

RUGBY FIVES IN THE U.S.A.
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Rugby Fives was introduced into the United States by Endicott Peabody, the founder and first Headmaster of Groton School in Groton, Mass. Peabody was the son of Samuel Endicott Peabody, who for some time during the nineteenth century was Managing Partner in England for J.P. Morgan and Company. Young Endicott Peabody was at Cheltenham, and later at Trinity College, Cambridge. It was while he was at Cheltenham that he developed his enthusiasm for Rugby Fives. Shortly after founding Groton School in 1884 he built the first Fives courts in America. There were, in that first small building, a singles court and a doubles court, built, I can only assume, after the specifications of the courts at Cheltenham. The walls were made of a red plaster, the floor of some cement-like material painted gray, and the tell-tale was a six-inch board across the front wall, the top of the board being three and a half feet above the floor. One of the early enthusiasts of the game was a young faculty member named William Greenough Thayer, who was at Groton from 1889-1894, and who left Groton in 1894 to become Headmaster of St. Mark's School in Southborough, Mass. Not long thereafter, Rugby Fives made its appearance at St. Mark's, and the courts there were, except for a few relatively minor differences, like the courts at Groton. An annual Fives contest between faculty and student teams representing Groton and St. Mark's soon became a tradition which, I believe, continues to this day.

When I came to Groton in 1928 as a Mathematics master, Fives was easily the most popular winter athletic activity. Ladders ranking all interested faculty and boys kindled a great deal of enthusiasm, and the courts were busy all afternoon from lunch to dinner. (I should add that the full complement of courts at Groton eventually grew to four singles courts and four doubles courts). Tournaments of all sorts were held in March, both for the Upper and Lower Schools. The singles and doubles events in the Upper School were for boys only, and were for the school Championships. A special handicap doubles event included members of the faculty, partnering each other or entering with a student, and was a high point of the winter season. Needless to say, the annual competition with St. Mark's was also a high point, and there were singles and doubles matches between both masters and boys. To the best of my knowledge, there are, in addition to Groton and St. Mark's, only two other Fives courts in the country, one in Connecticut, and the other in New Jersey, both built by Groton graduates, who learned to love the game in school. This very limited number of courts explains why the best player, (master or boy, as determined by the annual competition), could confidently claim to be the Champion of the Western Hemisphere!

By 1928, Mr. Peabody was 72, and had given up active participation in Fives, but he came into the Fives building almost every afternoon, to watch the play, and even to offer suggestions to beginners. After his retirement in 1940, the game of Fives continued to flourish, not only because there were a number of

younger masters who enjoyed the game, and who provided a target at which aspiring boy players could aim, but also because it was one of the few sports offered during the winter term. Today, the competition from basketball, hockey, squash racquets, wrestling and skiing, is very strong and since there are now extensive interscholastic schedules in all these sports, the best athletes no longer have the time for Fives. It is a great pity, I believe, since the game of Fives remains for me, at least, one of the most enjoyable physical activities I've ever experienced.