

I received a ♠2 lead and now there was only one play for the contract. I had four spade tricks and needed five club tricks to go along with three in the red suits. So, the clubs needed to be 3-3. I won the lead with the ♠A after West played the ♠J. I crossed to the ♣A and back to the ♠10. Cashed the ♣K and Eureka!, the clubs were indeed 3-3. This has got to be a good board and I later found out that I was plus 7 IMPs. Half of my cohort of 22 bid the slam and all of them made it. If you didn't bid the slam, you lost 6-8 IMPs depending on how you played the hand.

Board 3 was a part-score hand where half of us made it and half didn't. I figured this would be a small plus. Turned out, I was plus two more IMPs. On board 4, nearly everybody was in 3NT. Almost everybody made 5, but a couple didn't, so it turned out I was plus another IMP. At the halfway point, I thought I would be up about 8 IMPs. I underestimated by three.

Board 5 was one of those hands where, playing IMPs, the final decision was easy for me. I held, vulnerable versus not, ♠K432 ♥AQ9 ♦532 ♣AK3. I opened 1NT. My bot bid 2♣. I bid 2♠. It bid 2NT and I carried on to game.

The full deal: Board 5

5	N North	W	N	E	S
	♠ J7 ♥ 1085 ♦ AQJ9 ♣ J1095	P	P	P	1NT
W West		P	2♣	P	2♣
♠ A98 ♥ KJ432 ♦ K4 ♣ 876		P	2NT	P	3NT
	E East	P	P	P	
	♠ Q1065 ♥ 76 ♦ 10876 ♣ Q42				
	S South				
	♠ K432 ♥ AQ9 ♦ 532 ♣ AK3				
					3NT S NS: 0 EW: 0

I received a friendly ♥3 lead, won with the ♥9 in my hand. Next, I took the successful diamond and club finesses. I then took my second heart trick with the ♥A and played the ♥Q into West, figuring rightly that I would endplay West into leading up to my ♠K. Sure enough, that's what happened. Making 4NT tied me for top. A few didn't bid game and made four. I estimated I would gain about 2 IMPs. Turned out I gained 3. The extra IMPs mattered a lot in the final reckoning. The difference of two or three IMPs can be the difference of 1 or 2 masterpoints as the huge field is usually tightly bunched.

The next hand involved tough judgment calls at various points in the bidding and, with 20 in my cohort on this hand, there were nine different results on the hand. In second seat, nonvulnerable against vulnerable, I found myself with ♠Q108 ♥Q53 ♦AK643 ♣42. Remember, this was a best-hand tournament, so if I passed, the hand was likely to be passed out. You usually get very few biscuits for passing hands. You want action on the hands. So, I opened 1♦. The bidding was

W	N	E	S
		P	1♦
1♥	2♥	3♦	?

I chose to pass, not wanting to lead my bot to think I had anything extra. My bot's cue bid showed a limit raise or better with 4+ ♦ and 11+ total points. I feared if I bid, I would find myself in 5 ♦. West now bid 3 ♥.

W	N	E	S
		P	1 ♦
1 ♥	2 ♥	3 ♦	P
3 ♥	P	P	?

What would you do? Some doubled, even too risky for my blood. I've been burned too often by weird distributions and the opponent bots making a doubled contract. I now bid 4 ♦. Five of us made the same sequence of bids.

The full deal: Board 6

6	N North	W N E S											
	♠ 964 ♥ K ♦ J1082 ♣ AK987	<table border="1"> <tr><td>1♥</td><td>2♥</td><td>3♦</td><td>4♦</td></tr> <tr><td>3♥</td><td>P</td><td>P</td><td>P</td></tr> <tr><td>P</td><td>P</td><td>P</td><td>P</td></tr> </table>	1♥	2♥	3♦	4♦	3♥	P	P	P	P	P	P
1♥	2♥	3♦	4♦										
3♥	P	P	P										
P	P	P	P										
W West	E East												
♠ J53 ♥ A10872 ♦ 9 ♣ QJ65	♠ AK72 ♥ J964 ♦ Q75 ♣ 103												
S South													
♠ Q108 ♥ Q53 ♦ AK643 ♣ 42		4♦ S NS: 0 EW: 0											

Alas, I and everyone else in 4 ♦ played for diamonds to be 2-2 and went down one. Those who did best doubled after the 3 ♦ bid and the opponents ended up in 4 ♥ doubled going down. One intrepid soul bid 3NT after 3 ♦ and as the cards lie, made it for 7.5 IMPs. The doublers were plus 3.5 IMPs as 4 ♥ usually went down one. Those who passed 3 ♥ instead of bidding 4 ♦ were also plus one IMP as three hearts also usually went down one. I figured I was down four or five IMPs. Turns out, as usual, my estimate was more negative than the result. I was -3 IMPs on the board.

I figured I needed a good board now. Board 7 gave me, in first seat, both vulnerable ♠ AJ10 ♥ A54 ♦ KQ732 ♣ Q2. I opened 1NT only to hear my left-hand opponent bid 4 ♣, preemptive, and my partner's double showed 11+ total points and nothing more. I certainly wasn't letting the double stand, again leery of weird distribution, so I bid 4 ♦. My bot bid 4 ♥, which I passed. It held ♠ Q9753 ♥ QJ976 ♦ 105 ♣ A. The lead was the ♣ 3, which I won with bot's ♣ A. Plan the play.

The full deal: Board 7

7 D	N North	W N E S
	♠ Q9753	4♣ X P 1NT
	♥ QJ976	P 4♥ P P
	♦ 105	P
♣ A		
W West	E East	
♠ 8	♠ K642	
♥ 986	♥ K10832	
♦ KJ10987654	♦ AJ4	
	♣ 3	
S South		
♠ AJ10		
♥ A54		
♦ KQ732		
♣ Q2		
	4♥ N NS: 0 EW: 0	

I won in hand with the ♣ A and played the ♥ Q covered by the ♥ K and the ♥ A in dummy, getting the bad news of the 5-0 heart split. I ruffed the ♣ Q with the ♥ 6, which East allowed me to win, discovering that West had nine clubs. Good thing I didn't let the double stand. East pitched a spade. So, I am always going to lose two ♥ s and the ♦ A. The ♠ K has to be right and I needed to manage that so as not to lose more than two heart tricks. I played a diamond to the ♦ Q and a diamond back, and now East led another heart, which I won in hand with the ♥ 7. I now played the ♠ Q and repeated the finesse, ultimately taking three spade tricks, five heart tricks, one club and one diamond. Seven of us were in 4♥ s, but only two of us made it. The others didn't manage their entries or gave up a spade trick. Those five who let the double of 4♣ stand were in the worst shape. The contract made for -710 and -9.5 IMPs. I thought I'd get a good board here, but not the 12 IMPs I did receive, because so many went down or left in the double of 4♣.

On the last board, true to myself, and the "no risk it, no biscuit" philosophy, I pushed to 5♣ hoping for a perfect dummy, which was unlikely. Down one. A third of us did the same while the majority stopped in 4♣, making. It was a costly board—those stopping in 4♣ were +3 and I was -2 IMPs.

Ultimately, I was +21 IPPs, came in 38th of 710 and won 3.34 BBO points. Had I been a bit more sensible on the last board and stopped in 4♣, I would have finished 20th and won 5.11 points.

What did I learn from my most recent foray into the 8-board BBO daylongs, something I hadn't done in months? It felt far more intense than a 12-board tournament. There's the sense that doom is lurking around every corner if you venture where you should not. One bad board can ruin the good efforts on all the others. I also came away with more admiration for the leftfoots of the world. To consistently do well on a daily basis on seven 8-board BBO daylongs takes lots of stamina, concentration and ability. I was tired after just one 8-board session. Nonetheless, one of these days, I will try to play all seven in a day and see how I do. The challenge will be to get anywhere close to the daily leaders. In the meantime, stay safe and healthy and see you next week.