



W.H. Ollis Cup- Final

Tuesday 17th December, 2019

The long-awaited, unfortunately delayed 2019 Ollis Cup final took place at Lord's on the afternoon of 17th December. The context for this handicap final was intriguing. James McDermott is a self-confessed relative newbie to real tennis. He has been playing for a few years, but his racket sport of choice for most of his life has, until recently, been squash. James plays regularly at Wellington as well as Lord's. This was his first ever final. Iain Harvey is a veteran of a great many such finals, both singles and doubles. Iain plays regularly at The Royal Tennis Court, Hampton Court, as well as Lord's.

Both of these good gentlemen are Dedanists. Also, to add some frisson to this final, both are members of the MCC's Boomerang team for the forthcoming tournament in Australia, Iain Harvey being the skipper of that team. Add to the mix an intriguingly large handicap; Iain Harvey was giving "half 30 - owe 15" to James. A tough gig for both the giver of such a large handicap – who needs to concentrate on each and every point with errors punished severely – while the receiver of the handicap needs to find ways to overcome the advantages of experience, ability and application that have led to that handicap difference.

As your trusty reporter, I feel bound to admit that I anticipated a McDermott win this bout, based on the excellent performances I have seen James put in this autumn. In particular, I thought that James's volleying ability would, to some extent, neutralise Iain Harvey's famous and feared weapon; the lob. Iain is not known as "The Lobster" for nothing.

The First Set – Coup But No Cigar For James

James started well, taking the first game (contra handicap) but then he lost the next one (also contra handicap). Both players seemed to be struggling a little to settle into the match. James perhaps a little nervous in his first-ever final.



Iain working on the challenge of avoiding errors when giving such a large handicap.

The score went one way (2-1 McDermott), then the other (3-2 Harvey) without either player achieving a two game lead. James did well to get to 5-5, scoring a dedans coup off the main wall to level the set, after falling behind on the ninth game. But the "15 - owe 15" decider proved too much for James. Iain Harvey took the first set 6-5.

The Second Set – Contre-Handicap But Then Decisive

The second set started in similar fashion to the first, with the early games all going contra-handicap. As I had suspected, James was able to cope with Iain Harvey's lob well and was occasionally giving Iain a taste of his own medicine by sending lobs from the hazard end himself.

But after Iain Harvey managed to win the fifth game to go 3-2 up, Iain then managed to win the next, "30 – owe 15" game to pull ahead 4-2, then also take the seventh to go 5-2 ahead.

It seemed that the depth of experience together with deep concentration on Iain Harvey's part was starting to tell. Further, Iain was adapting his game, playing more forcing shots once he realised that James was coping with the lobs well.

James took the eighth game, to pull back to 3-5, but in the ninth game Iain Harvey really took charge with his use of the force, taking three rapid points from the hazard end with straight forces into the dedans. Those dedans forces pretty much clinched the match, in fitting fashion for a clash between Dedanists and with the dedans gallery by then ram-packed with people. OK, at least half-a-dozen of us.

The Aftermath

Brian Sharp did the honours with the awarding of finalist and winner spoils to James and Iain respectively. The winner's bottle of fizz soon somehow found itself open and pouring forth, to help the combatants and the audience celebrate a tremendous achievement for James McDermott in reaching the final and a well-deserved trophy win for Iain Harvey.

IAN HARRIS