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Obituary

Dr. Edgar Ferdinand Cyriax

President, 1947-55

Dr. E. F. Cyriax, President of the Rugby Fives Association from 1947, died in London on 19 February, 1955, within a few days of his 81st birthday. He was a manipulative surgeon and a physiotherapist, and one of the earliest and most ardent exponents in this country of Swedish gymnastics. He was a Knight of the Royal Swedish Order of Vasa (First Class) and a member of the French and Belgian Societies of Physiotherapy. Dr. Cyriax is survived by his widow and by his son, Dr. James Cyriax, and by his daughter, Dr. A. V. K. Cyriax.

Edgar Ferdinand Cyriax was born in London on 28 February, 1874, and educated at University College School and University College, afterwards taking his medical training in Edinburgh, where he graduated in 1898, proceeding to the Edinburgh M.D. in 1901. He was attracted to the Swedish methods and became a graduate of the Central Gymnastic Institute of Stockholm. One of his earliest monographs, published in 1903, was on the elements of the manipulative treatment practised there by the director, Henrik Kellgren, whose daughter, herself a medical woman, Dr. Cyriax married. During the first world war he was visiting physician to the Swedish War Hospital, and afterwards from 1919, visiting physician to the British Hospital for Functional Mental and Nervous Disorders, Camden Town. Until his retirement only a short time ago, he continued in private consulting practice, describing himself as a specialist in mechano-therapeutics. During his lifetime he wrote a number of papers on subjects connected with physical medicine: one entitled "Minor Displacements of the Vertebrae and Iliac," was published in *The Practitioner* in 1916, and another, about the differences between blood-pressure readings in the two arms, in the *Quarterly Journal of Medicine*.

The doctor was the grand old man of Rugby Fives which he played summer and winter alike shortly before his 78th birthday in 1952. To play the game at all until that advanced age was remarkable, and just as remarkable was the standard of his play up to the late nineteen thirties. It is said that from the time he first won the school singles championship at U.C.S. in 1890 he was unbeaten in singles matches for more than 35 years on any court and on his "home" courts at Gower Street (now, alas, no more) and Hampstead for more than 40 years. Forty years on from 1890 made him 56 years old. Probably few of the young men who played him in those days quite appreciated the quality of the man who could play first class fives at that age. They, now approaching that age themselves, may look back and wonder.

He was devastating at the front of the court, solid as a rock at the back of it, and he volleyed equally well with either hand. He excelled at cross-court shots. To all these were added an enthusiastic desire to win, a power to dominate the court, and recourse to a certain amount of what is now called "gamesmanship" in a quite open and obvious form to which no one ever seemed to take exception. For Cyriax there was no shot you played which he could not return provided that you did not balk him.

There was a fascination in playing in a match with or against the doctor. He would arrive whatever the weather on his own special "string bike" without hat or overcoat or gloves. As he gently chaffed the familiar faces in the changing room, he would move his considerable bulk (he weighed about 17 stones in his prime) into shorts and singlet far quicker than seemed possible. And the affair was by no means over when he had dealt with the opposition in the court. There was the cold bath to be taken, the putting on of his shirt without drying himself, the eating of very sweet fancy cakes at tea and the discussion about the game: You did not dry yourself because there was no point in it; you ate fancy cakes for the sugar in them; you cycled in order to avoid getting flabby; and ought there not to be a rule to deal with the occasion when your opponent, in the middle of a game, wanted to vomit?

The Open Singles and Doubles Championships, which he did so much to encourage, came too late for him to make his mark in them—he was approaching the age of 60 when they were begun in the way we know them today—but he entered every year in the singles and the doubles until 1939.

It was inevitable that the founding (in 1928) of The Rugby Fives Association should centre round him and that he should be the chairman of the Committee from the outset until he was elected President after the death of the first President (the Bishop of London, Dr. Winnington Ingram). He presided in his genial informal manner over Annual General Meetings and Committee meetings, all held at his house at 41, Welbeck Street, from 1928 until the war broke out in 1939. Number forty-one became a fives Mecca where the doctor courteously dispensed his hospitality—coffee, cakes and cigars.

There it was possible to discover more of his versatility. He had a wide knowledge of languages. He wrote and scored at least two complete comic operas, produced at the Scala Theatre—and acted in them. He would cycle over night (sometimes with P. A. Malt) from Welbeck Street to Stonehenge to arrive there on Midsummer Day to see the sun rise. He took long cycling trips in the summer along the Arctic Circle in Northern Europe. On one occasion, however, he was known not to ride his bike : one afternoon, in a taxi, he snatched up G. R. Rimmer to go with him to the Savoy Hotel where the orchestra was playing one of his compositions.

Of all his interests it seemed that Rugby Fives and its development gave him most pleasure. This development was certainly helped by the enthusiasm of a number of young players who gathered round him, but he was the rallying point and his was the great enthusiasm.

In his last years he gave the impression of looking with benign satisfaction upon all fives' activities and upon all those who had worked and played with him. They had earned the gratitude of the Doctor and by them he will be remembered with deep affection.

(Grateful acknowledgments are due to the British Medical Journal for detail of the Doctor's medical career)