

# Playing with Robots Part Two

By pluckycat

I hope you read last week's article, *Playing with Robots, Part One*. This week's article relies on - and builds on - that article. In part one, we explored the relatively inexpensive competitive games in BBO's Robot World. Just a note - the \$0.39 Daylong games have become so popular that another matchpoint and IMP game have been added. Now, four \$0.39 matchpoint and two \$0.39 Imp games are available every day. All of them attract hundreds of players, award lots of BBO masterpoints, and are the second most popular games on BBO, surpassed in numbers only by the ACBL \$1.35 Daylong games (apparently people without live games still lust after those ACBL masterpoints).

## Bridge Master

Before getting to some further tips about playing against robots, I'd like to explore one of the many BBO "side streets" - areas removed from competitive play. My favorite is **Bridge Master**. Bridge Master is designed to help your declarer play. The site offers players a series of instructional hands at five levels -Beginner, Intermediate, Advanced, Expert and World Class. The dozens of deals are carefully constructed to illustrate what you should consider as declarer as well as appropriate card-play techniques. The best thing about the site is that if you take the correct line of play, you'll make the contract. If you make a mistake, you'll get perfect defense and go down. *But* if you don't make the contract, the program will walk you through the correct considerations and line of play, step-by-step. The **Show Solution** tool explains both the correct line of play and the thinking process you should have gone through to get there.

I particularly recommend this site for beginners. It forces you to plan and to think through your plan.

Note: To get to **Bridge Master**, click **Practice** under **PLAY OR WATCH BRIDGE**.

I'll use a hand from Bridge Master's World Class level to illustrate how this feature works.

North	South
♣Q7	♣A65432
♦AK6543	♦J2
♥A65	♥432
♠K3	♠A2

As South, you're declarer in 3NT and the ♠Q is led. A quick assessment indicates that you have four top tricks outside of diamonds. If diamonds are 3-2, there's not much of a problem. So let's say diamonds are 4-1. What lie of the diamonds do you need to make your contract? And (big hint!), where you win the first trick matters! Thinking about entries is always a good thing. For those of you who want help with this hand - as I did - go to deal A1 in the World Class section. The explanations at every level are uniformly lucid and instructive.

### **More Tips for Playing with Robots**

Below are a few more tips for playing competitive games with robots, whether in ACBL World or Robot World Daylong tournaments. Remember, this is painfully acquired knowledge. The situations below occur frequently, which is why I've chosen them.

1. You often get terrible distribution and robots like to lead singletons or doubletons and hope to get a ruff either immediately or down the

road. Be aware of that and protect yourself when you can, either by drawing trump early or by keeping the leader's opponent off lead if you can.

2. Look gift horses in the mouth - hard. Let's say spades are trump. You as declarer hold ♠AQ543, and dummy holds ♠762. West leads the ♠K. It's a virtual certainty that East has ♠J1098. Plan accordingly (often ducking works best).
3. Robot opponent opens a major, you make a takeout double, robot opponent bids, and your robot partner bids the unbid major. Be very, very careful. Your robot partner may have very little in terms of high cards and be bidding based on the law of total tricks.
4. Not infrequently, you'll be faced with horrible splits and unmakeable contracts. The robots will seemingly take special delight in establishing a rapid-fire cross ruff that you can't prevent. Don't lose heart or concentration. Don't hope the robots will misdefend. Persevere and figure out how to go down the fewest number of tricks. Some of my best scores in matchpoints have come from unmakeable contracts. Also, if you're playing Imps, most people stretch to bid vulnerable games, so going down one instead of two or three in an unmakeable contract can be a very good score.

Enough tips for now - just a couple of notes. Robots do annoying things. They invariably discard their unnecessary high cards first so, if they can win a trick with a 3 in the end game, they'll keep the 3 instead of a face card. Unlike humans, they don't make mistakes when discarding in the end game. Pseudo squeezes don't work. Although they often make strange plays on defense, don't count on them to make a mistake. And while robots won't praise your good play, they also don't ever criticize or roll their eyes. And they can be very dependable bidders - if you make sure to check the meaning of their bids.

Here's one of my favorite hands from last week:

Robot partner opened 1♠ holding ♠AQ87654, ♥Q, ♦10, ♣KQJ8. (Opponents were silent throughout.) I held ♠K1092, ♥AK, ♦A87654, ♣10. The hand cried out for a splinter bid, so I bid 4♣. (A word about splinters. B. Jay Becker, a world class player and frequent champion, played very few conventions, but he thought splinters were very important and useful and belonged in everyone's arsenal.) Anyway, I clicked 4♣ and saw that it reflected the hand I had and that my robot partner would understand it was a splinter. Robot then bid 4♠. I had prime values outside of spades and my hand looked worth a slam try. A cue bid seemed better than Blackwood because what would I do if I discovered partner had one key card? Far better, it seemed, to show that I had first round diamond control and see what partner made of that. So I bid 5♦ over 4♠. And bless its little mechanical heart and big computer brain, it bid 6♠, which easily rolled home. The robot no doubt reasoned that I would not have looked for slam without two first round controls outside of spades. The reward - 93% on the hand!