

Playing with Robots

Part III

By pluckycat

Back to Basics

This week, I think it's worth highlighting some of the basics of robot play to make sure they're front and center in your understanding as you continue to play with your new best friends — the BBO robots.

The robots on BBO are called *GIB*, for Ginsberg's Intelligent Bridge Player. BBO professes that its robots play at least as well as the average player and that in duplicate simulations they score on average 55%. They use a relatively straightforward 2/1 bidding system. They have a *GIB* convention card that you can view by going to the **Account tab**, then going to **Convention cards** and clicking **GIB 2/1**. It's worth a quick perusal. Remember, though, you can click any robot's bid for an explanation of that bid and you can click your own bids to find out how the robot will interpret them.

BBO provides eight pages of system notes about the robots' bidding and playing practices. To find those notes, go to **Home**, click **Robot World**, click the blue **About** button, and then scroll to the bottom of the box that appears and click "**clicking here**." You'll come upon eight pages of notes. They're worth reading in their entirety.

This week, I'm only going to talk about the key aspects of the first heading **GIB System Notes**. Be sure to click **Click here for help understanding these explanations**. A page titled **Understanding GIB Bid Descriptions** will open. The first sections of this page are critical for developing a productive understanding with your robot partner. If you're intent on spending a little time getting in sync with your robot partner, spend some time on this page and on the paragraph **How GIB Defends** (more about that next week) back in the **GIB System Notes**. When reviewing a robot's bid, pay attention to both High Card Points (HCPs) and Total Points. These can give you a good clue as to how aggressive you may want to be in the bidding, particularly in a competitive auction.

Also pay attention to whether a suit is referred to as biddable, rebiddable or twice rebiddable—descriptions that come up often—and what their meanings are. Pay particular attention to those descriptions when your robot partner makes a forcing 1NT bid after your major suit opening. Whether to stop, go on with your suit, bid NT or raise robot's suit may depend on what's said about robot's suit quality. Stoppers or lack of stoppers can be important in NT bidding and descriptions of honors or lack of honors are frequently helpful in slam bidding.

I'll stop there and let you grapple with the rest of the page on your own. It's a bit of a dive into how the artificial intelligence of the robots operates. Reading it (and I have now read it multiple times) makes my hair hurt and my brain turn to mush. Suffice it to say, you can play very well with robots without going beyond the **Honors** section on the **Understanding GIB Bid Descriptions** page.

Instant Tournaments

Let's now turn to another venue in BBO's dizzying menu of options: **Instant Tournaments**. You can find these tournaments at the bottom of the list of **FEATURED AREAS** on the BBO home page. There are four instant tournaments and you can play them repeatedly all day. The BBO Instant Tournaments play eight boards and cost \$0.45 for both matchpoint and IMP tournaments. The ACBL Instant Tournaments play 12 boards and cost \$1.25 for both matchpoint and IMP tournaments. Each hand is from a past tournament and you'll be compared to 14 players in that tournament. If you place first in the BBO Instant Tournament, you receive .6 BBO MPs and lesser amounts for placing below first. If you place first in the ACBL Instant Tournament, you'll receive .9 ACBL MPs and lesser amounts for other placements. These are fun and inexpensive games that give you results instantaneously. Next week, I'll compare the value received from Instant Tournaments versus Daylong Tournaments.

Hint of the Week for Playing with Robots

I can't emphasize enough that finesses almost never work in these tournaments and you should plan to avoid them if you can. Hands often seem to steer you to a percentage play or to utilize a technique, like a dummy reversal, a ruffing finesse

or a loser-on-loser play. Robots don't lead away from honors. Similarly, count on Aces being behind kings. However, I have found that, in the end game, when you have no alternative but to make a contract with the Ace in front of the King or the finesse working, the contract succeeds assuming you've done everything right until them. To be sure, sometimes you have no good alternative but to take the finesse, but do look for alternatives. I also seem to notice that robot defenders frequently reward you for eschewing finesses by making helpful defensive plays in response, e.g., cashing Aces that were behind your Kings.

This hand from an Instant Tournament Game this week is an example of how paying attention to robot bids and proclivities on defense can help your declarer play.

As South, I held: ♠K52, ♥AK93, ♦Q98, ♣KQ2.

The bidding went 1NT by me, (opponents passed throughout), partner bid 2♥ (transfer), I bid 2♠, partner bids 3♦, and clicking on the bid reveals, 4+diamonds, 5+ spades, 10+ total points. With a max and honor cards in partner's suits, it's an easy 4♠ bid for me.

Dummy shows up with ♠Q10973, ♥865, ♦AJ643, ♣.

♥Q lead. I figured that the diamond finesse isn't going to work, so no use hoping for ♦Kx onside. Further, if I take the diamond finesse, and the king is doubleton offside, I run the risk of a diamond ruff by the defense. A ruffing finesse seems the best opportunity to get rid of a heart. So ♣K, covered by the ♣A, ruffed and now I can pitch a heart on the ♣Q. Now it looks like I have to find the ♠J. So, trusting robots' programming to cover honors with honors, I lead the ♠10, covered by the ♠J, covered by the ♠K and taken by West's Ace. Heart lead back. Now I hope for 3-2 spades. I find them 3-2, draw trump and lead low to the ♦Q. The king was with East, of course, and a doubleton. Making five. Surprisingly, none of the other 14 competitors in this instant tournament made five on this hand. Love those 100%.

The East-West Hands: W: ♠AQ6, ♥Q7, ♦1072, ♣AJ1083;
E: ♠J4, ♥J1042, ♦K5, ♣97654.

Favorite Hand of the Week

My favorite hand of the week was the one below in a **Just Declare** session. (Remember, **Just Declare** is where the hand is bid for you and all you have to do is play it well). **Just Declare** hands rarely make it easy on you. They test your mettle and planning skills.

This hand was bid to 5♥s. Always carefully review the bidding; particularly take note of whether the opponents have bid and what their bids meant. Be sure to click on the bid. Here, there was no opponent bidding.

Your hand: ♠K72, ♥AQJ8764, ♦103, ♣10. Dummy: ♠AQ6, ♥10952, ♦4, ♣AQJ42.

A spade was led. No reason not to win in dummy and lead the ♥10, hoping for a cover and, as hoped, the East robot covered an honor with the ♥K. Okay! One guess avoided. Now what to do? Again, remember that finesses are almost always surefire losers unless you absolutely need them to make your contract. So, assessing your entries, you have three, if you need them -- more than enough to try a ruffing finesse. Moreover, if the opposing clubs are 4-3, as they will be 62% of the time, you can get rid of both your diamonds -- making seven. After drawing the last trump, play the ♣10 to the ♣A. Then the ♣Q, covered by the ♣K and ruffed by you. Get back to dummy with a heart or spade and cash the ♣J. Eureka! The clubs split 4-3 and you make 7, which surprisingly is worth 100%. If you'd made six, you would, also surprisingly, have received 89%. Three quarters of the folks you were compared to made 5 and one person went down in five. I guess finesses are irresistible to most.

The full deal: W: ♠J1043, ♥, ♦Q98542, ♣975;
E: ♠985, ♥K3, ♦AKJ7, ♣K863.