

61. Bleeding robots

By Ron Klinger

West dealer : North-South vulnerable

West	North	East	South
1♠	Pass	2♠	?

What would you do as South with:

♠ A9
♥ K
♦ QJ1098
♣ J10732

One of the pleasant ways to play bridge online is via Bridge Base Online (BBO). Their website is www.bridgebase.com. You can watch top players in action or play for free against other players. Another option is to play against robots (for a modest \$US1 per week). You can play with your human partner against two robots or by yourself with a robot partner, playing Standard American, against two robots. The nice thing about playing with a robot partner is that they never have a nasty word to say to you. The standard of the robots is about the same you might find in a regular club duplicate.

Today's deals come from BBO with two humans playing against two robots.

West dealer : North-South vulnerable

	North	
	♠ Q53	
	♥ Q109543	
	♦ 43	
	♣ A5	
West		East
♠ KJ642		♠ 1087
♥ 876		♥ AJ2
♦ K5		♦ A762
♣ KQ9		♣ 864
	South	
	♠ A9	
	♥ K	
	♦ QJ1098	
	♣ J10732	

After 1♠ : Pass : 2♠, what should South do? In your methods, would 2NT be the minors or a strong balanced hand, say 17-19 points? This is something that needs to be settled in your partnerships. With 2NT showing the big, balanced hand, South chose 3♦ : Pass : Pass : Double, all pass. After you have trump agreement, East's double suggests penalties with a maximum 2♠ bid, but partner is allowed to revert to 3♠, of course, with an unsuitable hand for defence. Holding a balanced hand and K-5 in trumps, West chose to play for penalties.

That decision was sound, but the defence by the robots left much to be desired. Robot W led the ♣K, taken by ♣A. Declarer played dummy's ♥10: two – king – six. East could have defeated 3♦ swiftly by rising with ♥A and shifting to a spade. Not too tough a task, especially as there would be no quick access to dummy's hearts.

Declarer continued with the ♠10, taken by the ♣Q. West now needed to play a heart: nine – jack – ruffed. Another heart later would give trump control to East-West. Instead, West played a third club, ruffed in dummy. The ♦3 went to the queen and king. West switched to the ♠K. South won and knocked out the ♦A for ten tricks, +870 and +13.3 Imps. Other results: W 3♠ –150; S 2NT +120 x 2 (was this for the minors and passed by North?); W 3♠ –100; W 2♠ –100 x 4; W 2♠ –50 x 2; W 2♠ +140; S 4♦ –200 x 3; N 4♦ –400 (1♠ : P : 2♠ : 2NT, P : 4♦, taking 2NT as big, balanced, with 4♦ a transfer to hearts).

East dealer : East-West vulnerable

West	North	East	South
		Pass	1♠
2♣	Dble ⁽¹⁾	Pass	?

(1) Takeout, 6+ points, 4+ hearts

What would you do as South with:

♠ A76542
♥ AQ
♦ J
♣ J1053

Make up your mind about the answer to that question before considering this one:

East dealer : East-West vulnerable

West	North	East	South
		Pass	1♠
?			

What would you do as West with:

♠ Q10
♥ J92
♦ K93
♣ AK964

Not that everyone adheres to it, but there is a sensible approach to considering whether your suit is good enough for an overcall. This is the 'Suit Quality Test'. Add the number of cards in the suit you wish to bid to the number of honours in that suit. The total should equal or exceed the number of tricks for which you are bidding. Thus, for a 1-level overcall, the total should be 7: Q-8-7-4-3 is not good enough, but Q-J-7-4-3 is. For a 2-level overcall, the total should be 8: A-J-5-4-2 is not enough, but A-K-J-4-2 is. Of course, you still need the high card values to be bidding at the relevant level. Also, do not count the jack and ten as honours unless accompanied by another honour or honours, queen or high. A holding of J-10-8-7-4 does not qualify for a 1-level overcall and likewise J-10-6-4-3-2 is not good enough a suit for a 2-level overcall, whether it is a simple overcall or a weak jump-overcall.

That means that the ♣A-K-9-6-4, total quality 7, does not merit a 2-level overcall, despite the 13 HCP. The West hand is not as good as it looks. The ♠Q-10 are more likely to be useful in defence than in a club contract.

Another negative feature is the fact that partner is a passed hand. There is always risk in entering the auction with a balanced hand when partner was unable to open the bidding.

You can see the full deal on the next page:

East dealer : East-West vulnerable

	North	
	♠ K3	
	♥ 86543	
	♦ A642	
	♣ Q2	
West		East
♠ Q10		♠ J98
♥ J92		♥ K107
♦ K93		♦ Q10875
♣ AK964		♣ 87
	South	
	♠ A76542	
	♥ AQ	
	♦ J	
	♣ J1053	

At every table it began, with robots East-West:

West	North	East	South
		Pass	1♠
2♣	?		

Two Norths passed and 2♣ was passed out. One West was four down, North-South +400, the other three down, North-South +300.

At one table, with North the only human, it went:

West	North	East	South
		Pass	1♠
2♣	2♠?	Pass	Pass
3♣?	3♥	Pass	3♣
Pass	Pass	Pass	

The 2♠ bid by human North and the 3♣ by robot West were strange choices. Still, robot South made ten tricks, +170, so no great damage done.

The other 13 human Norths doubled 2♣ to show 6+ points and 4+ hearts. After East passed, five robot Souths bid 2NT, all pass. All made eight tricks, +120. Two robot Souths bid 2♠, all pass, ten tricks, +170. Five human Souths bid 2♠, all pass. Three made ten tricks, +170. Two made nine tricks, +140.

At one table, with human North and robot South, it went:

West	North	East	South
		Pass	1♠
2♣	Dble	Pass	2NT
Pass	3♣	Pass	4♠
Pass	Pass	Pass	

Robot South made ten tricks, +420 for 4.6 Imps, the second-best score. Top result for North-South came via Pass : 1♠ : 2♣ : Double, Pass : Pass : Pass. South figured North would be short in spades and South was short in the red suits where North figured to have length. No guarantees, but playing for penalties looked attractive.

North led the ♠K: eight – seven (encouraging if North had another spade; suit-preference if not) – ten. North recognized the possible suit-preference message and switched to the ♥8: ten – queen – two. South cashed the ♥A and the ♠A, then switched to the ♦J. North took the ♦A and gave South a heart ruff. Back came the ♠2: ♣6 – ♣Q – ♠J. North switched to a diamond, ruffed by South. The defence had eight tricks, +800 and 11.5 Imps.

Problems for Tomorrow:

1. South dealer : Both vulnerable

West	North	East	South
Pass	?		1♠

What would you do as North with:

♠ QJ10987
♥ 73
♦ AK2
♣ Q2

2. South dealer : Both vulnerable

West	North	East	South
Pass	?		1♥

What would you do as North with:

♠ A9732
♥ K875
♦ AJ63
♣ --

Why not phone or email your bridge partners and compare your answers and your reasoning?

2020: I never thought the comment, "I wouldn't touch him (her) with a 6-foot pole" would become a national policy, yet here we are.