

RFA Handbooke 1979-80

YANKEE DOODLE DANDIES

How did it all come about, you may ask, this first ever visit to the U.K. in March 1979 of a party of American fives players? Well, there was the Hon. Sec. of the Rugby Fives Association Club sitting at home for a change one November evening, minding his own business (most unusual) when an Eton fives acquaintance, Robin Mouldsdale, came through on the phone. Robin, six times Kinnaird Cup finalist and thrice winner, had been over in the States on furlough from his post at Shrewsbury School and had come across some

enthusiasts playing Rugby fives in courts at St. Mark's School, Southborough, Massachusetts. They wanted to make a tour here. How about it?

Immediate reaction of conservative fives-labourer, Tom, was of sceptic disbelief on all counts so Robin agreed to ask the Americans to make contact in order to convince him. Late on the night of the President's Cup Tournament (or was it early the next morning?), the Hon. Sec's, Hon. Sec., Joan was awoken by a direct line transatlantic call starting the ball rolling. A copy of their school prospectus (U.S. 'catalog') was requested together with convincing photographs. These soon arrived and the ten day tour in March was on. By Valentine's Day, U.S. organiser, John Carey, had finalised his list of players - having at last been convinced that the schools at Canford and Milton Abbey were not fives-playing.

Arranging a representative itinerary at comparatively short notice was helped by the invariably generous and enthusiastic response from all the representatives of the Schools and Clubs approached. Eventually the following programme took shape -

- Mon. 19th Arrive 9.10 Heathrow. Welcome from fives players throughout the U.K. conveyed by J. and T. 11.00 (approx.) visit to Mackenzie Fives Centre at St. Paul's School - host Alastair Mackenzie. 12.45 for 1.15 lunch at Wax Chandlers' Hall in the City of London. 19.00 play at Alleyn's School, South-East London - hosts the R.F.A. Club (overnight with Club members).
- Tues. 20th 13.30 play at the Barnes Stadium, Bradfield College - host David Barnes. 16.00 (approx.) play at Radley College - hosts the Warden, Dennis Silk and Chris Hirst (overnight at Radley College).
- Wed. 21st 19.00 play at the Cyriax courts, University College School, North-West London - hosts the Old Gowers Fives Club, Hon. Sec. Clive Orpen (overnight with Old Gowers).
- Thur. 22nd 12.30 Malvern College lunch first then play - host John Blackshaw (overnight at Malvern College).

- Fri. 23rd 18.00 The Cleaver Fives Centre, Sherborne School - hosts Mike Cleaver and Paddy Whelan (overnight at Sherborne School)
- Sat. 24th 14.00 Exeter University Sports Centre - hosts Exeter Rugby Fives Club - Hon. Sec. Cedric Clapp (overnight with Exeter R.F.C. members).
- Sun. 25th 16.00 (approx.) Manchester YMCA - hosts Wayne Enstone, Geoff Sherratt, Peter Woods, Fred Beswick and other members of the Manchester YMCA Fives Club (overnight at Manchester YMCA).
- Mon. 26th 12.30 Rossall School, lunch then play - host Davie Owen (overnight at Rossall School).
- Tues. 27th 17.00 Wessex Club, Winchester - host Frank Akerman (overnight with Wessex Club members).

Experts who were consulted forecast that, due to jet-lag, the visitors, like Alice's dormouse, would be fast asleep at the lunch on the Monday and would not awake until sometime on Wednesday. Fortunately non-playing captain Eve Carey's troops (husband John, Ned Hall, Chris Taylor, Peter Tuttle and Rick Uniker) were made of sterner stuff and were too interested to be other than wide-eyed and enthusiastic. At the pre-lunch reception they were welcomed by John Burton, President of the R.F.A. Club, assisted by other distinguished representatives of the Rugby fives playing world including John Armitage, Bill Bailey, Ian Fuller, Brian Griffiths, Chris Horrocks, John Nye, Bill Pett, Jeremy Schroeter and Nick Smith. Gwen Nye and Peggy Pett also graciously accepted invitations to be present. After a bill of fare comprising mushroom soup, roast saddle of lamb, fresh fruit salad and cream, coffee accompanied by sherry, moselle madeira, followed by the ceremony of the Loving Cup, some of the Americans took a short break whilst others accompanied Joan on a sight-seeing tour of the City and Westminster.

This was, sad to say, John Nye's last appearance at a fives fixture. He collapsed and died on Cheam station the following Thursday, one of Life's gentlemen.

Apart from the visit to Rossall which could not be made due to their hire-bus breaking down in Manchester, the visitors fulfilled all their whistle-stops. To say that they were delighted with their reception everywhere is an understatement. They were thrilled beyond words and have

sent letters expressing their appreciation and thanks for all that was done for them by everyone concerned. What could be more gracious?

Whereas most of us picture inhabitants of the New World as moving at least twice the pace of the staid natives of these shores, we were fascinated that our visitors often displayed a conviction that time stood still. Some of their reasons for standing outside the courts instead of playing inside only vied with those of indigenous RFA Club members for not appearing in matches. We look forward greatly to returning the visit and meanwhile send greetings and warm good wishes to our first-ever fives-playing Yankee Doodle Dandies.

A. FUNFS WALD - May 1979

---