Playing with Robots

Part XLIV

By pluckycat

Last week, I returned for a couple of forays into the individual Support Your Club (SYC) daylong game of 18 boards for $6. I wanted to see if there was anything to recommend playing in that game after a more than six-month hiatus. As some devoted readers of these articles will remember, very near the beginning of this series (see [Playing with Robots](#) - Part IV), I wrote that the SYC individual daylong game was not the most cost-effective option for robot play; that you got more bang for your buck by playing in the ACBL 12-board Instant Game for $1.25 or the BBO eight-board daylong games for 39 cents or even the ACBL 12-board daylong games for $1.35.

So, what is there to recommend the SYC daylong 18-board game? You won't win as many masterpoints as playing the other games. At best, if you come in first, depending on the number of entrants, you'll win at most 2.5 masterpoints; or maybe, with a big field, 3.0 masterpoints. Bridge players appear to have recognized the lack of value of these games because they now typically attract fewer than 200 participants while at the start of the pandemic, in March and April, these daylongs attracted more than 600 participants. The two games I played in attracted 181 and 191 participants. What still attracted these folks?
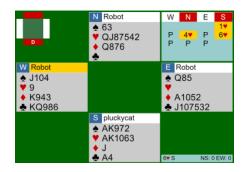
There is certainly the motivation to support your local club. More than $4 of the entry fee goes to your local club. Moreover, for those who care about such matters, the points won in SYC games count toward the masterpoint races the ACBL runs for the year, the Ace of Clubs and the Mini-McKenney. I wrote to the ACBL for an explanation of what online points count toward, and the explanation I received is in a post script to this article. It starts, "Per ACBL Board of Directors Regulation." Finally, I found that the competition in these individual SYC daylong games is perhaps the easiest you're likely to run up against in robot play online. That's in part because the number of players you're compared to on each board varies between seven and 12. And those players don't appear to be the most skilled players engaged in robot play. The sharks are swimming in the BBO daylongs.

In the two games I played in, I thought I played miserably in the first, hoping for a 50% game. I came out with 58.33% and .75 masterpoints. In the second game, I thought I played a bit better and would be at 55%. I had 65.18% and came in 7th of 181 for 1.05 masterpoints. Below are some of the hands I did well on.

In first seat, vulnerable versus not, I held ♠AK972 ♥AK1063 ♦J ♣A4. I opened a heart, planning to reverse with my next bid. My robot partner bid 4♥, showing a preemptive raise, 5+♥, 8- total points, 4+ HCP .

What would you do now? I thought only a most unfortunate distribution would leave no play for slam, so I just bid 6♥.

The full deal:

There was nothing to the play after the ♣K was led. Surprisingly, I was the only one of 12 in this cohort to bid 6♥ and I received 100%.

On the next deal, I held ♠AQ109 ♥J54 ♦A2 ♣KQJ9. My bot partner opened 1♦ in first seat, both nonvulnerable. I responded 1♠ and it now leapt to 3♦, showing 6+♦, 3-♠ and 17-20 total points. What would you bid?

Again, I smelled slam, which I maintain occurs with far greater frequency in robot play than in other contests. So, I bid 4NT and found my bot had three key cards. I thought that 6NT was the safer slam, so I bid it. My dummy came down with ♠6 ♥AKQ ♦K109864 ♣A103. Plan the play.

I received a low heart lead and won with the ♥Q in dummy. Hoping for 3-2 diamonds, I led a low one to my ♦A and then the ♦2 back to the board to my ♦K—only to discover that West was out and East had four diamonds. I now rued that I hadn't played my ♦10 off the board at trick two and see if East would cover, particularly given robots' penchant for covering honors. I then would have had five diamonds, four clubs, three hearts and one spade available after losing a diamond. But I didn't, so now I was on the board seeking to salvage this hand. Do you see it?

The hope is to lose only one spade and take three spades, two diamonds, four clubs and three hearts. I led a spade off the board and a prayer came through. East put up the ♠J and I now had the tricks I needed. I would have finessed the ♠10 anyway. Three of us in 6NT made; three didn't. 92.31% versus 26.92% for failing. A few went down in 6♦; three persons of the 12-person cohort didn't bid slam on this board.
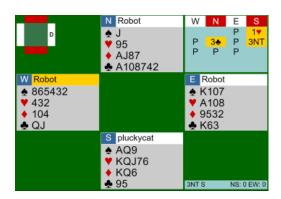
The full deal:

On the last deal for this week, in second seat, vulnerable versus not, after a pass, I held ♠AQ9 ♥KQJ76 ♦KQ6 ♣95.

 What did I open?

I opened 1♥, intending to rebid 2NT if partner bid 1♠, consistent with my new philosophy of bidding them up. Partner bid 3♣, showing 6+♣, 2-♥, 3♠- and 9-11 HCP. I had an easy 3NT bid. Partner had ♠J ♥95 ♦AJ87 ♣A108742.

Plan the play after the ♠4 lead, ♠J, ♠K taken by the ♠A. I'm always looking for the possibility of taking the maximum number of tricks if things go well or the robots are helpful. Here, I decided that I should test hearts before thinking about clubs because I was always going to have two club losers. I banged down the ♥K which was taken by East's ♥A. East then led back the ♠10—bless it—its partner's suit, no doubt little suspecting from its simulations that partner had neither the ♠Q nor the ♠9. Now, when hearts behaved, I had 12 tricks; three spades, four hearts, four diamonds and a club. Two of seven in the cohort made 12 tricks for 91.67%. The others invariably started clubs early.

The full deal:

N	Robot		W	N	E	S
♠ J					P	1♥
♥ 95			P	3♣	P	3NT
♦ AJ87			P	P	P	
♣ A108742						

W	Robot		E	Robot
♠ 865432			♠ K107	
♥ 432			♥ A108	
♦ 104			♦ 9532	
♣ QJ			♣ K63	

S	pluckycat
♠ AQ9	
♥ KQJ76	
♦ KQ6	
♣ 95	

3NT S   NS: 0 EW: 0

I recommend the SYC 18-board games for several reasons: the points are there for the taking, the competition is not as strong as in other robot games and you'll be supporting the Hartford Bridge Club.

Stay safe and healthy and see you next week.

<u>Post Script</u>

Per ACBL Board of Directors regulation:

Online points are "colorless." They are included when determining a player's category for entering events or participating in other masterpoint races. Online points do not count toward year-to-date totals for ACBL masterpoint races, [such as the Ace of Clubs or the Mini-McKenney] except for the one exclusive to online play.

There used to be a limit on how many online points could be used toward rank advancement. Since 2012, online points count fully toward rank advancement.

Any games that are run on BBO that are Support Your Club (SYC) games or in the various Virtual Clubs will award black points. Black points count towards all of the regular "races." There are two types of SYC games. There are the traditional pair games and one daylong event that runs each day. Since both award black points, both count toward Ace of Clubs and Mini-McKenney races.

BBO also runs pair games and daylongs (now 7 different daylongs every day). All of these games award traditional online points which are "unpigmented" and do not count toward any races except the annual online points race.

Only those points won in sanctioned ACBL games can count as official ACBL points. You can win points in other tournaments on BBO, and although they will count as BBO points and will be considered in raising the number (or letter) on your profile, they will not be able to be added to your ACBL point totals. Only those tournaments with "ACBL" in the title can be forwarded to the ACBL as official ACBL masterpoints.