Playing with Robots

Part XVIII

By pluckycat

One of the things I haven't done on BBO is take full advantage of the free opportunities to play with robots. You don't get any masterpoints for doing well in those games, but you do get to compete and practice and the hands appear to me to have a somewhat lesser degree of difficulty than the ones you have to pay for. They also are immensely popular. The one I played in this Monday had 13,963 entrants. We'll look at some hands from that game in this article.

What led me to the free tournament menu was an instructional video called "Understanding Robot Leads" posted on BBO by Peter Hollands, an Australian expert, who regularly posts instructional videos on BBO in the "News" section under "Messages." A link to his website and instructional videos is further down in this article. In the video "Understanding Robot Leads," (No. 257 in the series), which appeared on BBO last week through this Monday, Hollands analyzes in 36 minutes the bidding and play of 8 hands he played.

Hollands is an entertaining as well as a good teacher -- well worth watching. What's particularly instructive for me is listening to the inferences Hollands draws about the distribution and high-card points in the robot hands based on their leads and card play. For example, I've repeatedly said in these articles that robots very much like to lead passively. Hollands emphasizes that point and then goes on to analyze what it may reveal about the robots' hands if you discover that the robots didn't make a passive lead. Hollands sometimes gets it wrong, which I find very encouraging, and then goes back and analyzes how others did by viewing their movies to see if he could have done better. All good stuff. The link is https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCOaZnFbFH1OlbhVm25z4rLQ

If, for some reason, that doesn't work, just google **Peter Hollands YouTube**. Hollands scored 57% in the eight hands he played and challenged you to do better. Let's see how you would have done in the Just Declare game I played on Monday.

Oh, before I forget, there is a mea culpa I need to make about last week's article. BBO switched its menus a few weeks ago and, contrary to what I said last week, the same $0.39 robot daylong games awarding BBO points are still available on BBO. Now, to find them you have to go to the homepage under **Play or Watch Bridge***, click* **Competitive** *and scroll down to* **Daylong Tournaments***.*

Board 1

The first deal in Just Declare, where, as you'll remember, you're given the bidding and just have to play the hands, seems straightforward. You're left in 3♠ with no adverse bidding. Here's the full deal:

The opening lead was a helpful ♦ J, taken by the ♦ A; followed by a helpful low ♥, taken by the ♥ A; followed by the ♦ 6, taken by you with the ♦ K. Now the hope is that spades are 4-3 and, if there's a ruff, that it's in the hand with the four spades. Sure enough, it works out that way: West gets a ♦ ruff after East wins the ♠A, and I make 3. It seems like a flat board, but surprisingly I receive 59.65%. Of 172 players in the cohort playing these hands, 139 make 3♠, 31 go down one and two go down 2. People either forgot to draw all the trump or miscounted trump.

Board 2

The second board is more interesting. The North/South hands are

N-♠Q1073 ♥A64 ♦K10985 ♣Q; S-♠J65 ♥KQJ ♦AJ62 ♣K85

You find yourself in 3NT after this bidding:

W	N	E	S
			1N
2♠	3♦	P	3N
P	P	P	

Plan the play after the ♣7 is led and East plays the ♣3. You click on West's 2♠ bid and find it's Cappelletti, showing 4+♠ and a minor and 10+ total points. Well, clearly the minor is clubs. The play of the ♣3 by East probably means West has five clubs including the 2 -- and 4+♠. In the rest of its hand, it could have two hearts and two diamonds. So, there's a risk in playing a ♠ should East have a ♠ honor (there's room for East to have the ♠K as West has 10+ total points). So, I determined to go with the percentages and play West for a singleton ♦. I considered cashing three hearts to make certain West had a singleton ♦ and then finessing against East for the ♦Q after leading low from my hand to the ♦K, but that seemed to have a risk. What if West shows up with two hearts? It then may still have four or five spades and, therefore, one or two diamonds and now East may have hearts to cash if it has the ♠K. Anyway, I did finesse against East, West did have a singleton ♦ and the ♦Q was where it was supposed to be. After taking my diamonds, I then

took my three hearts, stripping the hands of hearts, and exit with a ♠. West is down to ♠AK and ♣AJ. After taking its spades, it has to lead a club to my ♣K. Making 4. The full deal:

Again, somewhat surprisingly, I receive 74%. 105 of 204 players made 4. And only 6 made 3 and the other ninety players went down, sometimes several tricks, either playing for the ♦Q to drop or taking the finesse the wrong way.

Board 3

Board 3 presents an interesting playing challenge. Your contract is 3♣. West has jump-overcalled 2♠, showing 6+♠, 10-HCP, 3+ total points. West leads the ♠A, and then the ♠8. Dummy has

♠QJ42 ♥QJ ♦KJ65 ♣QJ10 and you have ♠K ♥9852 ♦Q87 ♣K9752. What do you play from dummy at trick two?

Let's say you play the ♠J, ruffed by East with the ♣3. What do play then? You have a spade loser, at least two heart losers, a diamond loser and a club loser. Down one would be great.

Anyway, I overruffed, then played clubs, hoping diamonds were 3-3 and I could pitch one ♥ on a ♠ and one on a ♦. East took my club lead with the ♣A, played the ♦A and West showed out. Now a ♦ ruff. But here, West returned a ♠, allowing me to pitch a ♥, draw trump, ruff a ♥ and only lose two hearts. Losing six tricks for down two. If you played like I did, you scored 83.62%. If you discarded a ♦ at trick two instead of overruffing, you went down three for 50.28%. If you discarded a ♥ at trick two instead of overruffing, you went down four for 15.25%. If on trick two, you played low from dummy, East would have ruffed and then when you overruffed, you would have gone down only one for 98.31%. Only seven of 178 players went down one, after judging that West may have seven spades for its bid. The full deal:

Board 4

The next hand is all about paying attention to the robots' proclivities. Keep that hint in mind when you plan your play. There's no opposition bidding and your contract is 4♠. Your hand is ♠Q6432 ♥A765 ♦Q102 ♣K and dummy has ♠AJ108 ♥93 ♦K86 ♣A1076.

You receive the lead of the ♠5. How are you going to proceed? Well, I thought the key was to ensure two ♥ ruffs in dummy and to also secure the discard of a ♦ on the ♣A. If the ♠ finesse works at trick one, I only lose a ♦ and a ♥. So, I proceeded to take the ♠ finesse. Did you? Even after my hint? Robots lead passively time after time. They don't lead away from honors if they can help it. Moreover, if they lead a trump, there probably is no other passive lead to be made. So, I hope you rose with ♠A and dropped the singleton ♠K. Good for you. Then, it's a relatively simple matter to follow the play I outlined even if you didn't drop the ♠K. Of course, when I played the hand, I mechanically took the finesse at the first trick ignoring what I've been preaching to others, so I made only 4♠, but for yet another surprising score--80.33%. 114 of 184 people playing the hand went down one for 35.25%. Typically, they lost a heart, two diamonds and a club at the end when they drew trumps in three rounds and, consequently, failed to ruff two hearts. At the other end of the scale, 11 made five when they dropped the ♠K after the lead of the ♠5. They scored 97.27%. The full deal:

A couple of missed opportunities on the last two hands. Lucky to score what I did. The inference I draw is that the level of competition at the free daylong games, not surprisingly, is inferior to the competition at the daylong games at which you need to pay. Why not surprising? The free games have got to be attractive to many more beginners. Nonetheless, despite those lost opportunities, I have averaged 74.6% on the first four boards. Would you have done better? Can I keep it up?

Stay healthy and safe and tune in next week for the last four interesting boards.