

BAT — FIVES

BY H. B. EVINGTON

TO those who have had the fortune to learn this variety of the game it is a matter for surprise that bat-fives is not more widely known and played.

It appears to be played a little in several Public Schools, usually by a few enthusiasts, as was the case in 1900 in my time at Marlborough, where it appears to have had temporary, but not even then general, revivals since.

In some schools a squash-ball is used instead of the standard ball similar to a fives or rackets ball, but $1\frac{1}{4}$ inches in diameter.

Like the court itself the rules never seem to have been standardised, and I can only quote the rules in force at Harpenden, which have been compiled from recollections of several players.

The floor of the court, 18ft. by 29ft. is divided laterally by a line parallel to the front wall and 15 feet from it, and from the middle of this line another is drawn straight down to the back wall.

There is a service line 7 feet from the ground on the front wall and the board is 2 feet 6 inches from the ground.

The service is above the service line and round both the right and front walls into the left-hand court; service below the line or short of the "short" line (the one parallel to the front wall) being faults. The reason for the round-two-walls service is to take some of the way off the ball. Over arm service is also excluded for the same reason, but a fairly fast one can be managed with the arm straight and very nearly up to shoulder level.

A service hitting the front wall first puts the server out. This seems rather drastic, but as one of the hardest services to take is that which only just catches the side wall, the rule was probably made to increase the difficulty for the server.

The scoring is the same as in rackets or the side out having the choice of set-five at thirteen-all or set-three at fourteen-all.

Bats appear to have been made in all sorts of sizes, from 18 inches long with an oval head about $5\frac{1}{2}$ inches by $3\frac{1}{2}$ to 22 inches long with a head as much as $6\frac{1}{2}$ inches by $5\frac{1}{2}$.

We finally adopted some years ago as our standard here a bat 22 inches long with a head $6\frac{1}{2}$ inches by $4\frac{1}{2}$, weighing about five ounces. This was chosen largely to suit boys of preparatory school age, just as also our court was made eighteen feet by twenty-nine. It was built originally for hand fives but we found that for all except the elder boys this was too big, and it was this fact that led to the introduction of bat-fives in which the extra length of reach due to the handle made it an easier game to keep up a rally.

Two sizes of ball are used, the larger, $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter, which is actually a racket ball, making an appreciably slower and easier game.

It will be seen that in the absence of any standardisation the game can be modified according to individual inclination and existing courts. We played here first with small size bats and the court had no back wall and was 24 feet long and had no back wall. But when we found the larger bats I had the court lengthened and a back wall built 8 feet high and this made a great improvement.

Courts which are much wider than eighteen feet would probably make the game too strenuous for players who are any good at placing the ball low down along the side walls, just as extra length would make it easier.

The game as here described is almost rackets in miniature: actually owing to the smaller court rather faster, at least for ordinary players. With an even opponent and when use has accustomed one to the pace, the exercise obtainable in a short time is greater and more exhilarating than any other game of the type. It is hard hitting all the time.

I am inclined to regard bat-fives as the ideal busy man's game, so long as he retains the necessary agility and quickness

of eye. It is faster and more fun than Squash Rackets, as one can get real effect out of a low hard shot down a side wall. It has another value, I think, for the young schoolboy in that it would appear to be a good introduction to Rackets. Never having myself reached more than moderate proficiency at the greater game I distrust my opinion on this point, and it would be interesting to know what racket players of skill and experience think.

SqR, F, T & R February 1933

Bat-Fives

It is curious to think that bat-Fives has almost passed out of existence, for in the opinion of many who have played it, it is far and away the best game of its kind after real rackets. The reason for this is not far to seek, because Bat-Fives with its small fast ball in a confined place, gives to the player the same joyous thrill which the rackets' player obtains from the major game. This, however, is not the time or place to expatiate on the merits or demerits of a game, which has never been held in much favour in this country possibly because it has always fallen between two stools, that of Rackets on one side, and Fives on the other. Suffice to say here, that next month we hope to publish a short article on the subject, by Mr. H. B. Evington, who is an enthusiast for the game. Mr. Evington possesses an open court at Hardenwick School, Harpenden, where the game is still played with great enjoyment.