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FIVES.

BY EUSTACE MILES.



PEPPER-BOX OF THE ETON FIVES COURT.
(Photo: H. Mason, Cambridge.)

wickets, smaller bats, shorter innings; but such emendations would be utterly undesirable on a caking wicket, and do not get to the root of the matter, which is that we need better bowling, more left-hand bowling probably, and better fielding. As to left-hand bowling, Professor Tadd in America has shown that the left hand may be trained to do almost everything that the right hand can do. Personally, I think it was never intended for precisely the same functions; but still a moderate left-hand bowler will often be more useful to a team than a good right-hand bowler, partly because the natural break is more trying to the right-hand batsman. Certainly the left hand should be cultivated for the purpose of stopping balls at cricket, if not of throwing them in, and the use of the left side should be cultivated for all games and for life. We should be ready to stoop in any direction, ready to start in any direction. A reform which I should prefer for cricket would be a reform tending to improve the enjoyment in all games, namely, a system of such fundamental exercises. Some belong to the Macdonald Smith system, others to other systems; while others are, I believe, my own invention. But such reforms are little likely to be carried out yet. Failing that, I suggest Fives as one of the best helps towards im-

provement at cricket. Fives and boxing are closely allied. Both are excellent practice for left-side movements, including the movement akin to throwing, and are useful for stoopings and full extensions in various directions, and for quick starting both with the arms and with the legs in various directions—backwards, forwards, and to either side.

Nor is it merely a matter of starting at Fives and at boxing. When one has moved either the legs with the weight of the body, or else the arm or arms in the required line, one must still preserve poise. One must always be prepared to move anywhere, and yet maintain what has been called "the ready," the bodily position in which one may make an effective stroke. Both boxing and Fives are exciting in themselves, as well as valuable, if cricket, our great national game, and, indeed, if our national health, is to be preserved. It is the grandest fallacy to assume that the danger to cricket is from the superiority either of professionals or of Australians—the victories of professionals over amateurs, of Australians over Englishmen, are largely due to English want of science and English apathy.

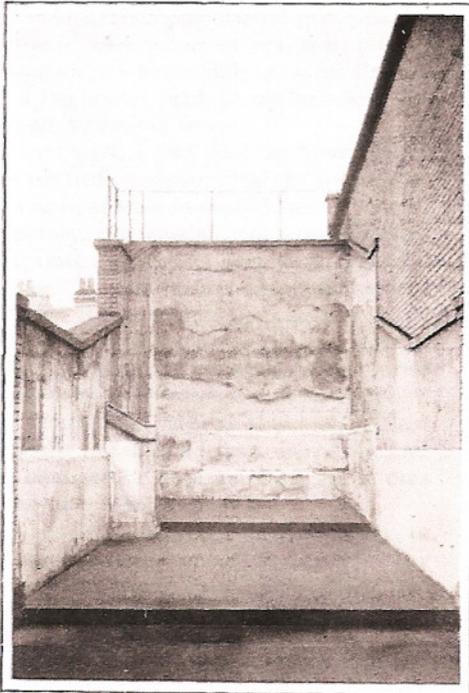


RUGBY FIVES WITHOUT A BACK WALL: A THREE-HANDED GAME, ALL AGAINST ALL

Fives, then, might well set itself forth as one of the best of national games, both as a preparation for self-defence and as a preparation for cricket, and also because of its physical effects, and especially for its stooping and other quick movements of the trunk, legs, and arms. We are a stiff-legged people; personally, I had the greatest difficulty in overcoming this fault of slowness to start and difficulty to stoop; and Fives has been of much service to me here and for other reasons.

This is not all. It can certainly claim, in one of its forms, to be called a very simple game. I speak here of the ordinary game called Rugby Fives. It is played not only at Rugby, but also at schools like Marlborough, and at Cambridge. In America the soft ball is often preferred to the hard English ball. The court may be either open or closed. Each kind has its advantages and disadvantages. What one loses in the closed court with respect to light and ventilation one gains in respect to independence of weather. Courts may be of various sizes; they may have four walls (as at Rugby and Cambridge), or three walls (as at Marlborough). The courts in the photographs have not any back wall at all. Courts may have two walls or only one, in which latter case they would correspond to the old Belvedere Racquet Court, with its one wall and nettings to stop the ball at the sides.

All kinds of courts are good, and it is hard to



ETON FIVES COURT AT CAMBRIDGE, SHOWING LEDGES AND STEPS.

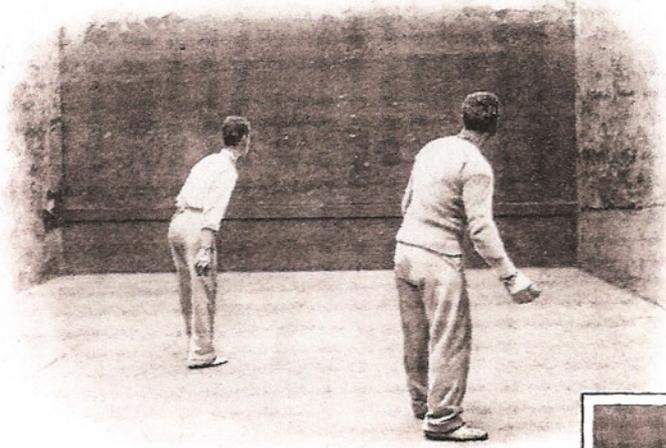
(Photo: H. Mason, Cambridge.)

say which gives the best play. If there are back and side walls, then there are bound to be longer rallies; but there is this to be said against the enclosed sides: that it is hard to finish a rally with a killing stroke. On the other hand, beginners find that the game is easy. Contrast lawn tennis, in which the beginner has the disadvantage of being passed down the sides or across the court. As a rule, a ball once past is past for ever; whereas in Fives there is a second chance off the side and back walls. Besides this, if the game be too easy with four walls, then one can have a lower play line, which will make the rallies shorter. This can easily be brought about by a movable board or "tell-tale," as they call it in America; but in either case the simplicity of the game attracts the beginner. The rules can be learnt in a few minutes. The game is for fifteen aces. If A is serving he scores a point when he wins the rally; when he loses the rally he loses the service. B takes the service, and if B wins the rally he now scores a point.

Fives hardens the hands without altogether depriving them of their sense of touch—indeed, I have found it quicken the sense of touch considerably. Among its other excellences is the fact that it gives both arms that jerk which is so much needed for various forms of athletics. It is often called the wrist stroke; really it is not only of the wrist, but of the fore-arm and shoulder as well. At racquets, tennis, lawn tennis, the jerk is made not merely by the wrist, but by these other parts of the body also. This jerk has been compared by Peter Latham, the racquet and tennis champion of the world, to the whipping of a peg-top, or the flicking of something with a whip. One might also compare fly fishing; and closely akin to this jerk is the jerk when, as is usually the case, one wishes to shake out a stylographic pen.

Then, again, Fives gives us practice in and familiarity with that sideways position which is so useful for tennis, racquets, lawn tennis, golf, and cricket. The batsman stands sideways, and runs out sideways. He does not, when he is about to run out, first face sideways, then run forwards, then face sideways again: his movements are *in* the sideways position. Few can run sideways with any success. Hence most batsmen stay in their ground, and allow what would otherwise be an easy ball to become difficult, simply and solely because of its length. In the sideways position the full-body swing from the hips comes effectively. Instead of a jerk by a tiny set of muscles like those of the wrist, there is this jerk if necessary, but in addition to it a longer and more sweeping swing with the larger muscles of the arm and trunk.

Moreover, Fives should develop not only this healthy full use of the trunk muscles, but also,



RUGBY FIVES: THE PLAYER TO THE LEFT IS JUST GOING TO SERVE.

(Photo: H. Mason, Cambridge.)

both before and after this full movement, alertness and poise. It should do this, but the majority of players play Fives wrongly.

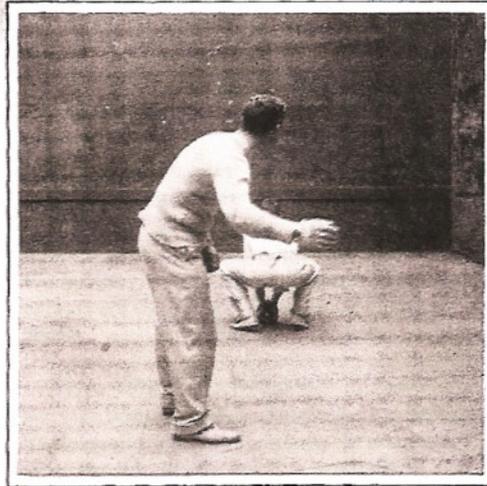
Indeed, the above advantages are theoretical advantages; they give us an idea of what Fives might do, rather than what it does do. So, the Double or Four-handed play should give practice in co-operation; as a matter of fact, most players fail to co-operate, as lamentably as most English teams do in the cricket field, in contrast with the Yorkshire and Australian teams.

For my own part, I find that the Four-handed game gives too little exercise, while the Single gives rather too much, at least in many kinds of courts; but in Fives there is a possibility of a three-handed game, all against all. Let us imagine A, B, and C to be playing. A goes in first and plays against B and C; then B goes in and plays against C and A; then C goes in and plays against B and A. This excellent variety is seldom tried; yet it forms good practice both for the Single and for the Four, it gives an alternation between extremely violent and quite gentle rallies, and in case one of the four cannot be obtained or does not turn up, it does not spoil the enjoyment of the three.

But whether Fives has these merits already, or whether it only has them "in potentiality" (as they say), it is a quick game, quick and exciting, and quickly over. It needs a small court, small expense when once the court has been built, and so is very cheap—it can be reduced to a few pence an hour.

What we have said of the simple game, with one, two, three, or four walls, applies also to the Winchester game, which has a buttress at an angle like the tambour of the tennis court, only on the left-hand side of the court. This gives variety, but not excessive refinement.

Eton Fives has far more intricacy; it originated in certain projections from the side of the Eton chapel. The original court may still be seen. Eton Fives courts are mostly open. Specimens are to be found not only at Eton, but also at Cambridge—the photograph is of a Cambridge court—and elsewhere. Among other features are the ledges along which the ball will run, or from which it will jump, and the pepper-box,



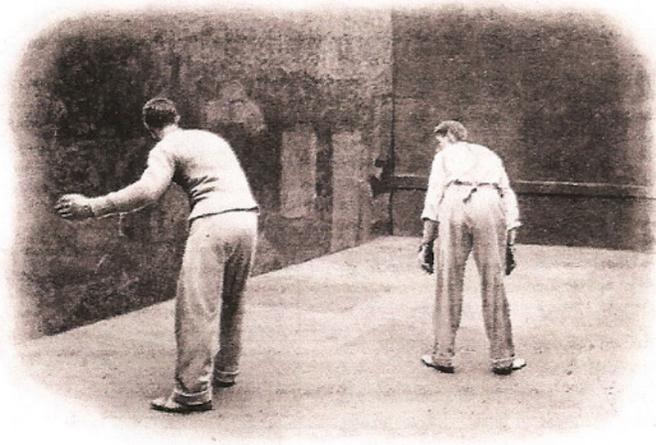
A FOUR GAME WITH ONE PLAYER FORWARD: THE OTHER TWO ARE STANDING NEAR THE BACK WALL.

(Photo: H. Mason, Cambridge.)

as it is called, the most elaborate piece of furniture on the left-hand side. Then there are also the two steps, which distinguish Eton Fives markedly from Rugby Fives.

In Eton Fives the Single is, I believe, a rarity—Four-handed games are the rule. These games, though I think not to be compared with Rugby Fives for vigorous strength and briskness, give an element in which Rugby Fives, with its four walls, is sadly lacking, namely finesse. Soft hitting, it is true, and especially dropping, may pay in the Rugby game—two or three of the Marlborough masters are adepts at dropping the ball—but, as a rule, soft hitting does not pay. In Eton Fives it does, if it be combined with accuracy, judgment, and diplomacy.

The stroke at Eton Fives, when the ball is kept close to the front and side walls, is often less a slap than a hold. It has not the actual catch and sling of the La Crosse stroke; that is to say, the ball is not held for an appreciable length of time before it is slung. The game of Pelota has a long



RUGBY FIVES: A LEFT-HAND STROKE

(Photo: H. Mason, Cambridge.)

implement in which, as in La Crosse, the ball is caught before it is slung. I believe at one time there was a dispute as to whether the ball should not be struck rather than slung. In Pelota the ball is held for a shorter period than at La Crosse. In Eton Fives it is held for a much shorter period than at Pelota. It is this feature of the game which separates it from such games as cricket and racquets and lawn tennis.

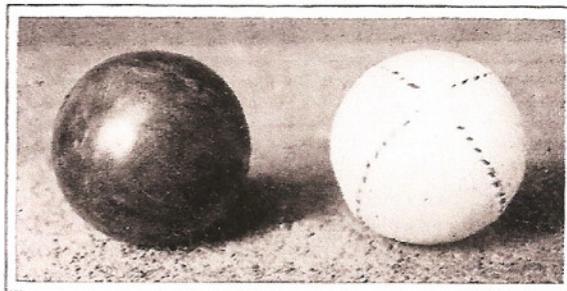
Fives should certainly be encouraged among the lower classes. It can be played in the evenings by artificial light in a bare room with a soft ball. Clubs in which Fives can be played should be started all over London and its suburbs, and, in fact, in all great cities and their suburbs, to say nothing of country houses, village clubs, hotels, etc. There need not be associated with this game the betting and drinking which were associated with it at one time in America. There the game of Fives, a game on a larger scale than the ordinary English play, was free to the players. The drinks brought in the dollars. There was high betting on the matches, and the proceeds of the betting was expended in drinks and smokes. It was chiefly the audience who made the court a financial success. It is not for such purposes that we should recommend the game; but rather as the present Bishop of London, a most excellent sportsman, would recommend it (for he plays it well)—for recreation, for the education of the left side, of the muscles needed for stooping and for the extension of the arms and legs, for alertness, for poise during and after strokes, and for many other physical and mental reasons.

A volume might be written on the atrophy of the left side of athletes. One

remedy for this lies in gymnastics, which, however, for the most part are extremely dull and unattractive, and, moreover, often use the two sides together, which is not what we want. We do not want merely the slow rhythmical movements of the two sides together, but rather an independent control of the left side as well as of the right. As it is, few of us are better than hopeless at even our own favourite games if we come to change the racket from one hand to the other. The best experts become absolute duffers under such conditions. Few seem inclined to practise their own games left-handed. Very well; but let them play games

in which they *must* use the left hand. Boxing and "Bartitsu" are good for this purpose—they require no apparatus. The only objection to Fives that I can see is that it requires a court and balls; but, given these, it must always stand out as among the very best and most useful forms of sport.

Note.—For the convenience of the reader it may be mentioned that a court of the best material, namely the Bickley cement, is somewhat expensive, though in my opinion well worth the money, since in it one can play not only Fives or Squash but also miniature racquets. A cheaper court can be made of cheaper cement or of glazed bricks; a still cheaper court of plain wood. In the front wall it is worth while to have the edges, and not the flat surface of the beams, facing the players. This is somewhat more expensive, but it gives more spring and more uniformity to the front wall. A plain wooden wall, with nettings at the sides and above, and a court marked out with lines, would cost only a few pounds.



A SQUASH BALL AND A RUGBY FIVES BALL.

(Photo: H. Mason, Cambridge.)