

Playing with Robots

Part XXVIII

By pluckycat

This week, we'll look at the bidding of Leftfoot, another of the high-ranking kings of the BBO world (one of its top 30 lifetime point getters). You'll get a chance to match your bidding skills with Leftfoot, who scored 87% on the five boards we will review. These occurred in one of BBO's daylong eight-board tournaments. Although this is a small sample, Leftfoot, like Leo LaSota and Usla, appears to have a distinct methodology. Even if you don't adopt it when playing with robots, it very much appears worth considering.

What would you open as South with these hands? (Answers are below, but don't peek until you answer all of them.)

1. ♠AJ1063 ♥94 ♦A4 ♣A1072 (Both NV) (3rd Seat)
2. ♠K10 ♥K872 ♦AK4 ♣9872 (Vul v. NV) (2nd Seat)
3. ♠AJ2 ♥KQJ ♦Q7 ♣A10654 (Vul v. NV) (3rd Seat)
4. ♠AQ86 ♥A103 ♦Q93 ♣QJ7 (NV v. Vul) (2nd Seat)
5. ♠K54 ♥AJ98 ♦K10976 ♣Q (Both Vul) (1st Seat)

As I've noted in the past, BBO offers you the opportunity to follow closely the exploits of its leading players. Indeed, Leftfoot and Usla regularly play in the eight-board BBO tournaments (usually three or more a day) and often do exceedingly well. For example, in the tournament from which the five boards above were chosen, Leftfoot scored 72.12% on the eight boards, came in 18 of 1140 participants and earned 9.72 BBO points for himself. It's why he and Usla often win 20 or more BBO points a day and find themselves among the top daily and monthly BBO point winners. Leo LaSota, the Ace, on the other hand doesn't play in the eight-board BBO daylong tournaments, but he does play in the 12-board ACBL daylong tournaments (often playing five or more). So, you can follow him there. To follow any of these experts, just go to "Home," then "Competitive," then "Daylongs" and finally click on "Complete," which will reveal the previous day's ACBL and BBO tournaments and their results. But those ACBL daylongs only offer 1.50 masterpoints to a few high scorers, so LaSota must be amassing his points elsewhere because he regularly gains the most points in a day and in a month. If anyone knows how LaSota amasses the huge number of points he does, I would love to know.

Anyway, back to Leftfoot.

On the first hand, Leftfoot bid 1NT—a nonstandard bid with 13HCP and five spades. He ended up inducing his opponents to bid 3♥ and he defended 3♥ doubled by his robot partner and set it three, for 500 and 100%. Every other North South didn't defend, but played the hand with varying degrees of success: a few played in 1NT making 2 for 90%, but several in that contract went down; a few played in 3♣ making, for 77%, but the vast majority in that contract went down.

The full deal:

D	N North	W N E S
	♠ 7 ♥ KJ52 ♦ KJ108 ♣ 6543	P P P 1NT P 2♣ 2♣ P 3+ P 3♥ P P X P P
W West	E East	
♠ 4 ♥ A76 ♦ Q9632 ♣ KJ98	♠ KQ9852 ♥ Q1083 ♦ 75 ♣ Q	
S South		
♠ AJ1063 ♥ 94 ♦ A4 ♣ A1072		3♥x E NS: 0 EW: 0


On the second hand, Leftfoot bid 1NT and was left to play there, making, for plus 90 and 82.76%. He made another nonstandard bid with 13HCP, this time with a balanced hand. Two-thirds of the field let E-W play in 3♠, after a 1♣ opening by those in Leftfoot's seat and a double by West, going down one for 50%.

The full deal:

D	N North	W N E S
	♠ Q32 ♥ AJ93 ♦ J3 ♣ 6543	P P P 1NT P P P
W West	E East	
♠ A94 ♥ Q1064 ♦ 10975 ♣ AK	♠ J8765 ♥ 5 ♦ Q862 ♣ QJ10	
S South		
♠ K10 ♥ K872 ♦ AK4 ♣ 9872		1NT S NS: 0 EW: 0


On the third hand, Leftfoot bid 2NT. Another nonstandard bid with 17HCP. Here, 95% of the field played in the same final contract as Leftfoot, so the opening bid didn't give him a particular advantage. Nonetheless, he made 4NT while a third of the field made fewer tricks. He got 70.69%

The full deal:

	N North ♠ K76 ♥ 10842 ♦ AK3 ♣ 972	W N E S P P P 2NT P 3♣ P 3♦ P 3NT P P P P P P
	W West ♠ Q843 ♥ A73 ♦ J9542 ♣ J	E East ♠ 1095 ♥ 965 ♦ 1086 ♣ KQ83
	S South ♠ AJ2 ♥ KQJ ♦ Q7 ♣ A10654	3NT S NS: 0 EW: 0


On the fourth hand, Leftfoot bid 1NT and ended up defending 2♥, as did 85% of the field, since Leftfoot's 1NT bid was standard. But Leftfoot and his bot defended better than 50% of the others, defeating 2♥, so he earned 80.43%

The full deal:

	N North ♠ J532 ♥ 75 ♦ 764 ♣ K1042	W N E S 2♥ P P 1NT P P P P
	W West ♠ 10 ♥ KQJ82 ♦ KJ8 ♣ A953	E East ♠ K974 ♥ 964 ♦ A1052 ♣ 86
	S South ♠ AQ86 ♥ A103 ♦ Q93 ♣ QJ7	2♥ W NS: 0 EW: 0

On the fifth hand, Leftfoot bid 1NT yet again—this time a very nonstandard bid with a singleton, albeit an honor in that suit and 13HCP again. Here, Leftfoot reached 3NT when his bot partner bid it. He made three for 100% because no one else was in game, either subsiding in 1NT or 3♦. The play of the hand by both Leftfoot and, more importantly, by the robots is worth analyzing.

The full deal:

		N North ♠ Q73 ♥ 103 ♦ QJ4 ♣ AJ1087	W N E S P 3NT P P P
		W West ♠ 10862 ♥ Q652 ♦ A32 ♣ 52	E East ♠ AJ9 ♥ K74 ♦ 85 ♣ K9643
		S South ♠ K54 ♥ AJ98 ♦ K10976 ♣ Q	3NT S NS: 0 EW: 0

Leftfoot received the ♠2 lead, on which dummy played low and East properly played the ♠J. Leftfoot won with the ♠K and returned the ♣Q, losing to the ♣K. East now returned a heart, with Leftfoot losing to the ♥Q in West's hand. West now returned a heart to East's ♥K and Leftfoot's ♥A. Leftfoot now led the ♦2 and West hopped up with the ♦A. What did it lead back? **Not** a spade to put Leftfoot down one—and now you're going to fault the robot and declare Leftfoot lucky, aren't you? Not so fast. The one thing robots do exceedingly well is count. Once its partner had shown up with 7HCP (two kings and a jack), the robot now realized that Leftfoot must have the ♠A for his bid. He needed the Ace to have 17HCP. The other thing is that robots, as I have repeatedly noted, trust others to have what they say they have. So, in the robot's mind, it would be futile to lead a spade. So, it led back a diamond, because maybe the opener shaded his bid a little (isn't it fun to try to go in the mind of the bot) and had only 14HCP and the ♠A, but not the ♦K. Curtains for the bots.

So, what have we learned from this admittedly small sample? Leftfoot, like LaSota and Usla, appears consistently to upgrade his hands and appears committed to bidding 1NT when he has 13HCP and the arguable shape to bid 1NT. 13 HCP for him is the new 15 and 17 is the new 19. It seems to work well for him. Astute readers will note that Leftfoot scored 87% on these five boards, but for him to score 72.12% on the eight boards, he had to score a mediocre 47.5% on the other three boards, on which he didn't open NT. On those boards, he either made an obvious suit bid in a major or responded to his opponents' bidding. Does Leftfoot bid 1NT with all 13 HCP hands that have at least an honor singleton or two doubletons? Can't say for sure and certainly a larger sample is necessary, but these hands are very suggestive and I, for one, will run a few experiments down the road and let you know the results of bidding 1NT against robots with 13HCP as well as probably looking at more Leftfoot hands. Of course, all this means that opening 1NT with 14HCP against robots is pretty much now standard and I do that regularly, generally to good effect. What happened on Hand 5 above happens with regularity. Robots misdefend because they trust you to have made a standard bid as they would have done.

Stay safe and healthy and vote if you haven't already.