will be a disappointment in terms of high-card points, but may have considerable playing strength. Remember total points adds three for a void, two for a singleton and one for a doubleton, while subtracting one for honors in short suits. When the HCP total is provided, along with a total points number, for your robot's bid, try to reconcile the two as you envision your robot's hand, or for that matter the hand of an opponent robot that has bid.

Lastly, I want to emphasize that in robot play far more slams seem available than would normally occur in your typical human pairs game. I think it's one of the ways that BBO differentiates among the hundreds of players who participate in their robot games, particularly the daylongs. Anyway, below are screenshots of two slams I bid in a recent daylong tournament that scored 96% and 95%.

### Board 11

11 D	N North	W N E S
	♠ K54 ♥ KJ108652 ♣ J43	P 2♠ P 2♠ P 3♠ P 4NT P 5♠ P 6♠
W West		E East
♠ Q86 ♥ J62 ♦ 973 ♣ A1072		♠ 93 ♥ Q109873 ♦ 4 ♣ K965
	S South	
	♠ AKJ107542 ♥ A ♦ AQ ♣ Q8	
		6♠ S NS: 0 EW: 0

I would not have bid this slam against humans, but this looked and felt like a slam to me against robots, hence my 2♣ opener. Once my robot partner bid 3♦, presumably showing the ♦K, I felt there was a reasonable shot at slam and that my 4NT bid might deter the lead of a club by the robots, who would think I held the ♣K if they had the ♣A. Remember robots, bless them, trust humans to bid as they would bid—why the deceptions of usla and leftfoot work so well. Sure enough, the ♣A was not led, but rather a passive diamond. Now, my hope was that the robot with the ♠Q had three diamonds, so I could pitch a club on the ♥K and another club on the ♦J. Sure enough it worked.

## Board 12

12	N North	W N E S
	♠ K6 ♥ KQ9843 ♦ K932 ♣ K	P 1♥ P 2NT P 3♣ P 3♠ P 4NT P 5♠ P 6♥ P P
W West	E East	
♠ J84 ♥ 1052 ♦ 1076 ♣ QJ105	♠ 10732 ♥ ♦ AJ84 ♣ 76432	
	S South	
	♠ AQ95 ♥ AJ76 ♦ Q5 ♣ A98	6♥ N NS: 0 EW: 0

Here, most people got to the heart slam, but only one other person made seven. Here I was rewarded for bidding Jacoby. Again, when playing with robots, making the right bid seems to me often to get rewarded. Most others didn't bid Jacoby, either storming to slam immediately or bidding Blackwood immediately. Others received the ♦ A lead. I received a low spade lead, won in dummy with the ♠ A and, when I then cashed three hearts, East helpfully pitched a spade. Now, a low diamond from hand, and East, programmed to duck, did duck with the ♦ A. It was then easy to discard three diamonds on the ♣ A and ♠ Q9. Always give the robots a chance to go wrong on defense if you can.

Before I leave, I very much need to thank Linda Starr, my excellent editor and proofreader. I am truly grateful for her patient and careful attention to these articles for each of these 50 weeks. I also did want to thank the host of persons who have written or spoken to me about these articles. I appreciate your kind and generous comments. I want to thank the Hartford Bridge Club for giving me the opportunity to have an audience for my scribblings. Last, but perhaps not least, I want to thank my mechanical friends and their thoughtful and brilliant creators who have enriched my life during what might otherwise have felt too much like one long hibernation.

May fortune smile on you and may all your finesses (if you have no alternatives) succeed.

Take good care of yourselves.

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