

50 YEARS OF THE RUGBY FIVES ASSOCIATION

In 1923 a Fives Association had been formed for Eton Fives, but in 1924 agreement to include Rugby Fives was approved by the Tennis and Rackets Association, with which the Fives Association became incorporated. It was that year that Dr. Edgar Cyriax offered a handsome trophy—known as the Cyriax Cup—for a doubles competition, which was first played in 1925 and which is still being played today.

Unfortunately, very soon squash rackets overwhelmed all other sports in the Association, and in 1927 the Rugby Fives element seceded, and the present Rugby Fives Association held its first Annual General Meeting at the home of Dr. Cyriax.

In those days there was no recognised standard court, and most courts had their own peculiarities. Size varied from the small pill-boxes of Hackney Downs School to the vast arenas of Christ's Hospital and the long corridors of University College School. A buttress on each side wall some feet away from the back wall was a feature of the courts at University College, Gower Street. The courts at St. Dunstan's College had no back wall, and the single court at Sir Walter St. John's School, Battersea had a wire netting some feet above the players' heads. There was an open court with an asphalt floor on the roof of the London School of Economics, and there were two very small open courts at Lady Holles School for Girls in Hackney.

This variety of court was one of the attractions of the early days of fives, although it did give a definite advantage to the home side.

However, the new Association felt that, if the game was to be considered a serious sport, it was necessary to have a standard court and standard rules. Thus one of the first tasks of its Committee was to decide upon the dimensions of a standard court, and to determine the nature and consistency of the materials used for floors and walls. A great deal of time, too, was devoted to drawing up and finalising the rules of the game.

The main supplier of fives-balls at the time was E. Bailey, trading as Jefferies Malings. The cost was 4½d for new balls, 3½d for re-covered ones. Even in those early days the risk of being largely dependent on one supplier caused us some concern, and the possibility of devising a synthetic ball was explored.

In 1932 the first Singles Championship for a Cup presented by the Jesters Club, was held. "County" fives was also inaugurated, and was confined largely to the home counties, the Universities and the United Banks. It is, perhaps, appropriate to mention here that only two banks had established clubs—the Bank of England and Westminster Bank, although the United Banks team also included players from other banks.

With the advent of the War all clubs closed down, with the exception of the Clove Club, which never closed although in the end it was reduced to three members.

As with so many other sports our losses in the War were grievous—K. C. Gandar-Dower, the first winner of the Jesters Cup, who was lost in a plane over the Indian Ocean; C. R. Black of the Old Blues, D. G. Mackenzie and L. H. Way of the Bank of England, D. E. Codd of Westminster Bank, and E. R. Puckle of the Clove Club. Undoubtedly there were others.

Rugby Fives was slow to resume activity after the War. Some courts had been destroyed, some converted to other uses. Balls were difficult to obtain. That the game survived at all was due in large measure to the unabated enthusiasm of the surviving pre-war players and over the succeeding years by the gradual infiltration of younger blood.

For many years the Committee dealt with much the same problems as in the past, but happily of recent years it is devoting increasing time to the possibilities of development of the game nationally. Nought but good can come of this.