University of Alberta program wins computer poker championship

August 8 2006

The World Series of Poker wraps up later this week in Las Vegas, but a team of researchers from the University of Alberta has already won the de facto world poker championship for computers at the American Association of Artificial Intelligence. The event was held recently in Boston, Massachusetts.

The U of A computer program convincingly defeated all other programs in a two tournament format of one-on-one Texas Hold 'Em. The U of A poker "bot"' won every match it played and amassed by far the most virtual money of any competitor. A version the U of A program is included in the "Poker Academy" commercial software.

"Poker is a game that involves skill, chance, and many forms of uncertainty", said professor Jonathan Schaeffer of the Alberta team. "It is a great problem for Artificial Intelligence, and we stand to learn a lot from competitions like this".

"We've been writing good poker programs for many years", said Darse Billings, the lead designer for the Alberta team, "but we weren't overly confident, because there is still a lot of room for improvement".

Poker is particularly interesting to computer scientists, because it has many properties not found in other games.

"Poker is a nice well-defined problem for studying some truly fundamental issues, like how to handle deliberate misinformation, and

how to make intelligent guesses based on partial knowledge", explained Billings. "Good solutions in this domain could have an impact in many other computer applications."

Source: University of Alberta