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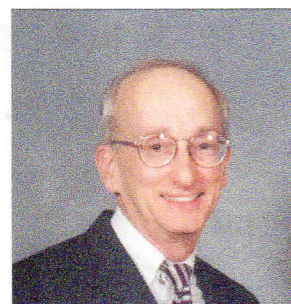
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# Teaching with Robots

by Dave Germaine

Dave Germaine has been teaching bridge since 1999. For the past four years, he has been a volunteer for the BIL, the Beginner Intermediate Lounge, started online by Maureen Hall. Dave teaches privately in the Chicago area and on the internet. Find him at [www.davegermaine.com](http://www.davegermaine.com)



I've been using a bridge app on my iPad for the past several years called iBridgePlus. For those of you who were at the Chicago Conference, Gidon Stemmer from iBridgePlus was one of the speakers. I've been recommending it to my students lately. It has a very friendly interface. The buttons and card faces are large and easy to use. There are several ways to use it. In "stand alone" mode, you can play random deals against three robots, including your partner. In "tournament mode" you play with the same three robots, but your score is measured in IMPS against a "closed" table consisting of four robots. You can review the bidding and play at this "closed table" and see where your bidding and play differed, and why you did better or worse. In "duplicate mode" you play 4, 6 or 12 deals against real people around the world. You are sitting in the South seat, and again, your play is with three robots. All your live opponents are also sitting South and they also have three robots sitting at their tables. You have several hours to finish and upload the results. When the time has expired, you get an email with all the results, the hand diagrams and a running rating of your performance based on your scores. To enter the competitions you pay a nominal fee; either \$1, \$2 or \$3 depending on the number of boards in the match. This is play money called iBridge Dollars (iBD's) and you get \$10 free when you download the app. The pot collected is split amongst the top placers, so you can build up your bank account if you play well, or purchase more iBD's at 25 cents to the dollar. After 2 years, I'm still working on the same \$10. Although this isn't real money, it does give you somewhat of the same adrenaline rush you get at the casino.

iBridgePlus has a wonderful module for beginning and novice players. As long as you have some basic knowledge of the game, you can play and learn using this app. The first step for the new player is to choose a system. It will probably be Standard American, although British players would choose Basic ACOL. It could also be Two Over One. There are lots of options for understanding the bidding and play. iBridgePlus Assist is available to the novice to explain all the bidding and help him understand the makeup of the other hands by their bidding. There is a Hint button and a Show All Hands button that should help the novice. Of course, the Undo button is extremely handy and the hands can be saved and replayed repeatedly. There is also a "money" duplicate game just for beginners.

There is another unusual feature called "Lively Hands." This is a series of filters that will give you only certain types of hands: strong; competitive; slam and slam tries; single, two and three suited hands; and no-trump openers, either weak or strong.

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The app is free to download and explore. It comes with 16 hands as well as 24 hands of Bridge Assist and \$10 of iBD's. Thereafter, you can purchase batches of 100 hands for \$1; or unlimited lifetime access to the whole database (2.6 billion deals) for \$13.99. The Bridge Assist feature costs \$1 for batches of 24, or \$12.99 for lifetime usage. The only disadvantage to the app is that it's only available on the iPad and iPhone.

I tell my students a story about partnering with robots. I say that the good thing about playing with robots is that they never criticize your mistakes. The bad thing is that sometimes you don't understand what they're doing.

I was sitting in the South with this hand:

♠AQ863 ♥----- ♦K5 ♣AQJ742

All the other players were robots. I had invested \$1 from my bank account on iBridgePlus, and after two passes, I saw my RHO open 1NT. I had forgot what system my robot partner was playing over a 1NT opening, so I over-called 2♠, planning to rebid my clubs if partner didn't like spades. West jumped to 4♦ which was a natural diamond bid. I didn't like being pushed around so I bid my longer clubs at the 5-level. That didn't stop West. It took the push to 5♦. This is where I thought my partner started going off the rails. It bid 6♣, which was doubled by my RHO. That didn't faze West. He now bid 6♦. My partner kept going with a 7♣ bid, doubled by my RHO. West led the ♥J. Here is the entire hand:

<p>South Deals ♠ J 7 2 None Vul ♥ 9 8 7 4 2 ♦ — ♣ 10 8 6 5 3</p>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; width: 40px; margin: 0 auto;">             N W   E S           </div>	<p>♠ K 10 9 5 ♥ A Q 6 3 ♦ A 9 8 ♣ K 9</p>
<p>♠ 4 ♥ K J 10 5 ♦ Q J 10 7 6 4 3 2 ♣ —</p>		<p>♠ A Q 8 6 3 ♥ — ♦ K 5 ♣ A Q J 7 4 2</p>

West	North	East	South
4♦	Pass	1 NT	2 ♠
5♦	Pass	Pass	5 ♣
6♦	7 ♣	Dbl	Pass
7♣ x by South			



## Teaching with Robots

I thought maybe my partner was kidding, but robots don't kid. They are programmed to be competitive and have no fear of MY being set. My partner had only 1 HCP, but the combination of 5 clubs, a void in diamonds, and absolutely no defense, apparently convinced him that a sacrifice would give us a better score than their making a slam in diamonds.

I gritted my teeth and thought of various ways to play this grand slam without losing too many tricks. The standard play would be to trump the lead in my hand; then go to the dummy with a diamond ruff and lead the ♣10, hoping the ♠K is in East.

I thought I could do better to cross ruff hearts and diamonds, ending in the dummy. When, finally, I led the ♠J, East played second hand low (a mistake: it should have covered the honor with an honor) and it held. I then led a low spade to my ♠Q and West discarded. That meant West had started with



no clubs and one spade. East had started with 4 spades. That also meant I could set up my 5th spade for an extra trick. I led the ♠A from my hand and ruffed my 4th spade, felling East's ♣K. Now I could lead a club to my hand, finessing the known ♣K in East. I pulled its last trump and claimed 13 tricks.

Granted, the contract would have failed if East had put its ♠K on my ♠J, but real players make the same mistake when they either play too fast or lose concentration and play by rote.

I saved the hand on iBridgePlus and played it several ways. West can't make 6♦ since it must lose the ♠A and the ♥K. My robot partner didn't need to put me in the grand, but I'm glad I caught my RHO robot sleeping (I guess robots do sleep) and racked up 2320 points. This won me first place for a win of \$6.40 on my \$1 investment. □

