

DOUBLES PAIRS AT RUGBY FIVES.

By JOHN ARMITAGE.

The Doubles Championship of Rugby Fives for the Cyriax Cup will take place during the evenings of the first two weeks of January. For the first time in history pairs will enter under their own names instead of as nominees of their respective Clubs, and in this way it is hoped the competition will become more general and less ridiculous,—ridiculous because in past seasons players who were without a club and who still wished to play in the Championship were taking to forming a fictitious club with a name such as the Jujubes and playing as its representatives. The matches will take place on the courts of St. Paul's School, by kind permission of the High Master, to whose generosity Rugby Fives players have so often been beholden. Another innovation will be the playing off of the rounds of the Championship on consecutive nights instead of the old system which allowed the competition to drag on throughout the season. On the face of it this would appear a wise and long overdue decision but in point of fact the authorities of Rugby Fives have many difficulties with which to contend which do not arise in Championships of other games. Few Rugby Fives players are masters of their own time, making play during the day time absolutely impossible, for there are few employers who consider Fives worthy of an absit each day; nor is evening play until a late hour, night after night, very much fun for the competitors.

At the time of writing there is still a few days left before the entry is closed and in consequence it is not possible to make any forecast as to which pairs will reach the final, even if we could be certain which pairs had entered for the Championship. P. A. Malt and E. L. Bailey will be favourites once again for they have won the Cyriax Cup three years in succession, while Malt has actually won it four times, once with Prout. It is true that they are not as young as they were but events this season have proved conclusively that there is no sign of decline. In the St. Paul's courts they recently won the first double of their game against H. A. Oundjian and K. R. R. Readhead by 15—2, and this in spite of the fact that the Old Pauline pair are considered by some people their equal and certainly their probable successors.

Oundjian and Readhead won the Public Schools Doubles Championship in 1932. They have always been a good pair, playing together now for a number of years, both as schoolboys and Old Paulines. At the moment it is possible that they rely too largely on theory to win their match, for they love to plan their games ahead. Anticipation, both in the court and before the match, is really of little value if opponents are the better players, and it is because Oundjian and Readhead so seldom meet better players than themselves that they believe theory to have been successful. Good understanding, fostering the skill of the arm, is the most necessary virtue of a good Doubles pair. Good understanding Oundjian and Readhead have and they will go far especially on their own courts.

Another splendid pair of whom we see but little and who are unlikely to compete in the Championship are R. de W. K. Winlaw and H. J. H. Lamb. Winlaw and Lamb were at Winchester together and won the Public Schools Doubles in 1931. Subsequently they both went up to Cambridge, and although playing seldom as a pair they appear each year together to the discomfiture of Oxford, in the University Rugby Fives match. In their school days, Winlaw was brilliant and Lamb the perfect second string for he would allow the bulk of the scoring shots

to fall on his partner without ever failing to be in the right place when needed. To-day the position is not quite the same for Winlaw does not play so regularly as Lamb and the latter has improved enormously. But if the play of these two has been evened up they are no less formidable. In last year's University Rugby Fives match in their singles and doubles together, they scored a maximum number of points of 120 against 35, conceding on an average just over four points per game.

W. J. Rees and W. L. Neustatter of University College and Hospital are also an old combination of two strong players. They can be very good on their own courts and indeed elsewhere, but it is unlikely that Neustatter will be able to partner Rees throughout a long championship. Rees is a most improved player, who on his own courts is practically unbeatable even by the champion, Malt.

These pairs are all outstanding, composed as they are of players who have enjoyed considerable reputations for some time. There are, however, many others who are likely to do very well in any company and who may well spring a surprise after a few nights of consecutive play on the same courts. D. E. Smith and F. K. Truman of the Old Alleynians stand out as two players who can both be brilliant on their day. This year Truman is playing even better than he did last season and but for the fact that neither he nor Smith care to regard Fives as a business they might do even better than they do. Then there is A. Francis and C. A. Becker, of Westminster Bank, V. E. Oundjian and J. G. Richards of the Old Paulines, but who have not played together very frequently of late and a host of others.