

# Playing with Robots

## Part XLVII

By pluckycat

The Spring 2021 NAOBC Individual Robot Tournament was held last Saturday, Sunday and Monday, May 6, 7 and 8. My results and play in the tournament give me a lot to talk about. But that will have to wait. I feel compelled to review and talk about the bidding and play of Leo LaSota in the second round of the tournament. LaSota is the Ace, the highest lifetime point scorer on BBO and someone whose game I have looked at repeatedly in the past. See [Playing with Robots](#), Parts XXII and XXV. In the second round, LaSota scored a phenomenal 78.69% over 24 boards. This week, I'll look closely at the 12 boards on which LaSota scored over 90%. They show a deep understanding of the robots' proclivities and the fortitude to take advantage of them.

### Board 6

6	N North	W N E S
	♠ J92 ♥ 832 ♦ 1092 ♣ 10864	X P P P 1♥ 1NT
W West	E East	
♠ K853 ♥ K10 ♦ KQJ74 ♣ J3	♠ AQ10 ♥ QJ965 ♦ A865 ♣ 7	
S South	1NTx S NS: 0 EW: 0	
♠ 764 ♥ A74 ♦ 3 ♣ AKQ952		

On this deal, LaSota received the ♦ K lead and then West robot switched to the ♥ K. LaSota rattled off 7 tricks for 180 and 97.37%. Three out of 39 players in LaSota's cohort had the courage to make the same bid and achieve the same result. Most, after throwing in a club bid or two, ended up defending some number of diamonds or, more disastrously, a successful heart game.

### Board 7

7	N North	W N E S
	♠ KJ1093 ♥ J9 ♦ J9742 ♣ J	P 2♥ P 1NT P P P 2♠
W West	E East	
♠ 864 ♥ 8543 ♦ A53 ♣ A103	♠ Q5 ♥ KQ76 ♦ 8 ♣ KQ7654	
S South	2♠ S NS: 0 EW: 0	
♠ A72 ♥ A102 ♦ KQ106 ♣ 982		

On this deal, LaSota did what he and lots of other top players on BBO do. He opened a 13HCP hand 1NT. He ended up in 2♠ making three, losing a diamond, a diamond ruff, a club and a heart for

100%. Others who opened a diamond and persisted to the three or four level in diamonds did well; those who sold out to 3♣ by E/W did poorly.

### Board 8

8	N North	W N E S
	♠ Q652	P 1♣ 1♠ 3NT
	♥ KJ6	P P P
	♦ Q64	
	♣ A72	
W West	E East	
♠ 43	♠ AJ1087	
♥ Q1072	♥ A843	
♦ J97	♦ 3	
♣ J954	♣ Q83	
	S South	
	♠ K9	
	♥ 95	
	♦ AK10852	
	♣ K106	
		3NT S NS: 0 EW: 0

On this deal, a number of players reached 3NT, but as Shakespeare would say, "The play's the thing." LaSota received a low spade lead, won with the ♠K, cashed the ♦A to ascertain that the diamonds would run, then led a low heart to the board finessing the ♥J to successfully establish the ♥K. On the run of the diamonds, the E-W robots discarded clubs, as they are wont to do, and LaSota was able to take three club tricks for 460 and 96.05%. Only four of 39 players in the cohort scored 11 tricks in NT.

### Board 10

10	N Robot	W N E S
	♠ 72	P 2♥ 1♠ X
	♥ K943	P P P
	♦ K6	
	♣ Q9532	
W Robot	E Robot	
♠ 1065	♠ AQJ8	
♥ 108	♥ Q52	
♦ Q9742	♦ 103	
♣ J76	♣ A1084	
	S Leo LaSota	
	♠ K943	
	♥ AJ76	
	♦ AJ85	
	♣ K	
		4♥ N NS: 0 EW: 0

Many had a similar auction, but only 7 of those in the heart game made it. LaSota received the ♦10 lead, covered by the ♦J, ♦Q, ♦K. He led a low club off the board. East rose with the ♣A and played the ♦3, taken by the ♦A in hand. A low heart was led to the ♥K in dummy. LaSota then played a low spade to the ♠K and the key play of a spade back. After East had taken the spade trick, it returned a high spade, ruffed in dummy. LaSota then led the ♣Q, pitching a diamond. A club was ruffed in hand; spade ruffed in dummy; club ruffed with the ♥J and ♥A still to come for 10 tricks. Here, most others pitched a spade on the ♣Q and, after finessing in hearts, tried to ruff a diamond and were overruffed. LaSota had recognized the robot lead of the ♦10 for what it was—the start of a doubleton—and determined, rightly, to ruff spades in dummy in front of East, who had the long spades: 91.89%.

## Board 11

11 D	N North	W N E S
	♠ AJ8	P 2♠ P 1NT
	♥ A8652	P 3NT P 2♥
	♦ J3	P P P
	♣ Q72	
W West	E East	
♠ 753	♠ Q104	
♥ K9	♥ QJ1073	
♦ AQ982	♦ 10765	
♣ J83	♣ 9	
	S South	
	♠ K962	
	♥ 4	
	♦ K4	
	♣ AK10654	3NT S NS: 0 EW: 0

This hand was a shining example of LaSota's knowledge of the robots' tendencies and his willingness to act on them. But first, note the odd shaped 1NT opener—again with 13 HCP. LaSota received a low spade lead, East inserted the ♠10 and LaSota won with ♠K. With diamonds wide open if East gained the lead, LaSota was not going to settle for nine tricks. Rather he led a spade back, ducked in dummy to East's ♠Q. Now East, bless it, led a spade back—as I suspect LaSota knew it would because West's lead of a low spade looked very much like a passive lead from three small. Now LaSota had three spade tricks, a heart and six clubs for 10 tricks and 97.30%. The results on the board were all over the place, but only four were in 3NT and one made only three.

## Board 15

15 D	N North	W N E S
	♠ KQ8	P 1♥ P 1♣
	♥ AQ84	P P P
	♦ J72	
	♣ 953	
W West	E East	
♠ A1095	♠ 7642	
♥ 2	♥ KJ106	
♦ Q10653	♦ A	
♣ 862	♣ Q1074	
	S South	
	♠ J3	
	♥ 9753	
	♦ K984	
	♣ AKJ	1♥ N NS: 0 EW: 0

On this deal, LaSota acted on his knowledge that this is a best-hand tournament. His pass of partner's 1♥ recognizes that game is remote since partner cannot have a hand better than LaSota's own hand. However, only a handful of others did the same. LaSota was one of five to stop at 1♥ while almost all other reached higher levels in hearts and went down: 91.89%.

### Board 16 screenshot

D 16	N Robot	W N E S
	♠ A874 ♥ 3 ♦ J1072 ♣ 9874	P P 1+ 2♥ 2♣ P 2NT P P P
W Robot	E Robot	
♠ KQ1053 ♥ K97 ♦ 86 ♣ Q32	♠ 2 ♥ A86 ♦ A9543 ♣ KJ105	
	S Leo LaSota	
	♠ J96 ♥ QJ10542 ♦ KQ ♣ A6	2NT E NS: 0 EW: 0

On this deal LaSota's leap to 2♥ proved effective when most bid one heart and later bid 2♥. Those in 2♥ went down one while LaSota managed to set 2NT two tricks for 94.59%.

### Board 17

D 17	N North	W N E S
	♠ Q83 ♥ 64 ♦ KJ7 ♣ KQ732	P P P 1♥ 2NT P 4♥ P P P
W West	E East	
♠ J9764 ♥ 1053 ♦ Q932 ♣ J	♠ K2 ♥ KJ ♦ A10865 ♣ 8654	
	S South	
	♠ A105 ♥ AQ9872 ♦ 4 ♣ A109	4♥ S NS: 0 EW: 0

Here LaSota accepted his robot's balanced invite to game. Most were in game, but only a half dozen of the 38 in the cohort made 12 tricks like LaSota. He received the ♣J lead, an obvious singleton, and won in dummy. He led a heart off the board, ♥K by East was taken by the ♥A. He led the ♥Q and a third heart to West, who now did something helpful by leading a spade, ducked in dummy and when East rose with the ♠K, LaSota had 12 tricks for 93.24%.

## Board 20

D 20	N North	W N E S
	♠ K3	1♠ P 2♠ X
	♥ 42	P 3♣ P P
	♦ 1094	P
	♣ KJ10965	
W West	E East	
♠ Q9842	♠ 765	
♥ AQ953	♥ K107	
♦ K6	♦ Q872	
♣ 2	♣ A84	
	S South	
	♠ AJ10	
	♥ J86	
	♦ AJ53	
	♣ Q73	
		3♠ N NS: 0 EW: 0

LaSota's double of 2♠ on this deal would not be everyone's action at the three level, vulnerable. But as I have said repeatedly, you usually do better playing a contract, if you can, rather than letting your opponents play, and here LaSota's bold action paid off. He received a spade lead and thus made 10 tricks, losing only one heart, a diamond and a club. 33 of 37 in the cohort let the opponents play in 2♠, making three for a mediocre result, or four for a terrible result. LaSota scored 98.61% as only one other made four.

## Board 21

D 21	N Robot	W N E S
	♠ 1073	P P P 4♥
	♥ J6	X P P P
	♦ J654	
	♣ K1093	
W Robot	E Robot	
♠ A842	♠ Q96	
♥ 8	♥ 1042	
♦ Q2	♦ A1087	
♣ AQ8642	♣ J75	
	S Leo LaSota	
	♠ KJ5	
	♥ AKQ9753	
	♦ K93	
	♣	
		4♥ S NS: 0 EW: 0

LaSota's 4♥ bid elicited a double. Those who opened 1♥, as did more than 70% of the 38-person cohort, ended up playing 4♥ undoubled. LaSota made an overtrick along with five others for 93.24%. He received the ♦Q lead, taken by the ♦A. A heart was returned and, with the ♦J as an entry to the dummy, LaSota ran some hearts, on which the East robot helpfully pitched a diamond. Now LaSota was able to cash the ♦K and go to the board and pitch a spade on a diamond before leading a spade off the board. LaSota seems invariably to guess right in these situations. For his double, West should have the ♠A, so LaSota's play of ♠J from hand seems clearly warranted. It worked in any event.

## Board 22

22	N Robot	W N E S
	♠ K8532	P P 1NT
	♥ QJ	P 2♥ P P 2♠
	♦ Q92	P 3NT P P
	♣ A104	P
W Robot	E Robot	
♠ QJ76	♠ 10	
♥ A1082	♥ 9753	
♦ 1087	♦ A64	
♣ 85	♣ KJ976	
	S Leo LaSota	
	♠ A94	
	♥ K64	
	♦ KJ53	
	♣ Q32	
	3NT S	NS: 0 EW: 0

On this deal, we have another 13HCP opener, which again accrued to LaSota's considerable advantage. As you see, LaSota reached 3NT. Only a third of the pairs did; most were in spades. Those in 4♠ went down and almost all in 3♠ went down too. Only LaSota managed to make 10 tricks for 100%. Because of the 1NT bid, he received a different defense than others and a very helpful defensive play near the end.

The ♣8 was led and ducked to the ♣Q. LaSota played a diamond to the ♦Q, taken by the ♦A and a diamond continued. He won the ♦K in hand and led a heart, taken by West ♥A as the ♥Q was played from dummy. Diamonds were continued and cleared by LaSota pitching the ♣10 from dummy. Now a heart to ♥J in dummy, a spade to the ♠A in hand, and then a low spade, and when West did not split its honors, LaSota finessed the ♠8 for 10 tricks. I can only think that the West robot, who is excellent at counting, figured LaSota had only two spades. Why else would he not correct 3NT to 4♠? As he has often done, LaSota snookered the bots again.

## Board 24

24	N Robot	W N E S
	♠ Q965	1♠ P 1♥ P
	♥ 1097	2♠ P P P 2♥
	♦ AJ9	P P P
	♣ 1053	
W Robot	E Robot	
♠ J103	♠ A72	
♥ A	♥ J432	
♦ 1064	♦ 7532	
♣ AQJ942	♣ 86	
	S South	
	♠ K84	
	♥ KQ865	
	♦ KQ8	
	♣ K7	
	2♥ S	NS: 0 EW: 0

On this deal, the bidding shows that LaSota, correctly, as it turned out, did not want his opponents to play in 2♣. The 2♥ bid was gutsy after East's heart bid and only four of 38 ended up there. Most let E/W play in 2♣, making two or three or going down one. Eight ventured 2♠ after East's heart bid; seven of the eight went down in that contract. 2♥, making two, was worth 93.24%. West led his singleton ♥A and then played a diamond. LaSota finessed for the ♥J, cleared diamonds, played on spades and ultimately endplayed West to lead into his ♣K.

These 12 boards should give you a good sense of how LaSota scored an almost unbelievable 78.62% in the second session of the Robot National tournament. He almost invariably found the right contract and then played the spots off the cards. To be sure, there is some luck involved—LaSota only scored 64.87% in the first session and fell down to 58.62% in the last session to finish ninth in the tournament—but his tactics, e.g., opening even off-shape hands 1NT with 13 HCP, and his unerring anticipation of the bots' defense, allows him to score as well as he does. Hats off to him. And hats off to the first-place finisher and champion, Fred Chang, who finished with an average of 70.35% over three sessions.

Next week, we'll explore what we can learn from an also ran—namely me. I will look at a number of boards where, in my view, I failed the challenges presented by those boards. I scored 66.58%, 60.71% and 59.29% in the three sessions to average 62.19% and finish 89<sup>th</sup> overall and in the top 3% of 3021 entrants. But as you will see, it could have been significantly better.

In the meantime, take good care and hope you take some time to play with bots and have fun with them.