

Our third article in the series on school Fives features St. Paul's School, a perennial stronghold of the game, and is written by Alastair Mackenzie, for many years master-in-charge at the school and a past President of the R.F.A.

3. ST. PAUL'S

The first edition of the *Pauline* magazine, published in 1882, records that prizes for fives matches were presented to C.B.Hulyatt for singles and to Hulyatt and K.Munro for the double-handed. Although there were no formal sports facilities at any of the three school buildings in the city, a kind of fives was played in the playground at the third school (1824-1884) in the shadow of the Cathedral. We are told that "balls would often strike the imposing pillars among stone walls and iron bars and bounce off into some dark corner".

Early reports on the new school at West Kensington (1884-1968) mention the building of seven courts: "thus a want that has been long felt at St.Paul's has been well remedied". Obviously Pauline fives had been quite a tradition at the old school as there are references to "our ancestral game of fives" and "the game which is *par excellence* the game of the school".

The new courts were immensely popular and the magazine tells us that the next decision was whether to play "after the manner of Eton or after the ancient and simple Pauline fashion". Both were available as three of the new courts (all open to the skies and without back-walls) were Eton courts. Shortly afterwards we learn that "the majority have already decided in favour of the home game".

Soon a tournament was played and matches arranged, the first against Bedford and Merchant Taylors' (then in Charterhouse Square) in 1885. Two years later, victories were recorded over the Old Paulines, University College School and Bedford. As the courts were open, rain (or snow) often halted or prevented play. The 1887 *Pauline* contains a plea "for an india-rubber sweeper such as is employed by street-cleaners in the city".

In these days before standard courts, home advantage was considerable and away wins were rare. However, in 1889 U.C.S. were beaten on their own courts despite including one E.F.Cyriax in their team. In the return match at St.Paul's, L.H.Godfrey beat the future W.G.Grace of fives by one point.

In 1891 two new covered courts were built next to the gymnasium and the three Eton courts converted to Rugby. Whitgift and Epsom were added to the fixture list.

In 1895 we learn that over the previous three seasons twenty-six of the twenty-seven matches played had been won and that over a hundred boys had entered for the senior and junior tournaments. Further successes followed and in 1898 J.Gilman is noted as "the best player we have had for many years".

A report on a match at Dulwich in 1901 states that "the two scores asterisked are not certain". I was reminded of a match at Bedford some seventy-five years later when we lost all four singles heavily but pulled back well in the doubles. At half-time in the doubles there was disagreement about whether our second pair had won a game 15-6 or 15-7. Jerry Cooper and I decided then that if there was only one point in it at the end the match would be declared a tie, and so it turned out.

In 1903 the *Pauline* printed The Rules for Doubles. "The Up player must always throw the ball up for the server. The server may refuse to hit any ball thrown up. When the server's side has lost two points in succession the server's place is taken by his partner." Both practice and terminology change. Later the server (as in the above) becomes the striker, the thrower-up the server; and finally, much later, when all players threw up for themselves, the striker becomes the server again, and the ex-server the receiver. Confusing, isn't it?

Haileybury was a new fixture in 1906, and two more unbeaten seasons followed; but the next year the seven original courts were demolished to make way for a new building to celebrate the school's quatercentenary, thus dramatically reducing practice facilities. However, electric lights were installed in the indoor courts.

The 1910 team included P.G.H.Fender, future England cricketer and famous captain of Surrey, "a strong, confident player with excellent variety of shots with both hands". One of his Haileybury opponents was F.M.Strawson, who would become first chairman of the Jesters Club, of which more anon.

Two years later three new covered courts were built, so the school now had five more or less standard courts. Other distinguished names begin to appear in the lists. One particular game caught my eye in which H.W.Yoxall, eminent wine-writer and for many years director of *Vogue*, beat A.N.Gilkes of Dulwich, later teacher and fives coach and eventually High Master of St.Paul's. One of them encouraged me to start writing about wine; the other appointed me to his staff.

In 1917 the team was captained for the second time by an exceptional player, C.H.Pearson. He was also an exceptional man, later a Lord of Appeal who in the 1960s settled single-handed two of the most formidable strikes of the age, the Dockers' and the Seamen's - in the days before A.C.A.S.. His team won all its matches, and the captain published in the *Pauline* some very wise "Hints for Beginners" which I as a young master-in-charge reissued in 1960 prompted by Pearson's successor, Cedric Cunis, both of whose sons, Tin (1960) and Richard (1963) were also to be St.Paul's fives captains.

St.Paul's continued to be one of the best fives schools in the early twenties when Christ's Hospital was a new fixture and the aforementioned A.N.Gilkes, "one of the best players we have seen at the school", joined the staff. We learn that in 1924 J.Avgherinos defeated Dr.E.F.Cyriax, the second time the great man had lost to a Pauline, though he was fifty on this occasion. The 1926 team included two more players who would achieve fame in other spheres, C.J.Paterson, later Archbishop of West Africa, and Monty Garland-Wells, another Surrey cricket captain. It was "one of the best seasons ever" and heralded a golden age of Pauline fives extending into the early thirties and coinciding with the fives Club presidency of a young Eton fives blue, Rupert Martin, whose grandson would play fives for the school some sixty years later.

The brightest stars of this period were the Oundjian brothers (H.A. and V.E.), J.G.Richards, G.C.Shneerson (whose son, John, was captain in 1965) and K.R.R.Readhead. Other distinguished names who had to be content mostly with second IV status were M.J.Sieff (later Lord Sieff, chairman and president of Marks and Spencer) and R.E.H. "Buzzer" Haddingham, for many years to be chairman of the All-England Lawn Tennis Club. I had the pleasure of sitting next to this lively eighty-five-year-old at a dinner at the Queen's Club recently. "It was my best game and I never got beyond the second IV" he told me. It still ranked.

Shneerson and Richards won the first National Schools doubles championships in 1930, losing narrowly to Winchester the next year. St.Paul's won it back in 1932 with H.A.Oundjian and Readhead; Oundjian also won the singles. Paulines prospered in the National Open championships too. V.E.Oundjian was runner-up in the singles in 1934; his brother won the doubles that year with Readhead, and the following year the Oundjian brothers were the champions, as they were again in 1938.

Another leading player and future Cambridge blue was J.F. "Jock" Burnet, Hon. Secretary of fives in 1929, whose influence on the future of enclosed court games was to be profound. In that year, encouraged by master-in-charge Rupert Martin, he, assisted by Richards, S.M.Mischler and other senior boys, founded the Jesters, a wandering club to play Rugby fives and squash rackets matches "with the intention of getting away from the serious nature of competitive games where the result may be thought to be more important than the enjoyment of the players". The club flourished. In 1930 it organised and presented a trophy for the inaugural National Schools singles championships (and in 1999 another for the winners of the annual Oxford v Cambridge match). During the 1930s Eton fives, real tennis and rackets were added, and the club now has active branches in the United States, Canada, South

Africa and Zimbabwe, and Australia. It remains faithful to the spirit in which it was founded. Jock was later, as bursar of Magdalene College, Cambridge, a wonderful supporter of fives at that university and played a big part in the success in the 1980s of the Oxford University Rugby Fives Courts Appeal, of which I was chairman, by encouraging all old Cambridge fives players to support the cause.



The 1929 team.

*Back row (from left): R.E.Asarappa, R.M.Marsh, S.M.Mischler, K.F.Coles, G.C.Shneerson.
Front row: J.G.Richards, V.E.Oundjian (Capt.),
R.C.Martin Esq. (Pres.), J.F.Burnet (Hon. Sec.), G.C.Roosmale-Cocq.*

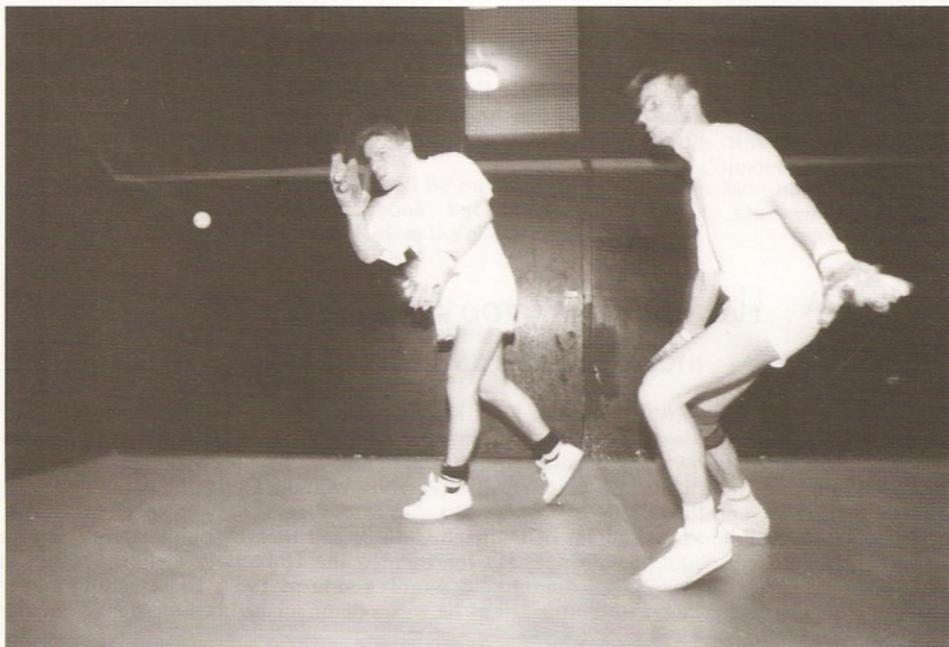
In the twenties and thirties there was a flourishing Old Pauline Fives Club with the High Master, John Bell, an active and supportive president, and as many as thirty matches were played in some seasons.

In 1937 Rupert Martin left after nine very successful years as president to be headmaster of King's School, Bruton. New fixtures were arranged with Sutton Valence and Oundle; the latter were to dominate schools fives in the immediate pre- and post-war years.

In 1939 the school was evacuated to Crowthorne in Berkshire. Here Wellington allowed us the use of their one court and a few matches were played in 1940, but after that there was no more fives until the return to West Kensington in 1945. Frank Commings, Old Pauline Cambridge blue in the thirties (and father of Peter, later captain of St.Paul's and Cambridge), and Ted Gawne, an Eton fives blue, did the post-war coaching and the standard gradually improved. D.L.Gold and B.L.Wright were among the best schoolboy players in the early fifties.

From 1957 to 1993 I had the pleasure of coaching fives throughout the school, greatly assisted at various times by George Baker, Owen Toller and Peter King, the present master-in-charge.

The first really good pair to emerge in this period were Richard East and Peter Commings (both sons of former blues at Oxford and Cambridge respectively who went on to emulate their fathers). More than thirty Paulines won blues at these two universities over the next thirty-five years. We won the National Schools singles and doubles three times each (John East 1965, Simon Kemp 1979, Edward Hickey 1993; Dickie Vainer and Patrick Macaskie 1975, Stuart Mackenzie and Gideon Bierer 1985, James Droop and Patrick Neate 1989), as well as various National Colts, West of England and Greater Manchester titles. John East was National singles champion in 1969 and won the doubles five times (1975-1979) with Wayne Enstone; he also lost in the singles final no less than eleven times, mostly to his redoubtable partner. His son, Richard junior, also won a blue, making the Easts the first three-generation Oxford fives blue dynasty. One of the greatest pleasures for me has been to play with or against so many of my former pupils after they have left school - especially at such places as Oxford, Cambridge and Manchester where the *après-fives* is always of the highest standard.



*Edward Hickey beating James Brown (Sedbergh)
in the 1993 National Schools Singles Final*

But even more pleasing than these individual successes has been the overall standard of fives played by large numbers of boys. For many years now, certainly since the seventies, over fifty boys have represented the school at various levels in each year, and the splendid facilities at the school at Barnes, completed in 1968, with six indoor courts and a heated gallery have been put to good use, not only by some hundred Paulines each year, but used for many championships (National singles; London; National Schools - open, colts and under-14; under-13 - formerly Prep. Schools; Ladies; National Club Knockout; and the Oxford v Cambridge match).

We have indeed been fortunate to have such facilities, but Pauline fives has benefited too from the enlightened spring term sporting policy of allowing what used to be called

“minor sports” to flourish. In many schools soccer or hockey have a virtually free pick of the best ball-games players from the start. Fives at Bedford, which had been the most successful fives school in the fifties and sixties, was virtually killed off overnight (although Jerry Cooper struggled manfully and with some success to keep it going) by a headmaster who decreed that all juniors would play hockey in the spring term. At St.Paul’s, while soccer is a flourishing sport, boys don’t play it in their first year, thus enabling them to try various other sports before deciding what to play in their remaining spring terms. Similarly, all boys wishing to play squash or fives must play both in their first spring term and thereafter one or the other, or both - or, of course, neither.

Since the new regime of Peter King, useful player (late developer) and supreme organiser, and Alex Wilson, one of the best players in the country, took over in the early nineties, things have just got better and better. Giles Corner, Paul Mann and Adrian Lee have all won the National under-14, colts and senior school singles titles and, with various partners, the doubles; Lee’s partner, Ian Mogford, is only a whisker behind him in singles; Thomas Dean has won the two junior titles (and the doubles) and has his eye on the senior.

So St.Paul’s now wins most of the tournaments in all age-groups. In this year’s National Schools, the school achieved the first clean sweep of all six titles. In three of the finals the runners-up were also Paulines. In some ways this is sad, reflecting, as it does, the decline of fives in schools where it formerly flourished. But it is nevertheless good to see - to quote again from the *Pauline* of 1885 - that “the game which is *par excellence* the game of the school, fives,” is still “attracting large numbers of devotees” and that “astonishing vigour is displayed in its pursuit”.

Alastair Mackenzie