

## Playing with Robots

### Part XXVI

By pluckycat

For the past several weeks, we've been looking intensively at the methods of experts playing with robots. I figured you and I might need a respite from robots, so this week we look at my adventures and misadventures in playing with humans in the individual games BBO sponsors, in which you play 12 boards in four rounds. In each round of three boards, you get a different partner and different opponents. It's speedball as well—14 minutes a round. Playing with robots and regular partners, one forgets how funny, prickly, and obtuse humans in these games can be. We'll explore some of the highlights—mostly lowlights—of my recent forays into these games.

I play in these individual games about once every two weeks. I've reviewed the trials and tribulations of these games previously. (See Article IX.) You'd have thought I'd have learned my lessons. But the best thing about playing in individual games (maybe the next best thing if you like roller coasters) is that they remind me of what's really good about playing with robots. First, robots are unfailingly polite and don't comment on anyone's play. Even in the best of circumstances, I find that opponents irritatingly cheerlead with far too many "wdp" for perfunctory declarer play that succeeds. Second, robots' declarer play is generally very good, while partners in the individual frequently fail to take certain winners and embark on lines that are transparently doomed to failure. Third, robots' bidding is generally reliable. You usually—but not always—can count on what a robot says when you click its bid. With that last point in mind, let's go to the first illustrative deal.

I pick up ♠AK94 ♥104 ♦AQJ8 ♣K104. My partner opens 1♥. Well, this is promising. Slam sugar plums immediately dance in my head. I bid 1♠. Partner bids 4♠. Grand slam sugar plums now are doing a jig. Partner should have something like 17-20 HCPs and/or no more than a five-loser hand. I check for Aces and find two and the ♠Q as expected. I almost bid the grand here, but I have no certain way of asking for kings and understanding the response. I also know that folks are generally eager to bid games and reluctant to bid slams at this level of competition, so I settle for 6♠, although 6NT might well be better. It's a very good thing I didn't bid the grand. Partner shows up with ♠Q632 ♥AKJ92 ♦97 ♣A5. A 3♠ bid would be a bit of a stretch, let alone a 4♠ bid. Fortunately, spades are 3-2 and hearts are 3-3, albeit the ♥Q is offside as is the ♦K, so I take four heart tricks, two club tricks, a club ruff, four spade tricks and the ♦A. Although we score 80% for making 6, it's moments like these that make me yearn for and appreciate the reliable bidding of robots.

The next hand with this partner confirms my trepidations. After this bidding by our opponents,

W	N	E	S
		1♣	P
1♠	P	2♦	P
4♠			

I lead the ♠8. Dummy plays a low club and comes down with ♠A1092 ♥A76 ♦Q8 ♣J743. Partner holds ♠KJ6 ♥1043 ♦AJ74 ♣962.

Declarer wins in hand with the ♣10. She leads the ♠7, ♠4 from me, ♠2 from dummy and partner wins with the ♠J. What does she play now? For all the world except for my partner, my lead looks like a singleton led in the teeth of declarer's opening bid. Moreover, it cannot hurt to play a ♣ and I look like a person with the ♠Q or at least another ♠ based on the play so far. No such luck and partner turns a tie for top into a tie for bottom by playing the ♦A and another ♦ instead of giving me a ruff. Happy to be on to the next partner.

The full deal:

	<b>N</b> pluckycat ♠ Q4 ♥ QJ852 ♦ 109653 ♣ 8	<b>W</b> N E S 1♠ P 1♣ P 4♠ P P P
	<b>W</b> fremas ♠ 8753 ♥ K9 ♦ K2 ♣ AKQ105	<b>E</b> tomato63 ♠ A1092 ♥ A76 ♦ Q8 ♣ J743
	<b>S</b> yolaper ♠ KJ6 ♥ 1043 ♦ AJ74 ♣ 962	4♠ W NS: 0 EW: 0

To be sure, in the individual, others suffer as greatly from partner's foolhardiness. My favorite recent misadventure by the opponents was this hand, but mostly because of the comment that followed the hand. Both vulnerable, our anti-hero sees his partner pass and his LHO bid 1♠. He passes and now RHO bids 2♦, game forcing. His partner passes and lefty now bids 3♣. With ♠82 ♥K109763 ♦863 ♣K4, what did our intrepid warrior do? He ventured 3♥. Doubled by me and passed all around. It went down 3 for -800 as the 3♥ bidder misplayed the hand and I managed to get a ♣ ruff along with my three heart tricks. We get a clear top and in the chat box I see one word by bidder's partner: "Why?" You can hear the absolutely plaintive tone accompanying that "Why?"

The full deal:

D	N hampton55	W N E S
	♠ AKQJ4	P 1♠ P 2♦
	♥ 2	P 3♣ 3♥ X
	♦ J2	P P P
	♣ J7532	
W gch431		E zeneka
♠ 965		♠ 82
♥ 85		♥ K109763
♦ KQ105		♦ 863
♣ A1096		♣ K4
	S pluckycat	
	♠ 1073	
	♥ AQJ4	
	♦ A974	
	♣ Q8	
		3♥x E NS: 0 EW: 0

Another person was equally eloquent when her partner's aggressiveness turned foolhardy. Our anti-hero now holds ♠KQ83 ♥AQJ1094 ♦3 ♣A4, both nonvulnerable. Here, he opens 1♥. It goes X-P-1♠. He bids 2♥. The bidding then goes 3♦-P-P. What does he bid now? Throw caution completely to the wolves, our opponent ventures not 3♥, but 4♥ (exactly how many tricks is he counting on his silent partner to provide?). There's a prompt double. He loses the expected five tricks for -300 and a cold bottom. Here, his kind and gentle partner simply writes in the chat box, "?!?!?"

The full deal:

D	N ABROUD	W N E S
	♠ AJ6	1♥ X P 1♠
	♥ K86	2♥ 3♦ P P
	♦ AKJ854	4♥ X P P
	♣ 7	P
W ander41		E judysandi
♠ KQ83		♠ 104
♥ AQJ1094		♥ 3
♦ 3		♦ Q9762
♣ A4		♣ Q10832
	S pluckycat	
	♠ 9752	
	♥ 752	
	♦ 10	
	♣ KJ965	
		4♥x W NS: 0 EW: 0

In this next deal, I was playing with a Slovakian fellow with the number 31 next to his name indicating that he had amassed 3100+ BBO points. I always try to check the profiles of my opponents and partners to see what they play and get a sense of their skills. Sometimes that's

helpful, sometimes not. And sometimes I forget. These individual contests are a crapshoot. Here, I don't look beyond Slovakia and the 3100 BBO points, thinking it's all I need to know. Anyway, our first hand goes well and we get 70%. In the next, I pick up ♠AK752 ♥A42 ♦J7 ♣842. In second seat, both nonvulnerable, I bid 1♠. After a pass, my partner bids 1NT—forcing, because I assume we're playing 2/1, so I bid 2♣. He leaps to 3NT. It goes down 2 for 2.9%. After the hand, he writes, "Need to learn to pass with minimum." I ignore the off-putting tone and write back "I thought your 1NT was forcing. Your bid should be 2♠." I failed to notice that his card said "SAYC." I should have noticed and passed. He's right, but 3NT with his hand?!? 2NT seems more than adequate.

The full deal:

	N go girl	W	N	E	S
	♠ J96				P
	♥ 109853	1♠	P	1NT	P
	♦ A6	2♣	P	3NT	P
	♣ K105	P	P		
W pluckycat		E KalataVG12			
♠ AK752		♠ Q103			
♥ A42		♥ QJ7			
♦ J7		♦ KQ1092			
♣ 842		♣ 97			
	S lavin35				
	♠ 84				
	♥ K6				
	♦ 8543				
	♣ AQJ63				
		3NT E			NS: 0 EW: 0

As I said, among other things, playing in the individual with humans who aren't my regular partners, serves as a good reminder of what's good about robot play.

Take care and be safe and healthy.