

Rick's Tricks

Messing with the Robots

By Rick Roeder

Rickro51@hotmail.com



I was playing in the first day of the 3-day Robot Individual in the week prior to the 2022 Summer Nationals in Providence. A Summer National in Rhode Island offers one benefit: If you get blown out of an event early, you always have the option of taking a day off to enjoy Lil' Rhody's beauty. A further ancillary benefit of early starting times in Providence is that one can make the short trip South to Newport after the second session, cross two bridges offering spectacular views and still be in time to enjoy sunset at one of Summer's treasures while sipping a beverage of choice.

True confession: I sometimes psych in robot games. Opening in my short minor is a frequent chestnut if I feel I will be able to "control" most subsequent auctions. To wit, holding:

♠9843

♥Q975

♦K

♣AKQ8

I opened 1♦. What bad could happen? If Mr. Robot chirped 1 of a major, I could happily raise (If that happened, would you raise to 2 or 3?). If Monsieur Robot responded with an inverted 2♦, I would bid 2NT. I would be delighted with a 2♣ response.

My BBO maestro did, in fact, bid 1♠. I decided to go low, having no clue as to the value of my Viagra card, the stiff ♦K. As you may know, sometimes the value of Viagra is uncertain.

Now, the Robot made a 3♦ game try with:

♠A1052

♥A64

♦Q1095

♣74

I happily accepted and was on stroke after the lead of the ♣J. Despite our 24 HCP, game prospects looked about as poor as Amber Heard's post-Johnny Depp trial image. The ♦A, two trump losers and a heart loser were mocking me.

A second potential heart loser could be pitched on my third club but there was no rush to take the pitch. At trick two, I played my ♦K as Righty produced the ace. The ♣10 was fired back as I won the king. Wouldn't it be awesome if the ♣9 were to fall on the third round, establishing a potentially Great Eight!

I could not wait to find out so I intrepidly played the ♣Q at trick four (playing a third round of clubs is not quite as risky as it might appear. If the queen was ruffed, the odds were it was by the defender with long spades. Thus, if clubs were indeed breaking 5-2, the ruff might be, at worst, a trick trade if the hand ruffing started with three spades). Both followed, but no 9. I pitched a heart from the Robot's concealed hand. After some thought, I elected to play a fourth club as lefty followed. I ruffed in with the ♠10, as Righty overruffed with the jack.

Now, Mr. Robot had a difficult decision at trick six, holding:

♠K6

♥K102

♦743

♣void

Either major suit shift could give up a trick, so the Righty Robot elected to punt with a diamond exit. As football fans will attest, a blocked punt can dramatically alter a game's outlook. The ♦7 was returned. Lefty Robot could have saved the day by not inserting his ♦J but descended into Robot hell by playing the knave. If my LHO Robot had not inserted the ♦J, I would only have two heart pitches from my hand and would not have been able to avoid a heart loser.

I gobbled up the jack and quickly played ace and a spade. I was charmed to see both Robots follow. As I was able to pitch three hearts from my hand on diamond winners, no heart loser! Making a fun four.

The ACBL's Zero Tolerance policy would have been as useless as a 21st-century blacksmith if bridge was only played by Robots. After their defensive gaffe, there were no recriminations, no lessons, not even an eyeroll. Somewhat spooky compared to their human counterparts. Do you think less of me when I confess that I would have enjoyed a human reaction? ♣