

LONDON TROPHY FINALS – 2013

by Michael Hill

On 23rd June, a little later in the year than usual, the finals of the 35th London Trophy were once again held in the elegant surroundings of the Royal Automobile Club in Pall Mall. This LMBA competition is essentially social and the concept is maintained by continuing to restrict teams to no more than one player ranked at national master or higher rank and by using aggregate scoring. The finals day has three head-to-head matches - 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 - played simultaneously using the same boards.

The three matches were: -

London Trophy final:

Robson's Rovers vs. Mushroom Chess

London Trophy third place play-off:

Crouch End vs. HM Treasury

Della-Porta Plate final:

RAC 2 vs. Home Office

This was the second successive year that Crouch End, HM Treasury and Home Office had been represented in the finals.

The event lived up to its reputation. The first board was a routine game with overtricks - but the only one in the entire event where the contract was actually the same at all six tables. Thereafter variety became the spice of life and the second board produced no fewer than five different contracts – and in four different denominations!

Board 2

Dealer East. NS game.

	S 54	
	H AQ652	
	D AK762	
	C A	
S 63		S 10972
H 7		H KJ1098
D 105		D J984
C KJ985432		C void
	S AKQJ8	
	H 43	
	D Q3	
	C Q1076	

Every South opened 1S. When Mushroom Chess were East-West, West elected to pass and North-South had a simple auction to 3NT, which North elected to pass even

though full values had not been shown. After winning the obvious club lead, declarer came to hand to take the heart finesse, after which the limit was ten tricks.

At every other table, West overcalled 4C, introducing wide variations in the subsequent auction. Two Norths bid 4D, two bid 4H and one bid 5D! Generally, South rebid spades and ended up in either 5S (making) or 6S (going one-off). However, one of the 4H bids ended the auction and the contract drifted one-off for a swing of 730 to Robson's Rovers. The 5D bid also ended the auction - but declarer made 11 tricks for a swing of 500 to Crouch End. RAC 2, who stopped in 5S, also gained a swing - of 780.

Board 3 was a little better - there were only four different contracts and three different denominations - and there was even no swing in one match! However, the next board created mayhem, including the curious case of both North and East declaring the same doubled contract at different tables.

Board 4

Dealer West. Game all.

	S 6532	
	H 753	
	D 642	
	C 863	
S KQ4		S AJ107
H A102		H QJ94
D 9853		D 7
C K94		C J1052
	S 98	
	H K86	
	D AKQJ10	
	C AQ7	

One West elected to pass and one, playing a strong no trump, opened 1D but all the other Wests opened 1NT. At three tables, this was passed round to South who doubled. When Robson's Rovers were East-West, this was passed out and they emerged with +380 when the defence did not cash their six tricks. The HM Treasury North pulled the double to 2S, his only 4-card suit and duly went four-off when good defence timing got them a club trick as well. The Crouch End North chose to bid 2C opposite the double (perhaps intended as part of a rescue mechanism) and South, rather liking his hand, rebid 2NT. When East doubled this, South attempted a "rescue" into 3C and East doubled again. After a lead of the D7, the defence lost a couple of possible tricks along the way but the contract was still five-off for 1400 to Crouch End and an overall swing to them of 1000. When Mushroom Chess were East-West, East responded 2C to the opening 1NT, so South could only overcall 2D - and then redouble when East doubled. North "rescued" into 2S, doubled by East and South tried 2NT. For some reason, East gave up the idea of taking a penalty at this point and bid 3C, which South was happy to double. Diamonds were led and continued and now, on the actual lie of the cards, declarer can make eleven tricks. But the position was far from obvious and he played safely for one-off, albeit losing a swing of 580. Life was far less exciting in the Plate match. The RAC West passed as dealer and

South opened 1D in the pass-out seat, where he played for one-off. At the other table where West opened 1D, he heard 1H from partner and a double from South. He rebid 1NT and played there making eight tricks when, once again, the defence did not manage to cash all their tricks. But that meant that the swing on the board was a mere 20 points.

Board 6 was the nearest thing to a flat board all day. Every declarer made twelve tricks five of them in 3NT and the sixth in 5C. By the time we'd recovered from the shock of this, along came board 9.

Board 9

Dealer North. EW game.

	S J42	
	H Q864	
	D 952	
	C 765	
S Q63		S A1085
H A105		H K932
D J63		D 874
C 9842		C AQ
	S K97	
	H J7	
	D AKQ10	
	C KJ103	

In the Plate, the RAC East opened 1S, playing a strong no trump. South overcalled 1NT and West raised to 2S, where he played, drifting quietly one-off. The Home Office East, playing a strong no trump and 5-card majors opened 1D and here, South's overcall of 1NT was passed out. This, too, drifted one-off.

At every other table, East opened 1NT and South doubled. In the Trophy final, this ended the auction at both tables. One declarer duly made seven tricks but the other lost his way and went one-off giving a swing of 380 to Robson's Rovers. In the third place play-off, both Norths decided to pull the double. One bid 2C, presumably the start of a rescue mechanism, and passed South's 2D. This made easily after a club lead. The other North bid 2H over which South tried 2NT, where he played. Somehow, 2NT was allowed to make, so the overall swing was only 30 points.

At half time, Robson's Rovers led by a massive 2030 in the main final but there was everything to play for in the other matches. Crouch End were ahead by just 440 in the third place play-off and RAC were 790 ahead in the Plate.

The second half continued the frenzy. Board 13 provided a game swing (or equivalent) in all three matches and the same thing happened on Board 14 (including a spade game bid and made on a 4-2 fit). Some balance returned on Board 15, albeit in the wrong way as no-one bid the cold slam. But board 16 ensured that balance was short-lived.

Board 16

Dealer West. EW game.

	S 9853	
	H AQ105	
	D A94	
	C 64	
S AK42		S QJ10
H K3		H J98742
D KQ5		D 73
C A1073		C QJ
	S 76	
	H 6	
	D J10862	
	C K9852	

In the Trophy final, the Mushroom Chess West opened 1C and this led to a contract of 4H played by East. The DJ was led to the queen and ace and a diamond returned. Declarer crossed to his hand in spades to lead a heart towards the king and now was unable to avoid three trump losers. At the other table, West opened 2NT so, after a transfer sequence, 4H was played from the West hand and North led the S9. Alas the play was not recorded, so we shall never know whether declarer timed the play correctly to execute a trump coup or whether North erred by ruffing a club but the contract was made for a swing of 720 to Robson's Rovers.

In the third place play-off, the Treasury West reached 3NT and, although this can be made by perfect timing, he finished one-off. All was not lost, however, as the Crouch End East-West had a bidding misunderstanding at the other table and ended in 4S. This can always be beaten but should probably be only one-off. However, realising that 3NT and 4H would probably be makeable, declarer tried to play for a lie of the cards, however unlikely, which might enable him to make 4S. He won the spade lead in dummy and tried a heart to the king. He won the spade continuation in dummy and led a second small heart, hoping to bring down a doubleton queen. Alas, when that failed to materialise and a third trump locked him in hand, he lost control and ended four-off.

The Plate was all set for a repeat of this, the contracts being 3NT at one table and 4S at the other. 3NT did indeed go one-off again and a trump was led against 4S. However, this time, declarer led the CQ at trick 2 and, when this was covered, won the ace and returned to the CJ in dummy. He now led a diamond to the king and ace, won the diamond return and ruffed a diamond. Had he now drawn trumps, cashed the CA and exited in hearts, North would have had to concede the tenth trick in hearts - but this was impossible to read and he led a heart, hoping for the king to be onside. Alas, it wasn't, and he ended one-off for a flat board.

Board 19 was of passing interest. In each match one East-West pair bid and made a vulnerable game (albeit in different denominations) while at the other table, they doubled South in 3D which always went four-off for -800 and a small swing. Then board 20 was one of the few that were almost flat. Everyone played in 3NT going two-off except for one declarer who escaped for one-off.

Board 22 provided opportunities in that a thin 6H could be made. However it was a flat board in slam in the Trophy final and in game in the Plate. Only in the third place play-off was there a swing when slam was bid at both tables but the Crouch End declarer took his eye of the ball and went one-off. Board 23 then provided more potential for fireworks

Board 23

Dealer South. Game all.

	S A102	
	H KQ	
	D A105	
	C AQ954	
S 75		S Q64
H J10753		H 862
D K9864		D 732
C 8		C J1072
	S KJ983	
	H A94	
	D QJ	
	C K63	

At five tables, South opened 1S but, at the sixth, the opening was 1NT. After the 1NT opening, the Robson's Rovers pair ended in 6C, losing just one club trick. After the spade opening, the other three tables in the Trophy final and play-off all reached 6S and, after taking the right view in trumps, emerged with thirteen tricks. In the Plate, things were different. The Home Office subsided in 4S and, playing safely, made just eleven tricks. RAC, however, bid to 6NT, perhaps concerned about possible bad distributions, and received the CJ lead. Declarer guessed wrong in spades then, playing for clubs to break, cashed the DA prematurely and ended two-off. Could this decide the result of the Plate? And would board 24 decide any winners?

Board 24

Dealer West. Love all.

	S 32	
	H QJ107642	
	D 5	
	C 1062	
S K874		S A9
H 953		H AK8
D KQ		D A974
C AK74		C J985
	S QJ1065	
	H void	
	D J108632	
	C Q3	

It looked a routine board and in fact the contract at five tables was 3NT, making ten or eleven tricks. However, in the third place play-off, HM Treasury bid to 6C, played from the West hand. The defence got their heart ruff at trick 1 and declarer won the spade return to draw trumps. However, he had won that spade in dummy so, after unblocking the diamond, discarding his third heart on the DA and ruffing dummy's losing heart, he no longer had an entry to dummy to execute a spade-diamond squeeze with the last trump and so ended one-off.

Perhaps fortunately, neither the loss on this board nor RAC's loss on board 23 changed the overall results.

Results

Trophy:

Robson's Rovers beat Mushroom Chess by ??? points

Third place play-off:

HM Treasury beat Crouch End by 700 points

Plate:

RAC beat Home Office by 280 points

Prizes were presented by Pat Brotherston, daughter of Freddie Della-Porta, who started this event back in 1978. In keeping with his original idea, everyone played the event in good spirits. The only sad thing was that Crouch End and Home Office both lost (in the same final) for the second year running. On the plus side, HM Treasury were moving up, winning the third place play-off this year, having won the Plate last year.