

## Playing with Robots

### Part XX

By pluckycat

For the past two weeks in these articles, I've been touting the videos of Peter Hollands, an Australian expert. This week, I'm going to do so again. His free instructional videos appear in the "Messages" Section on BBO every week. They appear on a Tuesday and run until the end of the week. The one I'm particularly recommending now appeared last week and is titled "Focus on Card Play." It's #259 in his series and is readily available on his website. The video analyzes eight hands in a BBO instant game. I'll highlight some of Hollands' key teachings and then review a 12-board instant matchpoint game I played right after watching his video. Inspired by Hollands, I scored 84.82% on the 12 boards. That is not a misprint and is perhaps the best recommendation I can make to have you watch some of [Hollands' instructional videos](#).

Hollands is particularly good at stopping to analyze, at key points in the play of the hand, what inferences you can make about the defenders' distribution and high-card points from their bidding, leads and card play. He doesn't, by his own admission, always get it right, but engaging in the analysis is most often very helpful. It's a constant process of visualizing the defenders' hands and then readjusting that visualization as the play of the hand advances. It's something I don't do nearly enough. Hollands is also good about trying to figure out what bid makes sense and whether a particular bid will run into a problem - either a rebid problem or simply not giving partner enough information about your hand. He also is very free to upgrade his hand, while checking what message he is giving his robot partner. Listening to Hollands requires real concentration. Like playing with robots, you need to slow the action down. He's very facile with the concepts that are second nature to him, but might not be for his audience. Pausing the video at times to reflect on what he was saying was helpful to me.

Now, to the instant game I played right after listening to Hollands. Remember, in Instant Tournaments, you're dealt hands from a past tournament and your scores are compared against 14 players in those tourneys.

**Board 1** found me with ♠AJ86 ♥A76 ♦Q643 ♣Q10. I bid 1♦. My robot partner bid 1♥. What would you bid next?

It was clear to me to bid 1NT with my flat hand. Even if we missed a 4-4 spade fit or a 5-3 heart fit, NT might be better and, since partner is a passed hand, there's no game to be had. 1NT was the contract. I didn't think there was much to the play, but as is often the case, I was wrong.

Here's the full deal:

D 1	N Robot			
	♠97			
	♥KQJ3			
	♦A72			
	♣8642			
W Robot	W	N	E	S
♠KQ42		Pass	Pass	1♦
♥10954		Pass	1♥	Pass
♦9		Pass	Pass	1NT
♣KJ97		Pass	Pass	Pass
	E Robot			
	♠1053			
	♥82			
	♦KJ1085			
	♣A53			
	S pluckycat			7♦
	♠AJ86			
	♥A76			
	♦Q643			
	♣Q10			
				1NT South
				0 0

West led the ♣7 to East's ♣A and East returned the ♠10. It seemed obvious to me to cover, but those playing South in NT rose with the ♠A. So, when declarer rose with ♠A, he ultimately made only one 1NT. The hand was also usually played by North, and not South, because South bid 1♠. The defense invariably took at least two spades and four clubs and often a diamond as well if a spade was led by East at the start of the hand, which was often the case. Remember robots prefer neutral leads. Anyway, at my table, the West robot won with the ♠Q at trick two, then took three more clubs before leading the ♠K. An odd lead, but perhaps it thinks its partner has the ♠8. Anyway, the lead of the ♠K allowed me to make 2NT for 100%, the key being the 1NT bid instead of 1♠.



enough it did. That ended the bidding. I am thinking there's genius behind the robots' programming. I passed 3NT, thinking 6♦ appeared unlikely after the overcall and entries to my partner's hand may be scarce. Indeed, they were. Dummy appeared: ♠AJ753 ♥J62 ♦76 ♣K63.

The ♦Q was led by East. Plan the play.

The key is to get to dummy to cash the ♠A to discard a heart to make six. The fact that you have diamond and heart entries back to your hand makes it worry free. The lead of the ♦Q showed that East had no safe lead, probably with honors in spades, hearts and clubs. Thank you, Peter Hollands! So, the only hope was to lead the ♣Q after taking the ♦Q with the ♦A and unblocking the ♠K. Sure enough, the East robot was accommodating, having no idea yet of the diamond holding, taking its ♣A and leading back a club. Making six after discarding a heart on the ♠A. A shared top for 96.43%

The full deal:

Board 4 presented play problems for the rest of my cohort.

Everyone ended up in 3NT and this was the full deal:

The lead was the ♣6. East played the ♣10 and I won the ♣Q. I didn't play the ♣K because I wanted East to think I have it to deter a club play when East gets in. I played a low diamond and was pleased to see West play the ♦9. My plan was to finesse diamonds twice. East took the ♦Q and played the ♥J back. I took the ♥K. As I suspected, when I played my second diamond, West was out, and I played the ♦A and another diamond and East took his ♦K. East led back the ♠Q, seeing no profit in hearts. I won with ♠A and led to the ♥A in dummy, cashed my three winning diamonds and discarded two clubs and a spade. East didn't make helpful discards, one of the robot's failings, and West in the three-card ending kept one spade and two hearts, so I made five with my two hearts and one spade for yet another surprising, but welcome, 100%. Other players either tried to establish spades instead of diamonds, an anti-percentage endeavor, or deprived themselves early of the ♥A, their entry to dummy, or played a second club.

Not a bad start. Three 100% and a 96%. Next week, we'll explore a few more interesting boards in this set and keep delving into the challenges and fun of playing with robots.

The results on the full 12 boards:

Board	Result	We	They	We	They
1	1NTS+1	120		100%	0%
2	1NTS+2	150		100%	0%
3	3NTN+3	490		96.4%	3.6%
4	3NTS+2	660		100%	0%
5	2♥S+3	200		92.9%	7.1%
6	5♣N-2		100	71.4%	28.6%
7	3NTS+1	630		53.6%	46.4%
8	4♥E=		420	85.7%	14.3%
9	4♠S-1		50	64.3%	35.7%
10	2♥N+2	170		67.9%	32.1%
11	2♥S+2	170		85.7%	14.3%
12	1NTS=	90		100%	0%
				84.8%	15.2%

On only two boards of 12, did I not get a top or shared top. On both of those, someone took an aberrant view, e.g., opening 1NT with a flat 14 HCP hand that resulted in a makeable game bid, with enormously favorable distribution, while everyone else subsided in a part score. On the hand I scored 53%, it was a flat 3NT hand, where the limit of the hand was nine tricks and where one person somehow found a way to go down. I felt having a flat board in the mix deprived me of the opportunity to chase the unicorn—a 90% game.

I should note that I didn't think I played at all exceptionally well. I suspect many of you could have done as well.