

LONDON TROPHY FINALS – 2010

by Michael Hill & Paul Lamford

On 23rd May, the Royal Automobile Club once again generously provided a venue for the finals of the London Trophy, the LMBA competition traditionally for sports and social clubs, now in its 32nd year. I say “traditionally” because, in future, bridge clubs will also be allowed to enter. As usual, the final of the London Trophy itself, the play-off for third place between the losing semi-finalists 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.

The three matches were: -

London Trophy final:

MCC 1 vs. Chislehurst Golf Club

Third place play-off:

RAC Pall Mall 1 vs. Leatherhead LTC

Della-Porta Plate final:

Cameron McKenna vs. St Georges Hill LTC 2

On thing that one can always say about this event, particularly as there are three matches in play at the same time using the same boards, is that there is no such thing as a flat board or even a likely outcome. The very first board proved that.

Board 1

Dealer North. Love all.

	♠ KQ73	
	♥ J987	
	♦ K84	
	♣ K10	
♠ 954		♠ A102
♥ 432		♥ AQ10
♦ J1062		♦ A93
♣ 642		♣ AJ98
	♠ J86	
	♥ K65	
	♦ Q75	
	♣ Q753	

This looks a simple part-score hand with not too many options and, indeed, at every table, North opened a weak no-trump and East doubled. Three Wests decided to pass (seeing the contract make twice and somehow drift one-off once) but the other three opted to bid 2D. Two of them played there (going two-off undoubled) but one was “rescued” by East who thought his hand worth 2NT, quickly doubled by South. However, the routine lead of the C3 helped declarer and he built on this somehow to come to eight tricks! So there were four different scores, swings ranging from +180 to –490 to North-South and a swing in every match.

Things then went fairly quiet for a while and the next excitement was Board 5.

Board 5

Dealer North. NS game.

♠ K94	
♥ 432	
♦ KJ1063	
♣ J8	
♠ AQ862	♠ 10753
♥ J	♥ 1097
♦ 92	♦ AQ84
♣ A10964	♣ Q2
♠ J	
♥ AKQ865	
♦ 75	
♣ K753	

At five of the tables, South opened 1H third in hand and West overcalled 1S. At the sixth table, South thought her hand worth a strong 2H opening – and West overcalled 2S. At one table, the bidding subsided in 3H (going one-off when West led the D9 and the third round promoted a trump trick for the defence) but everywhere else, East-West bid on to 4S. Twice, South elected to sacrifice in 5H (going three-off undoubled!) but the interest was focussed on the play at the three tables where 4S was the final contract. Clubs can be established so this contract ought to be made, even on best defence, but.....The Leatherhead declarer ruffed the second heart and rightly played on clubs before touching trumps. However, he chose to lead the C10 towards the CQ and, whilst this was covered and so picked up the opposing honours, the position of the C7 meant that the suit was not running. When North in due course won the SK, he switched to the DJ and declarer, convinced that the DK was wrong, rose with the ace. When he then found the club suit was not running and he could not discard all his diamonds, it was too late and he had to lose a trick in every suit for one-off. The MCC declarer found a different way to hold himself to nine tricks, after a seemingly helpful defence. South knew that a second round of hearts would not stand up so switched at trick 2 – to a club. This ran to the queen and the losing trump finesse followed. The Chislehurst North also found the diamond switch, albeit to the D3, but declarer again was convinced the DK king was wrong and rose with the ace. He now cashed the SA (finding the 3-1 break) and set about establishing the long club, using heart ruffs to re-enter hand. Unfortunately for him, North could discard a heart on the third round of clubs and so over-ruff declarer on the second heart ruff and cash the DK. It was left to the RAC declarer, Arun Suri, to show how the contract could be made. He ruffed the second heart with the S8 and led a small club to the queen and king. He ruffed the heart continuation with the S6 and cashed the CA. Concerned about the trump position, he now elected to ruff a winning club in order to lead a small trump from dummy. The appearance of the SJ gave him food for thought but, having deduced that North had at least five diamonds, he eventually won with the ace, took the diamond finesse and set about a cross ruff. Given that the clubs were established, there was no point in North ruffing a club with the SK ahead of dummy

and returning a his last trump. He could and did eventually over-ruff with the SK after discarding all his diamonds but that was still the defence's only other trick.

Paul Lamford reports:

When only one pair out of six reaches a slam, it is noteworthy, and Danny Roth, who produced the excellent handouts with potted comments on the hands, surmised that nobody would on the next deal. You are East, and you are playing four-card majors and a weak NT, and your style is to open the major first.

Board 6

Dealer East, EW game

		North	
		♠	964
		♥	A52
		♦	Q96
		♣	KJ53
West	East		
♠ Q752	♠ AK108		
♥ Q8643	♥ KJ107		
♦ A103	♦ 7		
♣ 4	♣ A1087		
		South	
		♠	J3
		♥	9
		♦	KJ8542
		♣	Q962

West	North	East	South
<i>Griggs</i>	<i>Wilson</i>	<i>Dyson</i>	<i>Park</i>
		1 ♥	Pass
4 ♥	Pass	4NT	Pass
5 ♦	Pass	6 ♥	All Pass

Griggs and Dyson, representing leading European law firm Cameron McKenna, who specialise in financial and legal services throughout Europe and Russia, used a simple auction to the excellent slam.

After East opened One Heart, West evaluated his hand as seven losers and bid game. Andrew Robson would approve, as he is always extolling the virtues of the ninth trump between the two hands, as well as the merits of simple bidding. East valued his hand as five losers, and asked for aces before bidding the superb slam. In this event, which is designed to attract non-bridge clubs, splinters are not allowed – in fact very few conventions are, so it was a good effort to reach this slam without any gadgetry. Next year, bridge clubs will be allowed to take part, in a bid to increase the number of teams competing, but it is also hoped that there will be more entries from companies or other clubs, and any organization is encouraged to take part – and even if you don't have a venue many London clubs will be able to host a match for a moderate fee.

(Footnote: This hand may fit the “9th trump” maxim but it fails on the “prefer the 4-4 fit to the 5-4 fit in a thin slam” one – 6S is quickly beaten by HA and a heart ruff).

Paul Lamford reports:

This was the second of three hands that caught my eye at the finals, and one of two that featured a difficult defensive decision.

Board 9

Dealer North. EW game.

		North	
		♠	985
		♥	K92
		♦	QJ73
		♣	QJ3
West		East	
♠	7642	♠	AKQJ3
♥	43	♥	106
♦	984	♦	AK652
♣	K974	♣	5
		South	
		♠	10
		♥	AQJ875
		♦	10
		♣	A10862

North-South should perhaps have competed more in the auction:

West	North	East	South
<i>Cumming</i>	<i>Grim</i>	<i>Clayton</i>	<i>Green</i>
<i>-Bruce</i>			
	Pass	1 ♠	2 ♥
2 ♠	Pass	4 ♠	All Pass

I would have raised to Three Hearts on the North hand, and South might well then have gone on to Five Hearts at the form of scoring. Aggregate scoring, which is used in the London Trophy, is nearer to IMPs than anything else, with the difference that it always takes at least ten minutes longer to agree the total score, with the standard error being 50. It reminds me of a sign I once saw on the M1 “Delays: aggregate scoring in progress”.

Still, the play’s the thing as they say, and South, not unreasonably, led her singleton diamond, and the declarer won and drew trumps in three rounds, and advanced the five of club. South ducked and that was the end of the defence, as declarer could concede a diamond and ruff them good. Should South have got this right? North thought so, of course, but I cannot see why East could not have ♠AKQJx ♥10xx DAKx C Qx. The only defence now would be to duck – even winning and under-leading the ace of hearts does not work.

(Footnote: At the other tables, 4S was defeated once and made once, again when South went to bed with the CA. At the other three tables, North-South bid on to 5H, once playing there and making just nine tricks, twice pushing East-West to 5S which went two-off, but was doubled only once).

At half-time, MCC 1 led by 1050 in the main final, RAC 1 had an almost unassailable lead of 2160 in the 3rd place play-off but the plate was desperately close, Cameron McKenna being just 240 in front. The start of the second half provided opportunities.

Paul Lamford reports:

My final hand also featured a critical decision in clubs, and one that maybe only Mystic Meg would get right:

Board 13

Dealer North. Game all.

		North	
		♠	AQ
		♥	65
		♦	KQ10963
		♣	KQ9
West		East	
♠	J652	♠	108743
♥	K43	♥	Q1098
♦	754	♦	A8
♣	A76	♣	32
		South	
		♠	K9
		♥	AJ72
		♦	J2
		♣	J10854

North managed to get the board played from the right side in a sense here, but it was the MCC who achieved a swing:

West	North	East	South
<i>Laurance</i>	<i>Grim</i>	<i>Lane</i>	<i>Green</i>
	1♦	Pass	2♣
Pass	3NT	Pass	Pass

North chose to bid 3NT on his second turn, rather than the Three Diamonds chosen in the other room, and East led a normal spade. Declarer won in dummy and played on diamonds, but East won the first round and cleared the spades. East did well now to pitch two hearts on the run of the diamonds (if North has the king of hearts he has at least nine tricks) and the defence were able to keep their five winners. In the other room, South was declarer, and West led a spade, but East switched to a heart when winning the first diamond. Declarer could rise and play on clubs, and the defence could not get at their three heart tricks. Again this defence could have been right on another day. But the Chislehurst declarer, Grimm, could have made it harder for his opponents. If he had won the first spade in dummy and played the *jack of clubs*, it

would have been very tough for Laurance, West, to rise with the ace of clubs. If he did not, then declarer could play on diamonds for nine tricks.

(Footnote: Every other South chose to bid 1H rather than 2C, not that that changed the final contract. At the other four tables, 3NT by North was the final resting place and, in practice, the defence usually let it through. It was defeated at only one other table. The net effect was that MCC 1 and RAC 1 extended their leads but nothing changed in the Plate).

Board 17 showed how a distributional hand can generate large swings from nowhere.

Board 17

Dealer North. Love all.

	♠ KQJ3	
	♥ void	
	♦ AKQ3	
	♣ J10854	
♠ 962		♠ 10854
♥ 72		♥ AK6543
♦ J854		♦ 2
♣ A762		♣ KQ
	♠ A7	
	♥ QJ1098	
	♦ 10976	
	♣ 93	

After North's opening 1C, the Easts were evenly split between a simple 1H overcall and an intermediate jump overcall of 2H. Thereafter, it was a lottery. Although East-West have 5 top tricks, the blockage in clubs means that they can never cash more than four of them and North-South can always make 3NT. However, this contract was reached at only two tables, once when South bid 1NT over the 1H overcall and once, after an extraordinary auction in which South passed the 1H overcall, passed again when East bid 2H over North's reverse into 2D and only came to life finally when North, in desperation, re-opened for a second time with 2S! The play was even more eccentric. After a heart to the king and a small one back to the nine, declarer, not knowing of the favourable diamond position, threw a diamond and a club from dummy and continued hearts looking to set up a 9th trick that way. He threw another club on the third round of hearts and, when that was ducked, had nine tricks on top. However, for some reason, he continued with a fourth heart, throwing yet another club from dummy. East won and played clubs but now West fell from grace. Given the three club discards from dummy, a simple count when South followed to the second round would have shown that he, West, held all the outstanding clubs and he should overtake and cash the long cards for two-off. In practice he ducked, and South found that, having turned nine tricks into seven, he'd been give the nine back again!

At the other tables, one East had her 1H overcall doubled (penalties of course) and duly went two-off on the (best) lead of the HQ (the only time it was found) while another had his 2H jump overcall doubled for the same two-off on the lead of the C9.

The RAC East had his 2H jump overcall passed out and went the same two off on the same lead but the real fun was reserved for the plate where, opposite a 2H jump overcall, the Cameron McKenna West found a bid of 2NT. This led to a final contract of 4H, which was doubled and duly went four-off for 800 much needed points to St Georges Hill.

Board 18 was perhaps the last hand to deliver real excitement.

Board 18

Dealer East. NS game.

	♠ J1076	
	♥ A7	
	♦ Q863	
	♣ AJ9	
♠ Q52		♠ 943
♥ 1096		♥ KJ85432
♦ AK		♦ J
♣ K8654		♣ 73
	♠ AK8	
	♥ Q	
	♦ 1097542	
	♣ Q102	

Four Easts thought their hand worth a pre-emptive 3H, non-vulnerable, first in hand and two didn't and so passed. When East did not pre-empt, North-South rapidly found their way to 3NT from the North hand. Even if declarer is given a second heart stop by a 4th highest lead, he has no more than eight tricks, given that the SQ is wrong and, in practice, an early diamond play will allow the defence to clear the hearts and later cash all their hearts when the spade finesse loses – and one declarer duly went four-off. The MCC declarer in 3NT tried harder. He won the heart lead with the queen and cashed the SK (in case a singleton queen fell) before taking the club finesse. When in hand with a winning club, he took the spade finesse and, although the defence won and cleared the hearts, he now had eight tricks available before having to concede the remainder.

When East opened 3H, the auction took different routes at several tables. The MCC East was allowed to play in 3H and, when South led the SA and then switched to a diamond was able to dispose of a club loser on the second round of diamonds, take a good view of overtaking the H10 with the king (felling the singleton queen) when North played low and leading up to the SQ for his 9th trick.. The Leatherhead South doubled 3H (take out?) but passed when her partner could manage no more than 3S in response. This can always be beaten but the defence cashed their diamond tricks too early and declarer emerged with ten tricks. At the other two tables the Leatherhead and Cameron McKenna Wests raised the pre-empt to game, which drifted two or three-off.

By this time, all the half-time leads had been increased a little, so the remaining boards were rather dull as the leaders tried to avoid any expensive mistakes. The

Trophy final and third place play-off were effectively over but, in the Plate, St Georges Hill perhaps still had a chance - and did their best on the final Board.

Board 24

Dealer West. Love all.

	♠ Q86	
	♥ AK9632	
	♦ J4	
	♣ 87	
♠ A5		♠ 109732
♥ J5		♥ 84
♦ K106		♦ A953
♣ QJ10643		♣ K5
	♠ KJ4	
	♥ Q107	
	♦ Q872	
	♣ A92	

This was played in a heart part-score at most tables but St Georges Hill, certain that they needed a big swing, pushed on to game. Alas it was not to be – there was no real chance of a defensive error and nine tricks were the limit.

Results

Trophy:

MCC 1 beat Chislehurst Golf Club by 1370 points

Third place play-off:

RAC Pall Mall 1 beat Leatherhead LTC by 3030 points

Plate:

Cameron McKenna beat St Georges Hill LTC 2 by 1960 points

Once again, we were pleased to be able to welcome Pat Brotherston, daughter of Freddie Della-Porta who invented the competition and after whom the Plate is named, to present the prizes.