

## LONDON TROPHY FINALS – 2009

*by Michael Hill*

On 31<sup>st</sup> May, the Royal Automobile Club once again generously provided a venue for the finals of the London Trophy, the LMBA competition for sports and social clubs. The final of the London Trophy itself and the final of the Della-Porta Plate, the competition for first round losers in the London Trophy, were played simultaneously using the same boards. Unfortunately there was no play-off for third place between the losing semi-finalists this year.

The two matches were: -

London Trophy final:

RAC Pall Mall 1 vs. Piltdown Golf Club

Della-Porta Plate final:

Dept for Children, Schools and Families vs. Economicals

The first couple of boards were rather dull but then came this.

### Board 3

Dealer South. EW game.

<b>S</b> KJ73	
<b>H</b> AJ74	
<b>D</b> J97	
<b>C</b> 96	
<b>S</b> AQ5	<b>S</b> 842
<b>H</b> 109862	<b>H</b> K53
<b>D</b> A63	<b>D</b> KQ10
<b>C</b> A7	<b>C</b> KJ102
<b>S</b> 1096	
<b>H</b> Q	
<b>D</b> 8542	
<b>C</b> Q8543	

West played in 3NT at every table, usually on a spade lead. At three tables, this came home easily enough, sometimes with overtricks but at the fourth table, declarer ran the H10 at trick 2, losing to the singleton queen. He could still have succeeded by using a diamond entry to dummy to take the backward finesse in clubs and later leading up to the HK but, with little distributional information to guide him, he took the club finesse the more usual way and duly had five losers.

A different declarer had a similar problem on Board 5, going down in a game made at the other three tables. Then, after a board in which there were a range of contracts but every declarer went off, came this.

### Board 7

Dealer South. Game all.

	<b>S</b> 1083	
	<b>H</b> QJ732	
	<b>D</b> 97	
	<b>C</b> KJ6	
<b>S</b> 76		<b>S</b> AJ52
<b>H</b> AK98		<b>H</b> 65
<b>D</b> KQ		<b>D</b> 6542
<b>C</b> Q9852		<b>C</b> 1032
	<b>S</b> KQ94	
	<b>H</b> 104	
	<b>D</b> AJ1083	
	<b>C</b> A7	

Every South opened 1D but there the similarities ended. At table 1, the Piltdown West overcalled 1H and, when the RAC North decided against a penalty double, this was passed back to South who reopened with 1S. North's 1NT then closed the auction. East led the H6 and, although in due course North took two losing diamond finesses, he still had a comfortable eight tricks. At table 2, the RAC west decided he was worth a 1NT overcall and this silenced everyone. After the lead of the D9, he managed to struggle to 5 tricks to hold RAC's loss to 80. At table 3, the Economicals West found a 2C overcall and the DCSF North a bold 2H. After the obvious 2S rebid from South, North tried 2NT and was raised to the optimistic game. The C10 was led and, although there appear to be nine tricks, the entry problems are insurmountable and declarer eventually finished three down. Finally, at the fourth table, West did not intervene and North South bid unopposed 1D-1H-1S-1NT. Again the lead was the C10. Declarer won the CJ and ducked a diamond to West who continued clubs. Declarer won in dummy and now ducked a heart to West who cleared the clubs. In hand for the final time, declarer took the losing diamond finesse and West duly cashed the long clubs, the HA and partner's SA for one off – but still a swing to Economicals of 250

We had to wait until board 9 for the first hint of a slam.

### Board 9

Dealer North. EW game.

	<b>S</b> J10862	
	<b>H</b> J5	
	<b>D</b> 8	
	<b>C</b> 86542	
<b>S</b> 3		<b>S</b> AQ7
<b>H</b> A10863		<b>H</b> K7
<b>D</b> A962		<b>D</b> KQ7
<b>C</b> QJ10		<b>C</b> AK973
	<b>S</b> K954	
	<b>H</b> Q942	
	<b>D</b> J10543	
	<b>C</b> void	

East opened an impeccable 2NT at every table and, at three of the tables, the bidding continued 3H-3NT. One West removed to 4H but it mattered little. Both games made with overtricks. It was when DCSF held the East-West cards that there were fireworks. Perhaps they realised they were several hundred points behind. Anyway, at their table, West responded 3C (stayman), East perforce bid 3NT and West tried 4NT. Whether he intended it as blackwood will remain one of life's mysteries but the ensuing 5H bid clearly showed two aces and West duly bid 6NT. On the D4 lead, declarer did not find the psychic play of the D9 from dummy, so was forced to win with the DK. However, the ensuing five rounds of clubs were too much for South who was squeezed in three suits. In practice, he discarded, in order, two spades, a heart, a diamond and, finally another heart. This established declarer's heart suit and, had he known the position, he'd have discarded a diamond from dummy on the last club and made all thirteen tricks. As it was, he discarded a heart, then cashed his diamonds and threw South in with the last one. The enforced heart return (to the 10, J and K) clarified the position and South duly claimed his twelve tricks and a 780-point swing. One can only speculate what might have happened if South had kept one more heart and one fewer spade and if North had not covered the H10 with the HJ at trick at trick 10. Would declarer have read the position and dropped the bare SK, or would he have used his entry to dummy to take the losing finesse?

Marginal slam hands are like London buses – none for ages then two come together. So board 10 was no surprise.

### Board 10

Dealer East. Game all.

	<b>S</b> J10985	
	<b>H</b> Q1072	
	<b>D</b> KJ5	
	<b>C</b> 8	
<b>S</b> AK2		<b>S</b> 743
<b>H</b> 5		<b>H</b> AKJ64
<b>D</b> A8		<b>D</b> 1076
<b>C</b> Q1097653		<b>C</b> AJ
	<b>S</b> Q6	
	<b>H</b> 983	
	<b>D</b> Q9432	
	<b>C</b> K42	

Did I say slam hand? The Piltdown East-West bid 1H-2C-2H-3C – and that's where they played, making eleven tricks! Both teams in the Plate reached game (one 3NT and one 5C) for an (almost) flat board but this time it was RAC who provided the fireworks. The first three bids were the same at every table but only the RAC West thought his hand good enough for a fourth suit forcing bid of 2S. When he learnt of secondary club support opposite, he checked for aces and duly bid 6C. On the lead of the SJ, he was able to draw trumps (finding he had a trump loser) and so find he needed the (successful) heart finesse for a swing of 1220.

Board 11 provided a minor flurry of interest as the defence had five cashing tricks against the likely 3NT but the "wrong" hand was on lead and, although declarer had only eight tricks by force, the "automatic" lead provided the ninth. Curiously, both

teams in the Trophy final played in NT part scores, making overtricks, whilst both teams in the Plate bid the game (one failing when East avoided the “automatic” lead).

At half-time, RAC led by 1700 in the Trophy final and Economicals by 710 in the Plate. It was going to be a hard fight-back for Piltdown but the Plate was still wide open.

The second half started with an unexpected swing in the Trophy. North-South had marginal game values but East got in first with a 1NT opening at three of the four tables. In the Plate, both Souths doubled and duly collected 500 but in the Trophy, South elected to overcall 2D on a 4-card suit – and played there, just making. Meanwhile, the fourth East opened 1C (playing a strong no trump) and this propelled North-South into 3NT. The opening lead gave away a trick and, knowing that virtually all the missing values were with East, South was not too hard-pressed to set up an end-play for his ninth trick and a swing of 510. Little did he know that his partner was going to give it all back – and more – on the very next board, perhaps the most interesting one of the whole event.

#### **Board 14**

Dealer East. Love all.

	<b>S</b> AK53	
	<b>H</b> KQ93	
	<b>D</b> A5	
	<b>C</b> AQ9	
<b>S</b> 4		<b>S</b> 10986
<b>H</b> J6542		<b>H</b> 7
<b>D</b> 10962		<b>D</b> K8743
<b>C</b> 1074		<b>C</b> 532
	<b>S</b> QJ72	
	<b>H</b> A108	
	<b>D</b> QJ	
	<b>C</b> KJ86	

Imagine your reaction, holding the North hand, to hear your partner open the bidding. At none of the tables was the bidding (or the play!) the same although three of the four Souths opened 1NT. One North bid an immediate (and rather pessimistic) 6NT; one tried Stayman and, having found the 4-4 spade fit, promptly bid 6NT (!); and one tried 4NT (Blackwood!), found one ace and one king opposite but still stopped in 6NT. Perhaps he was right as he made only 12 tricks although the other two found 13 tricks on top, courtesy of a fourth highest heart lead. The real interest was reserved for the table where a strong no trump was in use and South therefore opened 1C. In this convention-limited world, North could do no more than respond 1H and South rebid 1S. Whether North now expected South to have a fifth club as he hadn't rebid 1NT is not known, but, after finding one ace and one king opposite via Blackwood, he bid 7NT. But, unlike the 6NT contracts, this was to be played from the North hand. East led the C3 and declarer won and cashed his spades (West discarding one card from each suit) then two more clubs (West discarding another diamond). Alas declarer then momentarily lost track and cashed three top hearts ending in dummy. He then threw a diamond on the last club, crossed to the DA and had to concede a heart at trick 13,

thereby losing 1070 points when he might have gained 500. Fortunately, despite this rather hefty swing, his team emerged winners!

Even with the benefit of sophisticated conventions, it is not easy to bid a grand slam on this hand with any confidence even though 7NT is a very good contract, requiring only the HJ to fall in three rounds or show up for a marked finesse (~60%) or, if it doesn't, the DK onside (a further 20%), and 7S is even better, making whenever spades are 3-2 (by ruffing a diamond after throwing one away on the fourth round of clubs) as well as whenever 7NT makes if they're 4-1. Double dummy, of course, 7NT is cold on any distribution as you can pick up the HJ in either hand but, without that knowledge, trying to work out the best line of play on a neutral black suit lead is interesting. Probably best is to win the first round of spades in the South hand and lead the H10. You intend to overtake but there is always a chance that West will cover and solve your problem. In the unlikely event that West covers or shows out (giving you a marked finesse against East) you have thirteen tricks. If both follow small you cash two rounds of clubs and the rest of your spades, ending in the South hand. You now have to choose between two possible endings depending on what indications you have from the known distribution (West has more red cards than East) and discards. One is to lead the DQ (you still might induce a cover!), overtaking anyway to create a Vienna coup position, and returning to hand with the HA to cash the remaining clubs, discarding a diamond. This will bring home the contract whenever the hearts break, whenever West has five hearts - shown up when the HA is cashed (the unblock of the H10 created a usable finesse position) or whenever either opponent has both heart length and the DK (the squeeze shows up so there is no guess). It fails only when East was dealt four or five hearts to the jack and West holds the guarded DK - and there is a negative inference against this distribution as it gives West 7 or 8 diamonds to the king, with which he might well have overcalled on the first round - or when West has precisely four hearts but East has the guarded DK (and even then you may still guess correctly to finesse the heart in the end-position). The alternative ending is to leave the diamonds untouched and cash the HA. If the HJ has not shown up, cash the HK and the remaining clubs. If North's fourth heart is not established, you discard it and take the diamond finesse. Mathematically, these two lines are virtually identical - to the extent that, by the time the decision point is reached, the choice should probably be governed by table presence.

The rest of the second half produced a multitude of swings. RAC moved further ahead on board 15 by bringing home a marginal game that failed at the other three tables. On the next board, Economicals failed in a difficult (but possible) 4H, when everyone else bid and made the easier 3NT and this brought their match almost level. DCSF took the lead on the very next board when they made a 3NT contract (that failed at the other tables) after the defence blocked their cashing suit. There was more to come.

### **Board 19**

Dealer South. EW game

**S** QJ  
**H** J76  
**D** K3  
**C** KQ8752

**S** K1072  
**H** K43

**S** 6543  
**H** Q982

**D** AQ7642  
**C** void

**D** 1085  
**C** 104

**S** A98  
**H** A105  
**D** J9  
**C** AJ963

RAC were playing a strong no-trump, so opened the South hand 1C but, despite diamond intervention (twice!) from West, bid to the unbeatable 3NT. Piltdown, after an opening 1NT from South and a diamond overcall found their way to 5C - which had three inevitable losers and allowed RAC to move even further ahead. After the same opening and overcall, DCSF reached 3NT but Economicals stopped in 3C – a making contract but still a 300 swing to DCSF.

Then, after a rare board on which the same game was bid and made at every table, everyone's judgment was put to the test.

### **Board 21**

Dealer North. NS game

**S** AJ53  
**H** 9  
**D** 982  
**C** AK864

**S** 1074  
**H** AQ642  
**D** 63  
**C** J75

**S** 96  
**H** J10753  
**D** AK75  
**C** Q10

**S** KQ82  
**H** K8  
**D** QJ104  
**C** 932

Piltdown and DCSF bid unopposed but aggressively to 4S, which should have no play and DCSF duly went two off. RAC also went two off in 4S, but after a hotly contested auction to the three level in which East-West bid both red suits. Piltdown had contrived to play 4S from the North hand (when North opened 1S rather than 1C) and although the defence led the DA, they then somehow lost their way and allowed declarer to establish the club suit without cashing their tricks – a much needed 820 swing to Piltdown. It remained for table four to provide something even more different – and they duly did. The DCSF East-West competed to 3H at which point Economicals tried a penalty double, discovering to their cost a few moments later that the contract was unbeatable and conceding another swing, 730 points this time, to DCSF.

Board 22 was a solid slam, Economicals alone failing to bid it and board 23 was a choice of two marginal but unmakeable games which were actually made by everyone except Piltdown. Would the final board be a damp squib?

### **Board 24**

Dealer West. Love all.

	<b>S</b> A10	
	<b>H</b> Q10	
	<b>D</b> 653	
	<b>C</b> KQ9543	
<b>S</b> J9843		<b>S</b> Q7652
<b>H</b> K632		<b>H</b> AJ975
<b>D</b> 2		<b>D</b> AQ4
<b>C</b> 1086		<b>C</b> void
	<b>S</b> K	
	<b>H</b> 84	
	<b>D</b> KJ10987	
	<b>C</b> AJ72	

At three of the tables, East-West played in 4 or 5S after a contested auction and made eleven tricks. However, at the fourth table, DCSF decided to take the money in defence against North's 5C rather than risk 5S. East led the S5 to the king and North drew trumps ending in hand. He now pitched a heart on the SA and led a diamond which East won with the ace. He now cashed the HA and continued with a top spade. Declarer ruffed in hand and, reasoning that East would not have risen with the DA if he held Ax, duly took the diamond finesse to make eleven tricks and a huge swing of 1200 points (all the better given that double dummy defence gets two diamond ruffs as well as three top red cards for three off). Alas, it was not enough.

## Results

Trophy:

RAC Pall Mall 1 beat Piltdown Golf Club by 2310 points

Plate:

DCSF beat Economicals by 850 points