Robots Defending

Let's start by noting that playing against robots can be frustrating. You'll frequently run into extreme distribution, be given a choice of bids, and choose a perfectly reasonable one—and it will go astray. Similarly, you'll have choices in the play of the hands—and they may well go astray too. It's important to remember, even more so against robots, that this game is supposed to be fun. So, remember to laugh a lot when playing against robots. By the way, a friend was recently telling me that she curses a fair amount when playing against robots. Well, the nice thing about that is you can do it with impunity; one of the pleasures of playing against robots.

Another reason playing against robots is frustrating is that, as a description of their defensive tendencies indicates, "it's difficult to describe precisely how GIB defends. It simulates hands based on the auction, using double dummy analysis to determine the average result of each defensive play, and chooses the one with the best average." (See "How GIB Defends" in GIB System Notes.) So, what I've found particularly helpful is that, when you can, duck. Often the robot defender on lead will make a very helpful switch, for example, an Ace that sits behind our King. Similarly, even if you don't duck, don't take the available finesse. It's almost invariably wrong because robots don't lead away from honors. Rise with your Ace if you see an alternative line of play.

It's helpful to know that the robot usually leads passively against NT contracts. You can't assume it's leading its longest suit. Accordingly, when you're on lead against NT, it won't assume you're leading your best suit, which is why it doesn't always return your suit as a human partner would. Being familiar with that fact helps alleviate the frustration, particularly when you see the setting trick go astray.

In suit contracts, GIB's opening lead is frequently a side singleton or doubleton to try to get a ruff. When it leads a suit bid by the opponents, that's almost always the reason. And singletons seem to occur far more often in robot hands than they do in real life. I don't know the algorithms used to create these hands, but I suspect a significant percentage have singletons. Be forewarned.

If a robot leads an honor that's part of a sequence, it uses standard honor leads (K from AKx, A from AK doubleton). If it leads from a long suit, it leads 4th best (but, again, it doesn't always lead its longest suit). When leading from three small, it leads low against both suit and NT contracts.

It doesn't use any signals when making discards; it just tries to make safe discards. In a suit

contract, it will frequently discard from a short suit while it has trump left. Otherwise, it tends to discard from a long suit that's safe to shorten. Robots require you to pay attention to their discards and not get lazy about counting. They often discard the highest cards in a suit if they know that lower cards will be winners.

It's particularly important to recognize, as the system notes indicate, "When it's following to partner's <u>opening lead</u>, it will usually give an attitude signal:

- high spot card with an Ace or King
- high spot card with a Queen behind dummy's Ace or King
- Low in any other situation

Note that it doesn't give count in this situation, so it's hard to know when you can give it a ruff."

When it's trying to win the trick in third hand, it will play the lowest of equals. Otherwise, when following suit, it usually gives standard count signals (high = even). An exception is when it's forced to play equivalent cards in a doubleton; it will randomize them. Hence, another frustration—it's hard to get count.

But one of the joys of playing against robots is your ability to outsmart them when you know their defensive tendencies. The other evening, I had Kxx of a side suit in dummy and Qx in my hand, with two available pitches for the side suit and a trump left in dummy. The robot on my left was always going to duck and a valuable overtrick was allowed in the end game where a human may well have noticed that those cards in dummy were going away.

Movies and Travelers

If you haven't already taken advantage of this really neat feature of playing with robots, I highly recommend you do. After your game is complete, be it an instant or daylong game, go to the **History** tab, click **Recent tournaments**, select the event you want, and then click **Results**. In the box that opens, click **Show Boards**. There you'll have the options of looking at the **Traveller** and seeing how you did against the field, as well as looking at a **Movie** where you can review a play-by-play of your own movie—how you played the hand—or a movie of how others played the hand more successfully. It's a great teaching tool and one that also allows you to study how robots defend. Have fun at the movies!

Tourney 8216-1589292902- played by EllieMae48								
2020-05-12								
Nº Time North	South	East	West	Result	Points	Score	Movie	Traveller
#8216 Hartford Bridge Club Open pairs Tues. 10:15				2/32	1.20	64.07%		
1 10:20 Pancho 52	EllieMae48	marycp43	lizr19	1NN+1	120	70.00%	Movie or Lin	Traveller
2 10:20 Pancho 52	EllieMae48	marycp43	lizr19	1NN+1	120	70.00%	Movie or Lin	Traveller
3 10:25 Pancho 52	EllieMae48	marycp43	lizr19	4♠E=	-420	36.67%	Movie or Lin	Traveller
4 10:32 Pancho 52	EllieMae48	jhnth13420	glasjohn	3NS+2	460	86.67%	Movie or Lin	Traveller
5 10:39 Pancho 52	EllieMae48	jhnth13420	glasjohn	3♥N=	140	80.00%	Movie or Lin	Traveller
6 10:48 Pancho 52	EllieMae48	bevbillsau	BB30vfg	4♠N=	620	70.00%	Movie or Lin	Traveller
7 10:53 Pancho 52	EllieMae48	bevbillsau	BB30vfg	2♥N+1	140	86.67%	Movie or Lin	Traveller
8 11:02 Pancho 52	EllieMae48	Mikey1949	annie 15	6♥W-1	100	100.00%	Movie or Lin	Traveller
9 11:09 Pancho 52	EllieMae48	Mikey1949	annie 15	3NN+1	430	90.00%	Movie or Lin	Traveller
10 11:16 Pancho 52	EllieMae48	sel1930	jrm1939	3♣N+1	130	60.00%	Movie or Lin	Traveller
11 11:20 Pancho 52	EllieMae48	sel1930	jrm1939	3♦S-1	-100	90.00%	Movie or Lin	Traveller
12 11:31 Pancho 52	EllieMae48	haluconn	drjeckyl2	4♥N=	420	66.67%	Movie or Lin	Traveller
13 11:38 Pancho 52	EllieMae48	haluconn	drjeckyl2	3♠N-1	-100	40.00%	Movie or Lin	Traveller
14 11:45 Pancho 52	EllieMae48	bwats	zanl	3NE+1	-630	10.00%	Movie or Lin	Traveller
15 11:52 Pancho 52	EllieMae48	bwats	zanl	3NN-3	-150	3.33%	Movie or Lin	Traveller
16 11:58 Pancho 52	EllieMae48	runner9	drag104	1NW-3	150	100.00%	Movie or Lin	Traveller
17 12:03 Pancho 52	EllieMae48	runner9	drag104	4♠S=	130	86.67%	Movie or Lin	Traveller
18 12:13 Pancho 52	EllieMae48	marycp43	lizr19	3NE=	-400	10.00%	Movie or Lin	Traveller
19 12:18 Pancho 52	EllieMae48	marycp43	lizr19	3NN+2	660	66.67%	Movie or Lin	Traveller
				MPs Average		64.39%		19 MPs Hands

An Excursion Into Playing with Humans

Last Friday night, I decided to do something different. I signed up for an individual tournament on the ACBL menu at 8 p.m. for $1.25. With three minutes to go, 55 participants had registered. When the tournament started, there were 72 players and 18 tables. I had no idea what I was getting into. It turns out that I had entered an individual tournament, in which you get a new human partner and new human opponents every three boards for 12 rounds in a speedball format (14 minutes for three boards). These humans turned out to be far less reliable than robots. Some of you may remember the former Individual Regional in Newton, MA, held in January and named in honor of Bill Keohanes. It ended several years ago and was the last of the individual tournaments. I loved it. It was great and quirky fun. You quickly compared conventions and then prayed there would be no misunderstandings. There inevitably were. Psychology and assessing partner's and opponents' abilities become even more important than usual. Cue bids and splinter bids were not infrequently passed by partners. The challenge of playing a 0-2 fit was character building. That past experience prepared me well for last Friday night.

The first board revealed we were playing in an imp contest, in which making and setting games is particularly important. In this contest, you have no idea what conventions your partner is employing or familiar with. On the first board, my partner opened 1♠. Pass to me. I had three

spades and 11 HCP and a perfect <u>Drury</u> bid. I also had ♣AKxx. Even if Drury was misunderstood, I felt safe.

Long tank by my partner. Not good, particularly in speedball. He bid 2♦. Here I got conservative. I bid 2♠. We were nonvulnerable and I figured if partner had the goods, he would go on. 2♠ was passed out. Turned out 4♠ was cold, but partner botched the play and took forever to do it. At one point, he had a pitch on my ♣A and pitched, I kid you not, the ♥A. I assumed it was a misclick. (For those of you who haven't done it, go immediately to **Account**, then **Settings** and click **Confirm cards** and **Confirm bids** to avoid misclicks.) But still it looked like a long evening. I clicked **History** and noted that we were already minus 5 imps—and had 5 minutes left to play two hands.

On the next hand, partner was in third seat and passed a good 13 HCPs. A loss of another imp. Minus 6 with ten boards to go. Fortunately, the opponents stretched to an unmakeable 3NT on the next hand and we gained back 5 imps.

The rest of the evening went exceedingly well. I was allowed to make a vulnerable game by poor defense that robots wouldn't have played. Trump leads were called for and the robots are particularly good at those when they're not leading singletons. Some awkward moments did arise. One partner made a <u>Rusinow</u> lead. How was I to know? Another passed what I thought was a forcing bid. But my partner and I ended up punishing two opponents in competitive auctions with doubles that resulted in boxcar numbers. On the whole, I thought the standard of play was considerably below that of the robots I usually play against. I will try this contest again because I like the uncertainty and the need to read partner's and opponents' capabilities. The first board often gives great clues for the remaining two. Anyway, I managed to come in first among the 72 contestants, four imps clear of second.

This is the hand I made 4♠ on for 9.76 imps. As North, I held ♠AK953 ♥10 ♦AJ962 ♣72. Partner held ♠10864 ♥Q72 ♦7 ♣A10954. Both vulnerable. The bidding went (East) 2♥, P, 3♥, 3♠, P, 4♠. (Bless partner's bold little human heart—of course I could have had more.) Only 6 pairs of 18 were in game; only 2 pairs made it, 3 went down two.

The other hands were East: ♠7 ♥K96543 ♦K84 ♣KJ6 and West: ♠QJ2 ♥AJ8 ♦Q1053 ♣Q83. A spade was led. A quick review shows that if you can manage 3 ruffs in dummy, take your two Aces, and five spades in hand, you can make 4. So, ♦A, ruff a diamond, and here I led the ♥Q from dummy, hoping East had ♥AK and no more spades. West fell from grace when he ducked the ♥Q and East had to win with no more spades to cut down the cross ruff. The heart needed to be led, so you have two entries to your hand to continue the cross ruff. A satisfying moment.