

Playing with Robots

Part XXII

By pluckycat

About a week ago, I played in one of ACBL's daylong 12-board masterpoint sessions. I noticed that also playing in the event was Leo LaSota, who is the Ace—the person with the most lifetime BBO points. So, I thought it would be a good opportunity to review his movies and analyze his play to see what I (and you) could learn. As usual, the analysis was instructive. LaSota didn't have a particularly good session for him (67.9%) since he often scores in the 70s, if not higher. Therefore, his bad boards were particularly eye-opening. Let's look at both the good and the bad.

Some general observations: First, LaSota bid game or slam on every hand. He often, as you will see, upgraded his hand, sometimes way up. He and I played only one board in common, which I review below. I played my usual conservative game, trying to bid as my robot would expect. I eschewed the aggressive, and in some instances, hyper-aggressive, measures of LaSota. I scored 66.9%, one per cent less than La Sota, which indicates to me that one can, perhaps not regularly, but also perhaps not infrequently, do as well as the experts when playing against robots without resorting to their tactics. LaSota does appear to bid the cards up and rely on superior card play against robots based on his, no doubt, thorough and deep knowledge of their proclivities. Superior play did result in a couple of high-scoring boards.

Board 1

On Board 1, LaSota held ♠AQ10 ♥10 ♦AKQ983 ♣1096. What would you open? Seems clear, right?

1NT was LaSota's choice—not the 1♦ you and I thought obvious. Anyway, his partner transferred to hearts and LaSota then bid 3NT.

The full auction and deal:

D		N Robot		W N E S	
1		♠ J86		P P P 1NT	
		♥ AQ962		P 2♥ P 3NT	
		♦ 6		P P P	
		♣ K432			
W Robot		E Robot			
♠ 532		♠ K974			
♥ J853		♥ K74			
♦ J10		♦ 7542			
♣ QJ75		♣ A8			
S Leo LaSota					
♠ AQ10					
♥ 10					
♦ AKQ983					
♣ 1096				3NT S NS: 0 EW: 0	

Only a quarter of the field bid 3NT. Most bid 1♦, then rebid 2♦ and languished there. Of the 15 who bid 3NT only a third made five as LaSota did. After the ♦J lead, he cashed his six diamonds, and then did what?

LaSota led the ♣10, ♣J, ♣K, ♣A. The ♣8 was ducked all around! Now East was endplayed, so LaSota lost only two clubs. Making five. For 95.38%.

Board 2

On the next board, LaSota got to a 4♠ contract that only half the field reached and only half of those made. He held ♠KJ4 ♥82 ♦K72 ♣AK1072

Not at all surprisingly, he opened 1NT and ultimately raised his partner's invitational 3♠ to 4♠.

The full deal:

2 ^o	N Robot	W Robot	N	E	S
	♠ A98763 ♥ KJ5 ♦ Q5 ♣ 95	♠ A98763 ♥ KJ5 ♦ Q5 ♣ 95	2♥	3♠	1NT
W Robot	E Robot				
♠ AQ94 ♥ AJ8643 ♦ Q72	♠ Q1052 ♥ 10763 ♦ 109 ♣ J84				
	S Leo LaSota				
	♠ KJ4 ♥ 82 ♦ K72 ♣ AK1063				
			4♠ N		NS: 0 EW: 0

LaSota made four for 76.98%. The key was not to lose two spades.

Board 3

This was the only board we played in common. You're dealt ♠AK9 ♥102 ♦4 ♣AKQJ863. As dealer, nonvulnerable v. vulnerable, what do you open?

After a fleeting thought of opening 2♣, I reluctantly bid 1♣, fearing the worst, but after a pass, my partner bid 4♥, showing a long suit, 6-10 HCP, a strong rebiddable suit (which, had I bothered to look up, showed 4 of 5 honors or AKQ).

What to bid next? I pondered and just didn't quite remember what a strong rebiddable suit meant and didn't take the two minutes it would have taken to look it up. Laziness has a price. So, as a result, I didn't have enough faith that my robot had a runnable heart suit. That was a costly mistake. I had two hearts—and the ♥10 to boot—so it either had ♥AKQ or ♥AKQJ and at least seven, and probably eight, hearts. I just didn't think it through enough. Anyway, I bid 6♣.

LaSota, on the other hand, opened the hand—sure, you guessed it—2NT.

The ensuing bidding and full deal was

3 D	N Robot	W N E S
	♠ 10876	P 4♠ X 4♥
	♥ AKQJ7653	P 5♣ P 5♥
	♦ 4	P 6♥ P P
W Robot	E Robot	
♠ 53	♠ QJ42	
♥ 92	♥ 8	
♦ KJ10976	♦ AQ853	
♣ 1042	♣ 975	
	S Leo LaSota	
	♠ AK9	
	♥ 104	
	♦ 2	
	♣ AKQJ863	
	6♥ S	NS: 0 EW: 0

What's noteworthy about the bidding is that LaSota's opening 2NT bid was always going to result in his robot driving to slam with his strong eight-card heart suit and so he did, despite LaSota's effort to put on the brakes. Moreover, LaSota's opening bid and robot's transfer resulted in LaSota being declarer. So, despite the double of the transfer bid, the West robot stuck with its passive opening lead proclivities and led a spade. So, LaSota made all 13 tricks. He was the only one in 6♥ to make an overtrick. North was declarer in all other cases and received the ♦ A lead. As a result, LaSota received 98.39%. The others in 6♥ received 81.45% and I received 59.68% for 6♣.

Boards 4, 5, and 6

There followed a series of three boards on which LaSota bid what you and I would have bid and played unexceptionally to score slightly above average on all three boards.

Board 7

On the next board, he was back to being a risk taker and very aggressive in bidding a 6♥ contract.

Here's the full deal:

7 D	N Robot	W N E S
	♠ 96	P 2♠ P 2♣
	♥ 1096	P 3♥ P 3♠
	♦ Q743	P 4NT P 6♥
W Robot	E Robot	
♠ 1085	♠ J743	
♥ Q3	♥ 2	
♦ A98	♦ K1065	
♣ J10754	♣ A986	
	S Leo LaSota	
	♠ AKQ2	
	♥ AKJ8754	
	♦ J2	
	♣	
	6♥ S	NS: 0 EW: 0

The aggressiveness paid off here. La Sota received the ♣ J lead and was able to throw a losing diamond on the ♣ K, ruff a ♠ and have the slam come home. What is surprising is that 30% of those playing the hand bid 6♥ and received the same lead. What happened to trying to discover

you're off the \spadesuit A and \diamondsuit K? Or do you just not care and hope for a favorable lead? Which he got this time. La Sota scored 86.15%.

Boards 8 and 9

Next, on board 8, he bid a marginal game that came home for 69%.

Then, on board 9, another marginal game that some misplayed. LaSota received 72.5% on that board.

Then came two boards that confirmed that if you live by the sword, you also die by the sword. LaSota's aggressive bid cost him dearly.

Board 10

On board 10, he was dealt \spadesuit Q864 \heartsuit A85 \diamondsuit 7 \clubsuit AK742. What did he open in second seat, both vulnerable?

Of course, you guessed it—1NT. Talk about bidding them up. That bid led to a 4 \spadesuit contract.

The ensuing auction and full deal was

10	N Robot	W N E S
	\spadesuit KJ32	P 1NT
	\heartsuit Q10964	2 \clubsuit X XX 2 \clubsuit
	\diamondsuit Q84	3 \spadesuit 4 \spadesuit P P
\clubsuit 6	P	
W Robot	E Robot	
\spadesuit 95	\spadesuit A107	
\heartsuit J	\heartsuit K732	
\diamondsuit AKJ6532	\diamondsuit 109	
\clubsuit 1085	\clubsuit QJ93	
S Leo LaSota		
\spadesuit Q864		
\heartsuit A85		
\diamondsuit 7		
\clubsuit AK742		
	4 \spadesuit S	NS: 0 EW: 0

LaSota had to lose four tricks after a \diamondsuit K lead and \heartsuit J continuation where East withheld his \heartsuit K. I was pleased to see he received what I thought was a well-deserved 20.37%.

Board 11

Undeterred, La Sota bid them up on the next board as well.

Holding \spadesuit QJ1065 \heartsuit QJ9 \diamondsuit A4 \clubsuit AKQ, he opened 2NT and reached 4 \spadesuit .

The auction and deal:

11 D	N Robot	W N E S
	♠ 9873 ♥ A762 ♦ 1096 ♣ 102	P 3♣ P 2NT P 4♣ P 3♣ P P
W Robot	E Robot	
♠ K4 ♥ 1054 ♦ KJ53 ♣ J964	♠ A2 ♥ K83 ♦ Q872 ♣ 8753	
	S Leo LaSota	
	♠ QJ1065 ♥ QJ9 ♦ A4 ♣ AKQ	4♠ S NS: 0 EW: 0

Again, there was no way to avoid the loss of four tricks as there was no miracle in the heart suit, e.g., singleton or doubleton ♥ 10 and ♥ K inside. 47.10% for La Sota this time, as most others were in 4♠ as well.

Board 12

Okay, last board. Now completely undeterred, LaSota holds vulnerable v. nonvulnerable, fourth seat after three passes, ♠107 ♥ AK ♦ K973 ♣ K8432. What does he bid?

I'd open a diamond because of the rebid problem if there's a 1♥ response. LaSota, of course, handled the rebid problem by opening 1NT, again with a 13 count. Even this small sample seems to indicate that he does this regularly. Here it worked out.

The ensuing auction and full deal:

12 D	N Robot	W N E S
	♠ J986 ♥ 873 ♦ A ♣ AQ1076	P P P 1NT P 2♣ P 2♦ P 3NT P P P
W Robot	E Robot	
♠ AK54 ♥ QJ102 ♦ J82 ♣ 95	♠ Q32 ♥ 9654 ♦ Q10654 ♣ J	
	S Leo LaSota	
	♠ 107 ♥ AK ♦ K973 ♣ K8432	3NT S NS: 0 EW: 0

LaSota received 79.23% for bidding and making 3NT.

The **key takeaway** for me from the analysis of LaSota's session was how frequently he upgraded on all sorts of hands to bid 1NT and 2NT. It clearly works for him—at least often enough.

See you next week. Stay safe and healthy.