

# SOME PROBLEMS OF RUGBY FIVES.

By B. R. GRIFFITHS.

Although there are few sets of Rugby Fives courts which are absolutely identical, it is certain that those built at the present time do follow the standard measurements as laid down by the Rugby Fives Association. The surface composition of the walls and the floor has varied in the past just as much as the actual size of the court. Many courts had a polished surface, upon which any moisture in the air would condense, thereby bringing about the old complaint of sweating which has ruined many a day's enjoyment.

Nowadays it is usual for the surface to be left unpolished, a feature which some players—and particularly those who like "a crack at the ball"—contend has considerably slowed down the game. Although the hard hitters may find it increasingly difficult to kill the ball, I maintain that the introduction of what I may perhaps term the new type of court has been all to the good of the game for the following reason: The very slight slowing down of pace from the floor and walls has meant that emphasis should be laid more than ever on that most important of all Fives' virtues, the value of being able to hit the ball to a good length. Since the erection of the new courts at Alleyn's School and those at Hampstead Squash Rackets and Fives Club, players who hit hard and perhaps not too low have found that, unless they can in some miraculous way consistently 'hit the crack' at the back wall, they are more often than not wasting their strength and giving their opponents just that extra split second which generally attaches to shots which 'sit up' at the back wall.

It is interesting to note that the so-called slower court has surely, as with the new ball at Squash, made more calls on a player's stamina and speed, for although the faster Fives court and the old ball at Squash may have been considered to produce a faster game the position now is that the player has further to run to reach the ball.

At any rate some first-class players who have often stated their dislike for playing on courts that they consider too slow for them have, nevertheless, given some exceptional performances in them, notably J. G. W. Davies' fine form throughout the 1935 Amateur Singles Championship held at Alleyn's School and R. J. Knight's devastating play in the recent county match, Cambridge University v. Essex, on the same courts and in this year's Amateur Doubles Championship at Hampstead. The secret of these well-known players' success is in no small way explained by their quickness about the court.

While dwelling on this question of speed we may do well to consider the proposal of Mr. J. F. Burnet, the Hon. Secretary of the Jesters, that all club matches should be played on the same lines as are county matches at the present time, that is to say, each string plays his opposite number one game of singles, and the two first pairs meet each other in three games of doubles, the two second pairs meeting likewise. Mr. Burnet contends, and I think rightly, that anyone who has then not had enough Fives for one day is an exception and likely to find himself in a minority! The increasing tendency to discard the singles and play doubles only is certainly to be deplored. It is, however, a moot point as to whether the general re-introduction of singles into match play will be favoured; in singles the better physical condition of one's opponent can often negative a variety of shots whereas in doubles court-craft is the order of the day.

Mr. Burnet's suggestion, with which many agree, including the Hon Secretary of the Rugby Fives Association and of the younger players, Mr. Julian Gill, is commendable in that it will bring back singles play into the position it deserves. It is a little uncertain as to its reception by those who are beginning to consider themselves too old for Fives; nowadays many players are apt to give up the game after the age of 30 and I cannot help thinking that the advent of more singles play may hasten their departure. There are too few players of experience over the age of 30 and it is these as much as any who will continue by their knowledge to help the progress of the game.

No doubt players individually have their own ideas on the reasons which produce enjoyment in a game of Fives and it would be of interest to know how many do get more out of a match in which singles are played. There is no one who will not agree that a hard single at Fives 'takes it out of one,' in fact we used to get quite accustomed to hearing our old friend, Mr. K. W. Millage, say that "Squash is energetic, but Fives is strenuous." This statement might quite well serve as the subject of a very lively debate, but anyway readers of "Squash Rackets and Fives" will have "something to say about it."

It is remarkable to recall that until quite recently there was little Rugby Fives played in London which was not of match class and there was scarcely anyone taking part in it who had not previously been a member of his school team. It is the mediocre player of any game who is probably its greatest supporter and it is good to think that such a man—yes and woman—has now the opportunity to play Rugby Fives. It is to these lesser known lights that we may perhaps look to provide the backbone of Fives in the future just as much as the now more expert may have done in the past. The standard of Fives has increased considerably within the last five or six years and there is no reason to suppose that it will not further increase. Heaven help some of us if that increase is too large!

## *Some Problems of Rugby Fives.*

*To the Editor of Squash Rackets and Fives.*

Sir,

Although one of the "over 30 years brigade" I wish to say that I heartily agree with Messrs. Burnet, Gill and Griffiths, that whenever possible, evening club matches should be played on the same lines as County matches which include one single.

I fail to see why Singles are nearly always omitted and as far as I can gather, the only excuse offered, is that it means a certain amount of waiting about before the Doubles can begin, at clubs where there are only two courts.

This is true of course, but the same happens on Saturdays, when Singles are played, and I have never heard any grumbling on these occasions.

Yours faithfully,

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