

Playing with Robots—Part One

By pluckycat

This series will explore the various games on BBO in which you can play with robots, and also provide some tips about how best to take advantage of the way robots bid and play. All games on BBO labeled "Individual" are games in which a (human) player plays with -- and against -- robots. As you can see if you look at the list of BBO tournaments (games), many robot games are available on BBO.

The Games

In this article, I'm going to discuss my favorite BBO robot games -- the Daylong Tournaments in Robot World, which often attract 1000 participants or more. In Daylong Tournaments, you have up to 24 hours to complete your game. You can play at your own pace, leave the table, and come back to the game any time throughout the day. The Daylong Tournaments utilize advanced robots and award BBO masterpoints.

To find these tournaments, click **Robot World** and scroll down the list of games. You'll find several Daylong BBO events for just \$0.39. In one game, you **Just Declare**. The bidding is done for you and you only need to play the hand. Just Declare is my favorite among these games because there's no, sometimes quirky, robot bidding to contend with!

In the Daylong BBO Tournaments, you play eight boards. Even playing as slowly as I can, each game rarely takes more than 15-20 minutes. So, you can play 40 boards for less than \$2.00 -- in less than 1 1/2 hours. You won't earn any ACBL masterpoints, but you can earn BBO masterpoints. Because so many people play these games, if you score really well -- in the 70% range -- you can earn as many as 10 or more BBO masterpoints for an investment of \$0.39. Players who earn enough

BBO Points are rewarded with a BBO award symbol next to their names, symbolizing their success on the site.

For slightly more money (\$1.35 a game), you can play in one of the 12-board ACBL Daylong Tournaments and earn ACBL masterpoints as well.

The Robots

Robots play fast. They play very fast. I try to slow down the proceedings as much as I can. First, I make sure my account settings are on for Confirm bids and Confirm cards. (If you haven't done this, click Account in the right-hand margin and then click Settings.) Next, when any robot -- but particularly my robot partner -- bids, I click on its bid to make sure I understand what the bid means both in high card points and total points. Total points often give a clue to distribution, as robots do count distribution (void=3, singleton=2, doubleton=1).

Then, before I bid, I click my potential bid to see what my robot partner will understand. Sometimes I click 3 or 4 possibilities before I make a bid. What I want to avoid is making a bid that the robot will interpret as showing much more than I have. Early on, in playing with robots, I landed in far too many unmakeable slams because I thought fast arrival would be understood. I bid what I thought I could make; the robot bid based on what it thought I had. So slow yourself down and look at what your bidding will mean to the robot. Usually there's no perfect bid, so just use good bridge judgment -- as you would playing with a human partner.

Some other tips: Robots often lead passively and they rarely lead away from honors in suit contracts. They also tend to cover honors with honors unless it's clearly wrong. So, if you have a two-way finesse, say K9xx in dummy and AJ10x in hand, lead the J. If it's not covered, finesse the other way.

A Hand

One of the joys of playing with robots is that sometimes they can be totally reliable and you can discern their thinking. The following is an example of a hand I played recently with a robot partner.

My hand as North:

♠32

♥AQ853

♦AK854

♣J

West opened 1♠. I bid 2♥. East passed. Robot partner bid 2♠, showing a limit raise in hearts with 9+ points. I bid 4♥, thinking no more than game was there after West's opening bid. Clicking my bid showed that it did roughly mirror what I had. Now, robot partner bid 4♠. It's got to be thinking there's slam possibility! I clicked the bid to see what it meant and -- lo and behold -- it said, ♠A, 4+ hearts, and 13+ total points. Okay! I gave a 5♦ cue bid a try. Robot partner responded 5♥, essentially saying no club control. I thought for a while and decided that my robot partner was concerned about clubs, but he should have the ♥K and hopefully not more than 2 diamonds or the ♦Q. So slam appeared to be a good gamble and I bid 6♥ with my singleton club. Dummy showed up with ♠A10, ♥KJ74, ♦9, ♣K98753. A spade was led. Diamonds behaved -- breaking 4-3. Hearts were 3-1, but I managed to pitch a spade on the ♦K, and ruff two diamonds in dummy, making six with a combined 25 HCPs for a neat 96%.

Enough for now. More next week