



# TENNIS WEEKEND

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Friday 27 to Sunday 29 January, 2023



*Osborn Parker Winners presented with their prize*



*Mason Sharp Finalists*

I was chomping at the bit to play in the MCC Club Weekend Tournament at Lord's this year, having been "confined to barracks" this time last year with an infuriating bout of totally asymptomatic Covid.

Perhaps the organisers knew that I had been kept waiting too long for this experience, as I, together with doubles-partner Richard Boys-Stones, played the inaugural rubber of the sixty-six mini-matches of this tournament.

Even before the tournament started, when I surveyed the pairings and the draws it appeared that much thought had gone into trying to make the 24 pairings in four groups as fair as possible. So it turned out, with most group stage rubbers being either draws or determined by no more than two games. In particular, Graeme Marks and Chris Bray are to be thanked and congratulated for their meticulous planning.

The marking, by Messrs Bray, Swallow and Cherry, was excellent, although, naturally, not incontrovertible. In this silent film clip – click [here](#), Simon Talbot-Williams might be showing dissent at an absence of an "out" call, but Simon apparently claims that he was merely practicing his Saturday Night Fever dance moves...on a Friday.

At the end of play Friday, all pairs still felt they had a chance; most pairs had good reason to feel that way.

The Friday night dinner was excellent. About 60 of us sat down to a fine meal in the Committee Dining Room. The speeches were long enough to have substance but definitely short enough not to intrude on the dinners main purpose, which was socialising with fellow MCC real tennis enthusiasts.

There was a "feel good" sentiment about the evening, exacerbated by Chris Bray's characteristically upbeat talk about his past experiences and what he hopes to bring to MCC tennis.

I was grateful not to be one of the first pairs to play on Saturday morning, enjoying an early lunch and time to digest ahead of our first Saturday bout. That might explain why our pairing did well that day. Lord's really does do good grub.



Even at the close of play Saturday, most pairs were still in with a sniff of reaching the semi-finals.

In our case, we knew that a Sunday morning win would see us through, but it wasn't to be. With matters in the hands of others, we still had high hopes but were pipped at the post to that second semi-final spot in our group.

In the semi-finals on Sunday afternoon:

*Giles Stogdon & Iain Harvey (Group C Winners) def. John Pickthorn & James McDermott (Group D Runners-Up) **6-2***

*Alex Gibson & Nigel Smith (Group C Runners Up) def. John Thirlwell & Frank Guest (Group D Winners) **4-3***

*Ben Martin & Tom Carew Hunt (Group A Winners) def. Tom Guest & Robert Muir (Group B Runners Up) **6-2***

*Steven Bishop & Nick Pellew (Group A Runners Up) def. Peter Dean & James Leaper (Group B Winners) **6-3***

This left the rather intriguing prospect of both finals being contested between pairs that had met during the group stage and had drawn their group stage rubbers. Frisson. Unfinished business.

Ironically, it was due to a last gasp draw by Gibson & Smith (from 40-15 down to game) against Stogdon & Harvey, that my pair was eliminated from Group C. Ironic, because Gibson & Smith went on to win the C/D trophy in the final.

Without detracting from Nigel Smith's achievements in the contest, Alex Gibson's hat trick of hits on the grille in the fourth game probably proved decisive; psychologically if nothing else. Such a hat trick should be named "Coup de Gibson". The voice of Iain Harvey saying, "oh! Not again!" echoes out on the last of them, [click here](#). Gibson & Smith prevailed **6-4**, to secure the Osborn Parker Trophy.

The A/B final, Ben Martin & Tom Carew Hunt v Steven Bishop & Nick Pellew was intriguing. Most of us thought the former, younger pair would prevail. The youngsters got off to a good start. But the experienced pair of Bishop & Pellew found a way to apply pressure to the less experienced pair – in particular extracting several volley errors which, when added to the handicap, meant that experience prevailed on this occasion. [Here is a link to the match once it had reached 2-2.](#) Bishop & Pellew won the Mason Sharp Trophy **8-4** in the end.

Win, lose or draw, it really was a weekend in which almost everybody won. Everyone I spoke with said they had enjoyed themselves enormously, making and renewing tennis friendships in a most convivial, albeit competitive atmosphere.

Roll on the next one...

...hold on a moment...has [Simon Talbot-Williams's white line fever gone viral on TikTok](#) while you were reading this?

IAN HARRIS