

Board of the Week 75

By Dick Chapman

Here's a funny (in hindsight) board played in the free daily 12 board robot game on BBO. I hate those robots, but it's the best bridge available at 1:00 in the morning.

	♠952 ♥AKQ7 ♦AK3 ♣1053	
♠ ♥ ♦ ♣		♠ ♥ ♦ ♣
	♠AJ3 ♥1095 ♦Q106 ♣AKQ6	

As North, URP opens 1NT. What is URP? That would be "Unreliable Robot Partner." As South you have a balanced 16 with no four-card major. What is your call? You should not blast 6NT. Those 31 point NT slams just don't make. But you have some interest, so...you check to checked to ensure that BBO Standard understands 4NT to be quantitative. The information box says "quantitative invite to 6NT, 15-17 points." So you make that call. What do you do here as North, Reliable Human Partner? You have 6 losers in the black suits and no 5 card suit. It's close, but pass is best.

Did URP pass? Oh no, of course not. URP bid 5 hearts, described as "two or five key cards, no queen. What the hey? Key cards in what suit? No queen of what suit? BBO robots don't even understand their own system. I was cussing at a computer screen and some algorithm somewhere. But I admit I'm getting my money's worth since this is free bridge. Or free something, even it's not what you and I would call bridge.

Now what, South? You can't try to put on the brakes with 5 spades (in theory this is a relay to 5NT in order to stop there), as URP might pass 5 spades. You can't bid 5NT because URP will declare some number of kings. So...just suck it up and bid 6NT.

You have to play it from the North side. You get the four of hearts and suddenly it goes from hopeless to...marginally hopeful. Count winners: the opening lead will give you four heart tricks to go with 1 spade, 3 diamonds, and 3 clubs. Ok, you are up to 11. Where is trick 12?

The odds of East having both king and queen of spades are approximately 25%. The odds of a 3-3 club division are approximately 36%. You are glad this is not a money game. Play a second heart to strip West of that suit (assuming East has five) and lead a

spade up. You go first with the plan from which you can recover if it's wrong (you can't recover from the clubs if that suit isn't 3-3). I think the math is 25% for both spades to be onside plus 36% of the remaining 75% of the time, but I may have it wrong. I'm no more a mathematician than I am a bridge player.

It gets even more complicated when an East holding king-queen of spades splits the honors. You would win, but then what? I suppose you would then try the clubs and then if the suit doesn't break 3-3 you fall back on leading a second spade up...if East has the other spade honor and doesn't hold the fourth club, you are still going to make. Someone work out the math on that...my head hurts.

Anyway, back to the table. As expected, West covers the jack with the queen and exits a spade which you must win. Notice spades was a frozen suit (whoever starts the suit loses a trick). Now it's time for Plan B. But wait, before leading clubs you should play off some side tricks just in case someone foolishly discards a club. This usually works better when the four card holding is hidden, but today Dummy's AKQ6 (your original hand) is in plain sight (I suppose the robots are allowed to "see" dummy). Eventually West discards two clubs, but this is not revealing: East might still have four.

You just have to take a breath and play four clubs. Lo! The suit divides 3-3 and you made this silly slam. The full deal:

	♠952 ♥AKQ7 ♦AK3 ♣1053	
♠Q876 ♥2 ♦J9874 ♣974		♠K104 ♥J8643 ♦52 ♣J82
	♠AJ3 ♥1095 ♦Q106 ♣AKQ6	

You scored 1 spade, 4 hearts, 3 diamonds, and 4 clubs.

Can you see why I hate playing with BBO robots? After 4NT, URP should pass. Then the heart lead was the only card that will make the slam remotely possible. Here's a hint: when defending a 6NT contract: unless you have compelling reasons to the contrary, make a passive opening lead. Yes, you might finesse partner, but attacking (as here, in hearts) is finessing yourself. And many times the finesse you run through partner is one that declarer could have done anyway. Even with that heart lead you needed some luck.

Double dummy this makes 11 tricks. Was 6NT making a 100% score? No, of course not. It was only 71.3% (beating out those who went 1NT-3NT, I suppose).

The opening lead fiasco was surely replicated throughout the field.

See you at the club, where real people play and know what they are doing. No matter what you read in the Bridge Bulletin about computer bridge, it's just not the same as being with your friends at the club. Even when all four computer players are humans...it's just not the same. I do think that the mentor game works well on the computer because of the ability to reconstruct bidding and play, but otherwise let's meet at the beautiful Curtis Finch Bridge House (R.I.P. Curtis, Jr.) to play the world's best game.