

## LONDON TROPHY FINALS – 2011

*by Michael Hill*

On 5<sup>th</sup> June, the Royal Automobile Club once again generously provided a venue for the finals of the London Trophy, the LMBA competition originally limited to sports and social clubs but which now, in its 33<sup>rd</sup> year, allows bridge clubs to enter teams. The traditional nature is maintained by continuing to restrict teams to no more than one player ranked at national master or higher. 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:

Coombe Hill GC vs. Reform Tuesday

London Trophy third place play-off:

South Croydon SC vs. Royal Blue

Della-Porta Plate final:

Oxford & St Georges vs. Cheeky Chaps

Anyone expecting a quiet start was disappointed as the very first board provided significant swings in all three matches.

### Board 1

Dealer North. Love all.

	<b>S</b> KQ10754	
	<b>H</b> A942	
	<b>D</b> J5	
	<b>C</b> 9	
<b>S</b> AJ98632		<b>S</b> void
<b>H</b> void		<b>H</b> 10865
<b>D</b> K83		<b>D</b> AQ1076
<b>C</b> AQ7		<b>C</b> 8632
	<b>S</b> void	
	<b>H</b> KQJ73	
	<b>D</b> 942	
	<b>C</b> KJ1054	

In the main final, Reform Tuesday bid the north-south cards to 4H and duly went one off but, at the other table, their east-west pair chose to sacrifice in 5D which was doubled and went four off – an overall swing of 850 to Coombe Hill GC. In the third place play-off, Royal Blue did exactly the same thing, except that the declarer play in 5D doubled was sharper and the contract went only two off giving an overall swing of 350 to South Croydon SC. There was almost another repeat performance in the Plate final, the only difference being that Oxford and St Georges chose to sacrifice in 4S rather than 5D. That went two off but, as their north-south pair had contrived to go four off in 4H, there was an overall swing of 700 to Cheeky Chaps.

The rest of the first half was relatively uneventful, except perhaps in the third place play-off where Bob Bowman and Arun Suri, playing east-west for Royal Blue, who had already shown some bidding aggression in the sacrifice on board 1 seemed determined to continue in that style. They were the only ones to bid a poor, but making slam on board 2 and they then found another 5D sacrifice on Board 3, going for 800, albeit against a making game this time. They were also alone in bidding to slam on board 10, a contract which is off the ace of trumps and a cashing side ace. However, the aces were in different hands and the defence failed to cash the side ace when they had the chance, after which declarer could and did establish a twelfth trick.

At half-time, Coombe Hill GC had a narrow lead of 380 in the main final, Royal Blue were comfortably ahead by 1300 in the 3<sup>rd</sup> place play-off and Oxford & St. Georges were just 260 ahead in the plate. The odds were clearly on Royal Blue in the 3<sup>rd</sup> place play-off but the other two matches were far too close to call.

The second half began fairly quietly (although Coombe Hill GC extended their lead on board 14 when they made a game that failed at the other table) but then this hand livened things up.

### **Board 17**

Dealer North. Love all.

	<b>S</b> AJ95	
	<b>H</b> AQJ10753	
	<b>D</b> void	
	<b>C</b> 97	
<b>S</b> Q642		<b>S</b> 1087
<b>H</b> 42		<b>H</b> 9
<b>D</b> AQ105		<b>D</b> KJ62
<b>C</b> QJ8		<b>C</b> 65432
	<b>S</b> K3	
	<b>H</b> K86	
	<b>D</b> 98743	
	<b>C</b> AK10	

At most tables, the north-south auction began 1H-2D, the exceptions being one south who responded 4H and one north who opened 2H. Thereafter, things diverged. Two norths rebid 3H and were raised pessimistically to 4H, ending the auction. The other two norths reversed with 2S and this led to a final contract of 6H at both tables. That was also the contract at the other two tables so even the strong 2H opening did not lead to the good grand slam. One pair forgot to ruff both losing spades before drawing trumps and so made only twelve tricks, but everyone else made thirteen. However, the two failures to bid even the small slam meant swings of 500 to Coombe Hill GC and 470 to South Croydon SC.

Coombe Hill GC and Royal Blue were consolidating their leads but the Plate match was still desperately close. Then board 19 provided some unexpected excitement.

**Board 19**

Dealer South. EW game.

	<b>S</b> 876	
	<b>H</b> 1096	
	<b>D</b> 9432	
	<b>C</b> AK3	
<b>S</b> 43		<b>S</b> 10952
<b>H</b> 7543		<b>H</b> AJ
<b>D</b> 8		<b>D</b> KJ76
<b>C</b> QJ9742		<b>C</b> 1085
	<b>S</b> AKQJ	
	<b>H</b> KQ82	
	<b>D</b> AQ105	
	<b>C</b> 6	

Although both 6NT and 6S can be made as the cards lie, they are hardly with the odds and one would expect the contract at every table to be 3NT played by north, after an auction beginning 1D-2D. In fact, two norths chose to respond 1NT and one south chose to open a slightly eccentric 2NT. These should still lead to 3NT as the final contract and the outcome should be the same, whichever hand plays it. However, there were two variations - the Oxford and St. Georges south inexplicably passed the 2D bid to lose a swing of 360 whilst the Royal Blue south chose 5D as the final contract and, after electing to finesse the DQ on the first round of trumps, found he had two trumps to lose as well as the HA, for a swing out of 510.

Curiously enough, these swings were more than reversed immediately (on board 20), another solid 3NT for north-south. The two who had failed on board 19 showed they had learnt their lesson by bidding 3NT, but their opponents at the other table bid to the failing 5C for swings of 800 and 700 respectively.

Board 23 was to decide both the main final and the Plate.

**Board 23**

Dealer South. Game all.

	<b>S</b> 643	
	<b>H</b> 109874	
	<b>D</b> J6	
	<b>C</b> AJ3	
<b>S</b> void		<b>S</b> A1082
<b>H</b> AKQ62		<b>H</b> 53
<b>D</b> AQ109742		<b>D</b> K86
<b>C</b> K		<b>C</b> 10974
	<b>S</b> KQJ975	
	<b>H</b> J	
	<b>D</b> 3	
	<b>C</b> Q8652	

In the third place play-off, both teams had bid and made the diamond slam although the bidding was not the same. Both souths passed as dealer and one west, not unreasonably, thought his hand worth an acol 2C opener. Although south backed in belatedly with 3S over east's 2NT response, that was not going to keep west out of slam. The other west opened 1D and reversed into hearts after east responded 1S (the look on south's face on hearing east's bid was not recorded!). However, once he heard of diamond support this west wasn't to be kept out of slam either.

In the main final, both souths opened 1S. The Coombe Hill GC west overcalled 2D not expecting that to end the auction – but there she played! The Reform Tuesday west doubled and heard 3C from partner after north raised spades. That encouraged him to bid 5D over south's jump to 4S and to go on to 6D when south competed again with 5S! Optimistic stuff, but one can't argue with success. Both declarers made twelve tricks but the 1200-point swing to Reform Tuesday was a killer.

In the Plate, the Oxford and St. Georges South opened a weak 2S and west doubled. East's response of 2NT seemed an overbid and west, probably expecting more, bid an immediate 6D – but fortunately, east's scant values were in the right place. At the other table, south passed and the Oxford & St. Georges west opened 1D. After hearing a 1S response, he rebid 3H. Quite what this jump reverse meant is not recorded (extra distribution perhaps?) but it convinced east to raise to 4H. The consequence was that, after a Blackwood enquiry, west chose the wrong slam. 6H had no play, even had the trumps broken 4-2, and west duly ended three off – a massive swing of 1670 to Cheeky Chaps.

## **Results**

Trophy:

Reform Tuesday beat Coombe Hill GC by 520 points

Third place play-off:

Royal Blue beat South Croydon SC by 3210 points

Plate:

Cheeky Chaps beat Oxford & St. Georges by 840 points

This was the most exciting ending to the event that I can remember. Both the London Trophy and the Della-Porta Plate were won by the teams trailing at half time – and in both cases the margin of victory was less than the swing they gained on board 23.