

SqR, F, T & R 29/10/32

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FIVES GLOVES

It would be interesting to know when the modern Fives gloves with separate fingers first came into fashion. We were under the impression that the glove with a padded palm which enclosed all the fingers together but left the thumb separate was a very old idea, but we now hear that at one school at least, this kind of glove was used until quite a recent date. Perhaps it is still used; it would be interesting to know where.

SqR, F, T & R 5/11/32

Fives Gloves

To the Editor of "Squash Rackets and Fives."

Sir,—Your note on Fives Gloves in the issue of October 29th, prompts me to mention the shortcomings of the present-day glove. I have long thought that Fives gloves could be improved in many ways. The present leather or buckskin glove is presumably only a development of some earlier and less efficient form of hand protection, and it does not appear to have improved greatly during the last twenty years. The points that could be bettered a great deal seem to be first, durability, and secondly, comfort, with a view to less bruises. Eton Fives players especially are always scraping their fingers against the walls, and the result is quickly disastrous to any ordinary pair of gloves. Many players to-day wear at least one pair of thick inners, but this is apt to lessen accuracy of touch. What is needed is a thin material, which is harder and which offers more resistance than leather. It would be interesting to hear other people's views on the matter.—Yours faithfully,

E. T. C.

FIVES GLOVES AND BRUISED HANDS

By JOHN ARMITAGE

DURING the past few weeks there has been some little correspondence on the subject of Fives gloves. In it E. T. C. expressed his entire disapproval of the present day glove, declaring it to be both uncomfortable and easy to wear out. To this "Juggernaut" replied—thinking no doubt with affection of his six-year-old gloves, which some insensitive person had asked him to cast aside—that his no longer new gloves had lasted him well and that for comfort, they could not be bettered.

Now the question of gloves is very interesting, and although it is unnecessary here to deal historically with the subject, supposing that to be possible, it is perhaps worth reminding readers that gloves were not used at first as a protection so much as an additional weapon. It is practically certain that in the middle ages, when we know that hand-ball was played, only one hand was used for striking, since we read that the player bound his striking hand with skins or cords. This, as I have pointed out elsewhere, may well have been the origin of the racket, for it was not the fear of bruises that made a man protect his hand but the wish to hit harder, and he expected the skins and cords to give a better resistance than the ordinary bare hand. The ball, be it remembered, would not be hard, but was probably made, as was the tennis ball of those days, of strips of cloth rolled together and stitched with thread; later of leather stuffed with wool, feathers, bran or even human hair. "The barber's man hath been seen with him; and the old ornament of his cheek hath already stuffed tennis balls."*

This is no longer so. The Fives ball to-day is made with a centre of cork, which is wound round with felt strips, which is again bound with many yards of thread and the whole is encased in a covering of white leather. This ball is hard, and its hardness makes it quite impossible to play Fives really well without protection. There are some, I know, misguided persons, who still consider it manly to play the game with the bare hand, while, in truth, it is merely foolhardy. I cannot recall a single really good player of Fives, who plays regularly with bare hands, although many have done it for a wager, or towards the end of the game.

Of course, there is something more to be said for the man who plays with bare hands than that he is giving a display of manliness. Theoretically to play with bare hands is ideal, for only with the fingers unencumbered by gloves can the player hope to retrieve the clinging shots of his opponent. But in practice it is these very shots that cling to the side walls and the half volley which are impossible to the man without gloves. Any player pitted against an opponent using only his bare hands should be able in a very few minutes to break not only the nails but the spirits of his adversary, and ultimately win the match. But the fact that bare hands are an asset from the point of view of accuracy and balance proves that, the less protection a man needs the better, and this should always be borne in mind.

Everybody's hands are naturally not the same. Some are intrinsically hard, some will grow hard from the type of work a man does, while others are habitually tender. Nevertheless, it is a curious fact that although constant play at Fives does assist a man to become immune from bruising, there are some players who season after season suffer the utmost torture from the condition of their hands. For the novice, who is just beginning Fives, it is best at first to buy two pair of gloves, an inner pair and an outer pair. The inner pair should be of wash leather, as this is a protective material as well as giving a good resistance to the ball. This inner pair should in addition have padded strips along the palm side of the fingers and thumb and along

the inside of the knuckles. The outer pair should be of good, stout but pliable leather of a sort sold especially for the purpose by sports outfitters. It is as well to give a good price for these for in the long run they will well repay the initial outlay of two or three extra shillings. They will not be comfortable at first, but will gradually grow so with constant use until they form to the hand of the player. No cricketer without his own bat is more upset than the Fives player with strange gloves.

This may be good advice, but in practice, the ordinary player is not always so particular. I have known good players of the up and down variety, who wear two pairs of outer gloves one on top of the other. This enables them to hit very hard but destroys all touch. To be both a neat and effective player and one that makes full use of the angles, it is necessary to feel the ball against the hand and so it is that most people prefer to use as little protection as possible. Some novices and even quite experienced players use a thick pair of woollen inner gloves. This is disastrous, for wool gives no resistance to the impact of the ball and touch is destroyed.

It is well, if the hands have hardened sufficiently by the end of the season, to play with only a pair of wash leather inners, as these give added resistance while allowing a perfect balance for the hand. Not many people, however, care to risk such flimsy protection, for as we shall see in a few moments, once a bruise is contracted, nothing will cause it to go away. One player, who is a regular member of a very good team, is accustomed to playing in an ordinary pair of kid gloves, drawn very tightly across the palm of the hand, but although he has proved this protection to be both good and effective, it is not the sort of glove that one would willingly recommend, for the noise of the impact is little short of disgusting.

There can be no Fives player who has not at some time or other suffered from a badly bruised hand. It is a sad remark to make, but in truth, remedy there is none. In fact the only cure is complete resting of the hand or better still prevention. Curiously enough very few people profess to believe this, perhaps because it is not considered an adequate excuse for refusing to play in a match, although to play is agony.

Different players favour different cures. Some play with a square piece of tin concealed beneath their glove, with or without the permission of their respective Fives Associations, and others, there are many of these, tour the country with pieces of raw red steak wrapped inadequately in a piece of flimsy paper. Apart from the fact that raw steak battered and cooked in the oven of a man's hand, is quite a revolting sight, meat is not a good protection because it is too heavy. It is true that it offers a resistance to the ball, but it so upsets the balance of the hand that accuracy is impossible. The reverse is true of cotton wool. A good wad of wool is to my mind the most satisfactory shield for a bruised hand. Although wool gives no resistance to the ball, it is at least clean and can be used in very small quantities, stuffed tightly exactly over the injured bone. Meat will slip out of position unless a piece of sufficient size is used. But to expect to cure a bruise while still continuing to play is quite preposterous. There are a good many remedies for a flesh bruise, but when the bone suffers, it is too much to expect a cure while you are still hammering a hard ball against a wall.

**Much Ado About Nothing*. Act III Scene 2.

- CLAUDIO. If he be not in love with some woman, there is no believing signs: he brushes his hat o' mornings; What should that bode?
- DON PEDRO. Hath any man seen him at the barber's?
- CLAUDIO. No, but the barber's man hath been seen with him; and the ornament of his cheek hath already stuffed tennis balls.
- LEONATO. Indeed, he looks younger than he did by the loss of a beard.

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Fives Gloves

To the Editor of "Squash Rackets and Fives."

Sir,—May I be allowed to say a few words *re* your interesting article last week on "Fives Gloves and Bruised Hands"? I heartily agree with you that if a player wishes to obtain accuracy and to make full use of angles, the less he has on his hands the better, at the same time, as you admit, there are very few people who have hands hard enough to enable them to play with a very thin covering. When at school, I used to wear a pair of padded inner gloves and a pair of outers. This I found insufficient protection, and I used to have some very painful bruises each season.

About five years ago, I commenced to wear two pairs of ordinary wash leather gloves for inners, and a pair of outers. I expect you will feel rather disgusted over my confession. However, I never have bruises now. Also, I buy a new pair of outer gloves every second season. You are quite correct in stating that all hands are not the same.

I am afraid that there are quite a number of regular players who would play a more accurate game than they are doing at present, were they to wear less protection, but this they dare not do for fear of bruises. These people have to take into consideration the fact that most of them are called upon to turn out three or even four times each week, now that the game has become so popular and more matches are played, and a badly bruised hand under these conditions would be disastrous. Your idea of cotton wool protection sounds good advice. I have never tried the raw steak method, but some time ago applied a very thin layer of plasticine over a bruised palm. This moulded itself to the shape of the hand and certainly was good protection, although I will admit that the glove felt a little on the heavy side.

As regards the gentlemen who slip pieces of tin into their gloves. Whether this helps them or not, there does not seem to be a rule regarding the kind of Fives glove to be worn. Do you not think that this matter should be taken up by the Rugby Fives Association at some later date? If there is no rule made, we may see, one day, a IV playing a match armed with steel plates on their hands! Hoping that I have not taken up too much of your time.—Yours very sincerely,

Old Alleynian Fives Club.

F. A. VOGLER.

SqR.F.T&R 3/12/32

CORRESPONDENCE

Raw Meat in Fives Gloves

To the Editor of "Squash Rackets and Fives."

Sir,

In a recent issue of "Squash Rackets and Fives," (From which I may say the present writer derives Considerable pleasure

In reading when he has the leisure),

I was astonished to read (in a page

Contributed by a John Armitage)

That it is the practice among Fives players to-day, Before they begin to play,

To insert in their gloves a piece of *raw beef*

In order to give relief

To a hand

Which is apparently too soft to stand

The hitting of a ball

Against a wall!

I merely wish to say,

That in *my day*

We were made of sterner stuff,

For we found ordinary gloves were good enough

With which to beat

Any opponent without the aid of raw meat.

When *we* went to play a match we did not stop

To fortify ourselves at the nearest butcher's shop!

Though over 80 I am still a player (though slightly rusted),

I enclose my card but prefer to sign myself—

"DISGUSTED."