

LADIES' FIVES: A 10 YEAR RETROSPECTIVE

The inaugural National Ladies' Rugby Fives Championships were played in 1985, so we asked Denise Hall-Wilton to cast an eye back over the first decade of Ladies' competitions.

The newly published Record Book will give you the winners and runners-up in the Ladies' Championships during this first decade, but as in the early Olympic Games of the modern era, taking part rather than winning has been of paramount importance. Some might say that the social get together afterwards has featured highly, too!

The format of both the Rugby and Winchester Fives competitions has depended on the number of entries. We have had round robins, pools followed by seeded knockout rounds, and when numbers were at their highest (16+) a straight knockout and two plate competitions. The seeded players have always had to play to the traditional format in the latter stages.

There have been many good-natured and sporting battles at all levels of the competitions. One of the singles semi-finals has usually produced a good close match, but the exhausted winner's prize was almost always the same: to face Paula Smith, our unbeaten singles champion, in the final! Paula has contributed so much to Fives, not only in pushing up the standard, but in persuading colleagues and friends of either sex to have a go, spending hours coaching and encouraging them. Only once did she not defend her title, the reason being the severe knee injury which sadly still plagues her.

The future of Ladies' Fives is encouraging. The original old faithfuls (sorry, girls!) such as Mary Love, Melanie Haslam, Amanda Pearce, Paula Smith and the new RFA Club Manager have been joined by many others who have played a vital part in keeping the ladies' game alive. The sparkling Hardie twins and their Loretto friends led the way at school and took Fives on to their universities. The word is spreading to Fives-playing schools that now take girls. Bradfield has been playing for three years, Alleyn's entered four young ladies last year as part of their Duke of Edinburgh Award, and Oundle are among the newcomers on court.

It matters little whether you are 12 or 50, a novice or a veteran: all are welcome at Ladies' competitions and matches. If a slightly softer ball (at present being researched by the RFA) is produced for beginners, I am sure even more will be attracted to the great game of Fives.

Denise Hall-Wilton