

THE RFA NATIONAL DOUBLES CHAMPIONSHIP for the CYRIAX CUP

The short-lived Fives Association (formed in late 1923) announced the draw for the first ‘Rugby Fives Competition’ in *The Times* of January 20th 1925. Entries were open to pairs representing any Club, University, University College, Hospital, or any individual pair. 24 pairs entered, some of them under fanciful names such as ‘The Casuals’, ‘Hampstead Wanderers’ and ‘Grasshoppers’, and the progress of the competition was slow because pairs were expected to arrange their own matches. Both singles and doubles were to be played. The second-round draw was announced on March 10th, with one first-round match still to be played. We have little further record of the competition, except that the eventual winners were Gonville & Caius College, Cambridge (W.H. Powell & J.E. Scott) who beat U.C.S. Old Boys “A” (C. Barratt & E.F. Cyriax) in the final at the Bank of England Club by 79 points to 53. By that stage it was already October 1926!

Dr Edgar Cyriax, a finalist in that first competition, presented a cup bearing his name to the winners. Although he was the best-known player in the game, unbeaten in singles matches over a period of 34 years since leaving University College School, Dr Cyriax was never to win his own cup. His greatest contribution to the game he loved was to found the Rugby Fives Association in 1927 and to bring about the standardisation of rules and court dimensions in the endeavour to develop the game in the period between the wars. He chaired the early R.F.A. Committee meetings and became its President from 1946 until his death in 1955.

Records of the competitions for the Cyriax Cup from 1927 to 1929 are lost to us, but it is clear from occasional references in *The Times* that at least two of them were played, taking most of 1928 and 1929 respectively to complete. In January 1930, *The Times* announced that ‘The Rugby Fives Competition for the Cyriax Cup is this year confined to Doubles’, and this year marked the emergence of the Alleyn Old Boys as the premier Rugby Fives club of the day. Pairs from the club, all of them including Philip Malt, probably the greatest player of the 1930s, won the Cyriax Cup every year from 1930 to 1933.

In 1934 the competition was officially named the ‘Amateur Doubles Championship’ and the names of the winners rather than the club began to be engraved on the trophy. Of course, this did not prevent players from the same club from entering and in many years from winning. Members of the Old Paulines and Old Alleynians – two of the strongest clubs along with the Alleyn Old Boys – started to win the coveted cup, and regular club pairs were always the winners up to and including 1939.

After the war, the competition continued with a different cast of characters, with one exception: the most prolific winner of the pre-war years, ‘Bill’ Bailey of the Alleyn Old Boys, was to add one further victory in 1952 to his five previous ones.

Since the 1950s, the Cyriax Cup has been characterised by several winning sequences, notably those of John Pretlove & Dennis Silk (1956-59), Mike Elliott & John Watkinson (1962-64), David Gardner & Stuart Reid (1970-72 and 1974), John East & Wayne Enstone (1975-79), Ian Fuller & Dave Hebden (1980-85 and 1987-90), Wayne Enstone & Neil Roberts (1991-99), John Beswick & Neil Roberts (2000-03) and Hamish Buchanan & Robin Perry (2004-11).

A quite extraordinary record was created by one of these pairs, Ian Fuller & Dave Hebden, who appeared in every final from 1980 until 2000 and won ten of them. Neil Roberts’s thirteen consecutive victories (with two different partners) from 1991 until 2003 are also a remarkable achievement. Since 2012, no all-conquering pair has emerged, although Dan Tristao has appeared in every final since then. Five top players have shared the spoils: Charlie Brooks & Will Ellison have won five titles; Ed Kay & Dan Tristao four; and Dan Grant two, with Tristao as his partner.

The Cyriax Cup is normally held at Alleyn’s School and is now officially known as the **National Doubles Championship**.

David Barnes June 2026



Cyriax Cup Centenary t-shirt
