

LAMH LIATHROID—

The Gaelic Game of Handball.

By L. RUSSELL MUIRHEAD.

It is true that the history of Fives is lost in the mists of antiquity, but the form in which the English game has reached the Twentieth Century is a fairly sophisticated one, with more or less standardised apparatus. It does not, moreover, seem ever to have been a game with a wide popular appeal, but has always been restricted to organised communities—schools, clubs, and the like.

Irish Handball, however, which is at least equally ancient, has always been played throughout the country, and since the establishment of the Irish Free State it has become recognised officially as a national game, under the patronage of the Gaelic Athletic Association. Enquiries made at the Association itself, and from Irishmen learned in the history of their country, met with little success as regards the discovery of historical items about the game. But everything goes to show that the custom of playing Handball is deeply ingrained in the Irish people.

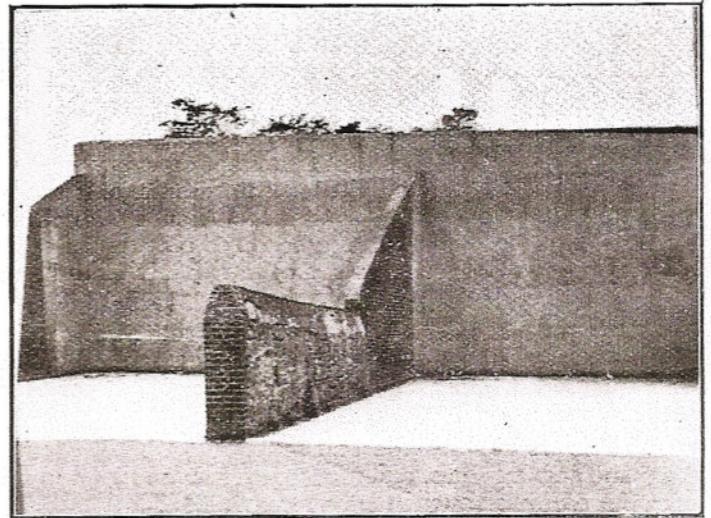
A ball-alley was the main feature of a recent cartoon in *Dublin Opinion*; we have yet to see a Fives-court figuring with equal prominence in *Punch*.

There is scarcely a village in Ireland without its ball-alley, whether a regular one, or an improvised one up against the gable-end of a house. At Killeany, off the largest of the Aran Islands off the west coast, they play against a huge single slab of limestone sixty feet square, flanked by a rough wall. I regret to say that in one case the wall of an ancient ruined Franciscan monastery was found cemented up and adapted for the game (though this is not very different from the original Eton Fives court!). Every boys' school and college is copiously provided with courts, Maynooth having little short of a hundred. So shrewd an observer as John Gibbons, in his book on Ireland,* remarks that the country seemed to him to contain more "fives-courts" per head than any country he had visited. They are to be found everywhere—in the slums of Dublin, in the public parks, in the Civic Guards' barracks—the game of Handball is an essential part of the leisure life of the Irish people.

Before going into the rules, we may well say a word about the ball-alley here illustrated. These courts are at Blackrock College, near Dublin, and are remarkable in being marked out for Pelota as well as for Handball, to enable the numerous Basque and South American students attending the college to keep their hand in at their own national game. Most courts are very difficult to photograph well, owing to the presence of a high back wall, which is usual though not essential, as will be seen from the following paragraphs. The horizontal side-wall in the picture is not properly part of the court; it is used here merely to keep the players in the two courts from running into each other. In the most primitive courts even the slanting side wall may sometimes be replaced by a line.

POINTS FROM THE RULES.

A selection from the Gaelic Athletic Association's Handball Rules is appended. The most noteworthy points of difference from the games of Fives are: two



BALL-ALLEYS AT BLACKROCK COLLEGE, CO. DUBLIN.

different kinds of ball may be used; a game consists of 21 aces; three players on each side can take part in a game; and service is made by striking, not by throwing the ball against the front wall. On the other hand, the rules for "Hinders" (i.e. "Lets") are practically the same. But let the G.A.A. speak for itself.

THE COURT OR ALLEY.

1. The floor shall not be less than 60 feet or more than 63 feet long, and not less than 28 feet and more than 30 feet wide. Height of front wall 30 feet. Height of back wall (if any) at least 9 feet.
2. A line called the short line must be drawn parallel to the front wall, not nearer to it than half the length of the court, and a line called the service line to be drawn 4 feet inside the short line.
3. A line should be drawn at the extreme edge of the floor, if there be no back wall, six feet from the boundary, to keep off spectators, and parallel to the front wall. This line to be called the overline.
4. Where there are no side walls, or where the side walls do not extend to the over line, lines should be drawn from the ends of the front wall or side wall to the extremities of the over lines. These lines to be called side lines.

THE BALLS.

5. The balls to be hard and covered with sheepskin or any suitable kind of leather.
6. The standard size for Hard-ball shall be from 1 13-16 inches diameter to 1 15-16 inches diameter, and the standard weight shall not be less than 1½ ounces or more than 1¾ ounces. The standard rebound shall be not less than 2½ feet or more than 3½ feet when dropped from a height of 8 feet to a concrete or flagged floor. The standard size for Soft-ball shall be 2⅓ inches diameter.

THE PLAY.

7. A game shall consist of 21 aces, and to be won by whichever player or team gets this number.
8. A rubber may consist of any odd number of games, and will be won by whichever gains the greater number of games.
9. A "home-and-home" rubber to be played in the two alleys or courts belonging to the challenged or challenging players—as many games as may be agreed

* *Tramping through Ireland.* By JOHN GIBBONS (Newnes).

on to be played in the one alley or court, and the remainder or a sufficient number of games to decide the rubber in the second alley or court.

10. Before commencing a game the opposing players shall toss for choice of inside or outside ground. One "hand" shall be given for first innings of every game; two "hands" for second and succeeding innings, if there be two players on each side; and three "hands" for third and succeeding innings if there be three players on each side. When one game is finished the winners shall have choice of ground.

11. All the balls served out from the front wall to the outside must be tossed—that is, hopped on the floor and struck with the hand against the front wall. Jerking is not allowed.

12. Players serving the ball must stand between the short and service lines, and must not cross the latter line until the ball has touched the front wall.

13. An ace to count when an outside player misses a ball, fails to return one which has been tossed out or played to him, or makes a "foul." A "hand-out" to count when an inside player misses a ball, fails to return one which has been played to him, or makes a "foul."

14. Touching a ball to be considered as playing it; should it be played to a second time by the player who struck it, or his partner, before reaching the front wall, it shall be foul, and count as an ace or hand-out. Playing to a ball on the second or succeeding hop to be foul, and an ace or hand-out.

15. Should a player catch or deliberately stop a ball going to or from the front-wall, a hand-out or ace should be given; according as the offender is an inside or outside player.

16. A ball which crosses the side line or side wall will be an ace or hand out, according as the player who last played to it is an inside or outside player. When a ball crossing the side line be struck at and missed before it hops, an ace shall be given against the player who missed. If the ball has hopped, and the player is not sure whether it is inside the line or not, he should call for judgment, and proceed as in Rule 25.

17. Should a player strike a ball and it goes up off his partner, it is foul, and shall count as an ace or hand-out. Should a player strike at a ball with both hands together it is foul.

SERVICE.

18. The partner or partners of the player who is serving must stand on the side line or with one shoulder

touching side wall, and inside the short line, until the ball is served.

19. No ball to be tossed out until the outside players are in position outside the short line. The judge may disallow any ball tossed out before the outside players are prepared, or while a question of judgment is being decided.

20. If the player who is serving tosses the ball over the side line, or side wall it will be a hand-out. Should he fail to toss three successive balls between the short and over lines, it will be a hand-out. Should he strike the ball against the ground, the side wall, or his own person ere striking the front wall, it will be a hand-out. Should he miss the ball when tossing it will be a hand-out. Should he jerk the ball it will be a hand-out. A ball hopping on a line to be over that line.

21. All balls tossed out between the short and over lines must be played to unless they have touched the player who served them, or his partner, after leaving the front wall or unless the judge disallows them. Should the partner of the player who is serving prevent a ball crossing the side line it will be foul.

22. Should the player who is tossing, or his partner, catch the ball before it hops a second time, it will be a hand-out. Should the outside player catch a ball before it hops a second time, unless he is standing four feet outside the over line, it will be an ace.

HINDERS.

23. Should a player strike a ball and it afterwards strike his opponent, it should be a hinder, and must be played over, even though it reaches the front wall.

24. Should a ball coming from the front wall strike the player who put it up, or his partner, it is a hinder, and must be played over.

25. Should a player, whilst the ball is in play, think that a foul has occurred, he must call for judgment and play on. When the ball has been played out, the judge will decide if a foul has occurred, and give his decision accordingly. Should no foul have taken place the result of the play will count. The judge may, if he wishes, declare an ace, or hand-out when a foul occurs without waiting for the ball to be played out.

26. Should a player obstruct another in such a manner that he cannot play, the judge may give a hinder. Should the obstruction be wilful, the judge may give an ace or hand-out against the offender.

27. Any ball brought off the front wall in play to or beyond the over line shall count dead and be played over.

28. When a ball is over or short the player may or may not, as he pleases, play to it. Should he try to play to it and miss, it will be an ace. Kicking or attempting to kick a ball shall be deemed playing it.

29. In a court, a ball brought off front wall in play over back wall shall be dead, and shall be played over.

30. In covered alleys a ball striking the roof is an ace or hand out.

31. The decision of the judge to be final.