

THE RUGBY FIVES ASSOCIATION.

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(Hon. Secretary Rugby Fives Association).

On a certain Saturday evening in 1926, I think it was in November, a party of eight tired people sat down to hot tea and toast after a typically hard game of Fives. The match had been between Alleyn Old Boys, always to the fore where Fives is concerned, and the Old Sinjuns. My memory is, unfortunately, not sufficiently good to enable me to recall the names of all those present, but two stand very clear in my mind, those of P. A. Malt and H. D. Beevers, both of whom have since devoted so many hours to the advancement of the game. Hot tea and toast after a game of Fives has much the same loosening effect on the tongue, where any is needed, as beer after a hard day's walk, except that in the former circumstances the topic of conversation is invariably Fives. On this particular occasion, after the usual "You-played-jolly-well-how-did-I-play?," the conversation turned towards the organisation of the game, and it was suggested that there ought to be an Association governing the game of Rugby Fives, a game which, even at that relatively remote date, had numerous followers (I find on consulting my diaries that I was playing Club Fives Matches as early as 1923). All those present agreed that something ought to be done about it. There was, at this time, a Fives Section of the Rackets Association, but nobody seemed able to give us any information about it. Our only hope was Dr. Cyriax. If he didn't know, nobody did. Of course he did know. The Secretary of the Rackets Association, it appeared, was abroad and after a vain endeavour to establish connection with that

Association we decided to break away and form an independent one with Dr. Cyriax at the head.

It is easy enough to decide to form an Association "a suitable blend of enthusiasm and initiative" is all that is required, but it is quite another matter to form it. You must be patient in the face of opposition's lethargy and present a broad back to ridicule. Moreover, many of those who are now our staunchest supporters were then still at school.

THE FIRST MEETING.

Where could we hold our Inaugural Meeting? We have never been able to afford any Headquarters, however simple. It happened that one of our number was at that time connected with one of the London Colleges and he optimistically guaranteed to find us a room. I well remember sneaking past the hall porter hoping he would not challenge me, though I had taken the precaution beforehand of furnishing myself with a plausible excuse. On reaching the comfortless tin-hut appropriated for us I was disappointed at the smallness of the gathering, though previous experience of such meetings should have prepared me. We agreed that a Constitution must be drawn up. This could not be done at one fell swoop, so further meetings were arranged, one of which, I remember, was held at the private residence, in Hampstead, of Mr. L. L. Marsden who, at this period and later, gave us so ungrudgingly of his knowledge of things legal. Lawyers as a profession are, I believe, noted for being meticulous. Mr. Marsden is no exception. We learnt what an Association was, and what was implied by the expression "improper conduct." Last year, in order to cope with the increasing work of the Association and in recognition of its widening influence, the Committee was enlarged, and now consists of eleven members instead of seven.

The first official Annual General Meeting was held at Dr. Cyriax's private residence in Welbeck Street, on October 29th, 1928. Everyone was so impressed with the Doctor's coffee and cigars that, with his kind permission, we have held all subsequent meetings there. Our meetings are, by that same token, a little less cold and formal than most. The clubs who sent representatives on that occasion were:—Alleyn Old Boys, Old Sinjuns, Clove Club, University College School, Old Boys, King's College and Glasgow University. It is encouraging to note that from the start we received support from a club so far distant from London as Glasgow. Twice since that time Glasgow University has, with the help of the Association, arranged a tour in London. At the first A. G. M. I was elected Honorary Secretary and my friend, H. D. Beevers, Honorary Treasurer, and we have both held those respective offices ever since. The other members of the original Committee were Dr. Cyriax, P. A. Malt, L. L. Marsden, J. W. Nye and W. H. Pett, all of whom are still concerned in one way or another with the game of Fives.

The competition for the Cyriax Cup had been in existence some years before the formation of the Association, but in 1929 Singles were eliminated, the Championship being confined to Doubles. In 1934 for the first time the Championship was played off on consecutive evenings, instead of being spread over the whole season. The innovation was, on the whole, thought to be a success

though it debarred those who were unable to spend the fortnight in or near London. The Singles Championship, instituted by the Jesters Club, has only recently been taken over by the Association. No more significant indication of the growth of the popularity of the game could be found than the steady growth of the number of entries for these Championships.

STANDARD RULES.

It was about this time too that a movement was set on foot to standardise the rules of the game. Hitherto Club Matches had been so rare and Championships so few that the absence of any standard set of rules had not been a grave disadvantage. But the phenomenal growth of the game made such a set of rules imperative. The method adopted for their foundation was as follows. A small Sub-Committee was appointed to draw up a preliminary code of Rules, a copy of which was sent to all known Rugby Fives Schools and Clubs together with an invitation to send criticisms and suggestions. All such were carefully analysed and tabulated before the final draft was made. The most difficult part of the task was the formation of a Rule that should adequately deal with the thorny question of "lets." Most rules were subjected to some form of criticism. The only one that met with unanimous approval was the last, to wit, that the umpire's decision should be final. The final draft was ratified by an Extraordinary General Meeting on May 8th, 1930.

Having disposed of the question of standard rules the Committee turned its attention to the even more intricate problem of the Standard Court. Every Fives player knows the story of the provincial who, due to play a match at West Kensington, found himself by mistake at the Albert Hall and remarked "This is a little larger than

ours!" With a view to reducing this chaos to order, a circular was sent to all Schools and Clubs throughout the country asking them to furnish dimensions and other particulars of their courts. So diverse were these particulars, and so peculiar, that, after examining the large pile of postcards received in answer to our request we should not have been surprised to have heard of an octagonal court with French windows in the middle of the front wall. In the far distant future when Fives courts of standard size are as common as Lawn Tennis courts, some of these historic old erections will be taken over by the Office of Works, or shipped off to America as curios.

The year 1931 was a very busy one for the Association. It saw the beginning of several new schemes. It was in this year that we first sent a team up to the North to play at Manchester, Leeds and Halifax, a tour that was successfully repeated last season. 1931 saw also the beginnings of the Association's Touring Side which, in the capable hands of Mr. K. W. Millage, has developed until it includes in its fixture list almost all the Rugby Fives Schools and Clubs. At about the same time an even more ambitious scheme involving Inter-County matches was evolved. This scheme, by which each County appointed a representative whose duty it was to arrange matches and teams, worked well at first, but had to be considerably modified as the idea developed, and last season the County Championship was administered from Headquarters and, like the other Championships, played on the "knock-out" system.

In 1931 also another Sub-Committee was appointed to draw up a code of Rules for the regulation of Match Play. As matches are still played under such varying conditions

it has not yet been thought expedient to publish the findings of that Committee

The most recent undertaking of the Association has been the taking over from the Jesters Club the management of the Open Singles Championship and the Public Schools Championships. It is to Mr. J. F. Burnet, himself a pioneer in all matters relating to Fives, that we owe these two Championships. Schoolboys, in particular, have every reason to be grateful to Mr. Burnet. The popularity of the Public Schools Championships is shown by the number of Schools which have taken part and by the high standard of play. Among the Schools which regularly send representatives are:—Alleyens, Bedford, Bedford Modern, Carlisle, Cheltenham, Christ's Hospital, Dulwich, Felsted, Forest, Haileybury, Marlborough, Malvern, Oundle, St. Paul's, Sir Walter St. John's, Sherborne, Strand, Sloane, Tonbridge, Winchester.

Although we have, on occasions, met with opposition it is only fair to say that on the whole, we have been well supported in our efforts. We are particularly grateful to those Headmasters and Governors of Schools, without whose generosity in the matter of the loan of courts, the Championships would have been an impossibility. We have by no means finished yet; some of the work still to be done will, I know, prove intricate and difficult. It can be successfully accomplished only by the whole-hearted co-operation of all those who are interested in the welfare of the game.