Bots battle for world domination
By Al Levy

The 16th World Computer-Bridge Championship, sponsored by the ACBL and WBF, was held alongside the human world championship in Lille, France. The results, along with the history of previous championships and much more, can be found at www.computerbridge.com.

While I organized the annual event, this year I had to coordinate it from afar, as a medical emergency prevented me from actually being in Lille. The contest could not have taken place without the expert on-site efforts of Gérard Joyez.

Eight software developers entered their robots into this year’s competition:

✦ Bridge Baron (Stephen Smith, USA)
✦ Jack (Hans Kuijf, The Netherlands)
✦ Micro Bridge (Tomio Uchida, Japan)
✦ Moose Bridge (Pete Boton, USA)
✦ Q-Plus Bridge (Hans Leber, Germany)
✦ RoboBridge (Job Scheffers, The Netherlands)
✦ Shark Bridge (defending champion — John Vermehren Norris, Denmark)
✦ WBridge5 (Yves Costel, France)

Many of these software developers sell their software (WBridge5 is free) and use their robots and related software to help newcomers learn our game and to entertain many of our more experienced players.

The format is team play, with each team consisting of four identical robots. The event starts with a 32-board round-robin, with the top four robot teams advancing to the 64-board semifinal knockout stage. The round-robin ended with Jack (145 VPs), Micro Bridge (137), WBridge5 (125) and Q-Plus Bridge (111) qualifying for the knockouts.

In the semifinals, WBridge5 squeezed out a victory, 162–161, against Micro Bridge while Jack won comfortably 189–116 against Q-Plus Bridge.

The final was also close, with Jack winning the title, 153–147.

After the event was over, it was noticed that Micro Bridge had 137 VPs in the round-robin, not 135 as originally posted. That meant Micro Bridge was entitled to 2 more IMPs carryover in its semifinal match against WBridge5, which meant it would have won by 1 IMP. A most unfortunate situation!

Micro Bridge developer Tomio Uchida was a good sport about it, reporting that he was encouraged with his program’s performance and looked forward to next year’s competition. The other competitors expressed their regrets to Uchida and wished him much success in the future. The sportsmanship of all the contestants, along with their dedication to improving robot play, is to be commended.

If there was an award for best declared deal, it would go to WBridge5, making 5♣ doubled on this deal from the final match.

Dlr: South ♠ 4 3 2
Vul: Both ♥ A
♠ J 8 6 3 2
♦ 10 9 4 2
♣ — ♥ K J 10 7 6 5
♦ 10 4 3 ♥ Q 7
♠ A 10 9 5 4 ♥ K Q
♣ A 8 7 5 3 ♠ K Q J
♠ A Q 9 8 ♥ K J 9 8 6 5 2
♦ 7 ♠ 6

Table 1:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>West</th>
<th>North</th>
<th>East</th>
<th>South</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jack</td>
<td>WBridge5</td>
<td>Jack</td>
<td>WBridge5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pass</td>
<td>1NT</td>
<td>2♠</td>
<td>3♥</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Pass</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At one table, WBridge5, sitting North–South, played in 3♦ and went down one, losing two minor-suit aces and three spades.

Table 2:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>West</th>
<th>North</th>
<th>East</th>
<th>South</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WBridge5</td>
<td>Jack</td>
<td>WBridge5</td>
<td>Jack</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2NT</td>
<td>Pass</td>
<td>5♣</td>
<td>Pass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pass</td>
<td>Dbl</td>
<td>All Pass</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At the other table, with WBridge5 sitting East–West, West was overly aggressive, vulnerable, overcalling 2NT to show the minors. East, rich in minor-suit honors, jumped to 5♣ and North doubled.

Checking with Deep Finesse, 5♣ is cold on any lead if played perfectly, and WBridge5 played perfectly, find-
ing one of a number of sequences of
plays to make the contract.

After a diamond lead to the king,
East led the ♣J, covered by the queen
and ruffed. Back with a trump to the
queen, East led ♣10, covered by the
ace and ruffed. Back with a trump to
the king, East cashed the ♥Q, ♦K
(pitching a heart) and ruffed a spade
with the ace (dummy’s last trump).

North discarded a diamond. It doesn’t
help the defense if North discards the
♥A.

Declarer came off dummy with a
heart. North, in with the ♥A, could do
no better than return a trump to East’s
jack, ruff East’s good spade, and lead
into West’s ♦A 10. A well-deserved
12 IMPs for WBridge5.

Lura Crossley
1925–2012

Lura Crossley, one of the best-known
bridge personalities on the West Coast,
died earlier this year at her home in
Greenbrae CA after a short illness. She
was 87.

Crossley was born
in Muskogee OK and grew up in Dixon
IL. She earned a degree with honors in
journalism from the University of Illinois.
She married C.F. Crossley Jr. (Cap Jr.)
and they lived in St. Louis, Newfound-
land and Salt Lake City before moving
to Marin County in Northern California
in 1952, when her husband started his
medical practice.

The Crossleys were avid bridge play-
ers and founded ACBL’s Marin Unit in
1954.

At the age of 34, Lura became the first
woman in Marin to become a Life Master.

Divorced with four young children, she
began a bridge business in her home in
Greenbrae, sometimes directing as many
as 80 bridge players.

She taught bridge from Mountain View
to Santa Rosa and directed bridge tour-
naments from Tiburon to Novato. Start-
ing in the Sixties, Crossley worked as a
bridge lecturer for Travel with Goren, go-
ing on numerous bridge cruises, includ-
ing five world trips.

In the Seventies, Crossley purchased
the Greenbrae Rod and Gun Club and
moved the Crossley Bridge Center there.
Two of her children — Bob and Janet
Crossley — still operate the club.

Daughter Janet said her mother “taught
thousands of people to play bridge and
touched the lives of countless others.
She was generous with a kind heart and
a keen sense of humor. Of all her many
accomplishments, she was proudest of
the job she did as a single mother raising
her children — who all earned advanced
degrees — as well as the accomplish-
ments of her grandchildren.”

Other survivors, all bridge players, are
sons William (retired) of Brazil, David of
Las Vegas and Robert of Corte Madera.
She also leaves eight grandchildren and
two great grandchildren.

The rest of the story – part 2

An article in the July issue (page 62) and a letter to the editor in October
(page 6) touched on two different aspects of computer scoring of bridge
games. The article was about ACBLscore, created by Jim Lopushinsky. The let-
ter gave a short history of a bridge program developed in Massachusetts.

Overlooked in both was the contribution to scoring by two Oregon program-
mers: Merlin Vilhauer of Beaverton and Marvin Hamm of Tualatin.

The two wrote the first bridge scoring program used by the ACBL. It was
called Director and was used by the ACBL from 1982 to 1991.

Many of the commands used in ACBLscore — now undergoing a major up-
date — come from Director.

Vilhauer, an active player, represents District 20 on the ACBL Board of Direc-
tors. Hamm plays at the Ace of Clubs Bridge Center in Beaverton.