

CORRESPONDENCE

Winchester Fives

To the Editor of "Squash Rackets and Fives."

Sir,—On reading Miss Hallum's article in your last number and her statement that Newnham badly needs another Fives court, I was tempted to take my pen and suggest that those intending to build new courts should watch or play a game of Winchester Fives before doing so. Fives has not existed as a scientific game so long that people have fixed ideas as to what species of courts lends itself to the best game. The Rugby game, it seems to me, is inclined to be dull. Admittedly there may be some really fine volleyers with a deadly accurate touch, skill, and placing who can raise the game from the pit of monotony, but for the average player it is a dull game. In a "four," hard-hitting is inclined to dominate the game: subtle angle-shots and short drop-shots avail little against agile opponents. While mere pace of hitting and muscularity of shoulders can win the match, subtle finesse is forced from the game by its own ineffectiveness; in such a court there is not room for it.

The Winchester game on the other hand offers resources for either type of game. Hard-hitting judiciously mixed with soft shots and buttress play is the ideal. Should a player bruise his hand he may well win a match by accurate play in the front of the court and concentration on the buttress. This game rarely develops into one of brute force, while including also an element of craft: experience and court craft are invaluable essentials of such a game. This subtlety and scope for more general versatility in the court should recommend the game to Newnham and women players. The game lends itself to the individual far better than the Rugby game, which, if anything, tends to check and stifle all individuality and court personality. The mind plays a real part and the co-ordination of mind and body is necessitated to a far greater extent than in the Rugby game. Surely co-ordination of mind, body and soul is one of the chief arguments in favour of a game.

I thoroughly recommend the game as being a most intelligent and fascinating game, played by many schools, including, Winchester, Tonbridge, Bradfield, Radley and Canford.—Yours, etc.,

R. DE W. K. WINLAW.

25/11/32

Winchester v. Rugby Fives

To the Editor of "Squash Rackets and Fives."

Sir,—Really, Mr. Winlaw! As a once holder of the Public Schools Singles Championship for Rugby Fives, you should have known better, much better. The Rugby game is dull indeed! But this is an enemy speaking. Come now, Mr. Winlaw, forget that you were at Winchester, and let us argue this awhile.

You maintain—what!—that mere pace of hitting and muscularity of shoulders can win the match. Yes, you have said so. You already repent, do you not? You mean presumably one of two things. Either that brute force is the sole desideratum, in which case you would be prepared to back the unskilled slogger against the one who goes all out for placing his shots—an untenable position to take up. Or, avoiding this pitfall, you would aver that, given two people of equal skill, the harder hitter will win.

But this is no charge at all! The man of force has an added weapon, that is all, and all the more credit to him. But you must not deny him skill. If you do, then you are back to your first alternative.

But there is worse to come. "Subtle finesse is forced from the game by its own ineffectiveness, subtle angle-shots and drop-shots avail little against agile opponents. The Rugby game tends to check and stifle all individuality and personality." Heresy upon heresy! Such rank unbelief can only be challenged effectively by actual play.

There is a conclusion which we hesitate to embrace, that Mr. Winlaw has not moved among the best circles. But then, delightful apology, comes this, "there may be some really fine volleyers with a deadly accurate touch who can raise the game from the pit of monotony." Thanks, Mr. Winlaw, this both vanquishes your own argument and preserves your reputation as a Rugby player. Before the gamut of the instrument, the five-fingered exercises. Scales, are drudgery, before harmony, but enough of defence. Mr. Winlaw has invited comparisons, let him have them. What after all, is his Winchester game but a hybrid between Rugby and Eton? The latter, indeed, has a definite character, being a ding-dong bout of skilled volleying, while Rugby brings out the finesse of the doubles game. Once introduce a hazard into the Rugby court, and the game becomes a duel for the buttress—it cannot be ignored, and to play haphazard at it is to invite defeat at the hands of the specialist. In other words, Eton or Rugby. Do not mix the breeds, please! They are uncrossable!

ALLEYN OLD BOY.

(almost certainly E. U. Bailey)

SqR, F, T & R 12/11/32 (2)

Winchester v. Rugby Fives

To the Editor of "Squash Rackets and Fives."

Sir,—I should be interested to know whether "Alleyn Old Boy" has ever played Winchester Fives. If he has, he is the

first player I have found who has played the game without at least realising its possibilities. If he has not, his rude condemnation of Mr. Winlaw's excellent letter is, to put it mildly, somewhat out of place.

I strongly suspect the latter, and when he called Winchester Fives a hybrid between Rugby and Eton, I wondered whether he had even seen a Winchester Fives court. The Winchester court is exactly like the Rugby court except for its small and carefully angled buttress, which cannot possibly be compared to the Eton Fives buttress. Moreover, while a Winchester Fives player can adapt himself fairly easily to Rugby Fives, he is no nearer to being an Eton Fives player than the man who has played nothing but the Rugby game.

I see that one of your correspondents would like to have a similar buttress in a Squash court. I expect "Alleyn Old Boy" will be writing to tell him that his game would be a hybrid between Squash and Real Tennis! But the point is that he says a buttress would help skill at the expense of stamina. That is just what it does in Winchester Fives. In Rugby Fives a single is apt to degenerate into an endurance test. A double, if not exactly dull, is at any rate far less interesting than in Winchester Fives, where the rally is by no means over, as "Alleyn Old Boy" seems to suppose, when one side or the other succeeds in hitting the buttress.—Yours, etc.,

H. J. H. LAMB.

Cambridge.

SqR, F, T & R 19/11/32

Rugby Fives v. Winchester

To the Editor of "Squash Rackets and Fives."

Sir,—Was I very rude? If so, I am indeed sorry. But Mr. Winlaw's letter roused my blood. Albeit I have been taught better manners than to condemn out of hand. Many times, Mr. Lamb, have I played Winchester Fives at Tonbridge, and each time returned disappointed. So your suspicions are set at nought. But we are descending into idle bickering. The calm philosophy of "Jester's" letter is better suited to the dignity of this paper. It is all, as "Jester" truly remarks, pure personal predilection (alliteration mine). Wykehamists may come, and go, but Rugby Fives will be undismayed, and vice versa, of course. So now we are all happy.

ALLEYN OLD BOY.

SqR, F, T & R 26/11/32

CORRESPONDENCE

Winchester Fives v. Rugby

To the Editor of "Squash Rackets and Fives."

Sir,—I do hope you will excuse me for continuing the controversy about the Rugby and Winchester game, but I am afraid that "Alleyn Old Boy" has given himself away so grossly in your last issue that I, and I expect all other genuine Winchester Fives players, cannot rest contented. "Alleyn Old Boy" does not appear to realise that, although the courts at Tonbridge are of the Winchester type, the school does not play Winchester Fives. In other words all four players play at the back of the court as at the Rugby game and whenever the ball hits the buttress someone has to get it up from there. At Winchester and Bradfield one of each pair play in the fore-part of the court and crouch under the bar, thereby dealing with shots that hit the buttress. (This, I think, would be impossible at Tonbridge owing to the badly angled buttress). This makes the real Winchester Doubles game quite different from that played at Rugby and Tonbridge, and I maintain that this method of dividing the court fore and aft makes a Doubles game, which is quite as interesting and certainly more energetic than the Rugby game. However, I am very willing to agree that the Singles game in the Rugby court is a far better game than that in the Winchester court and does not, as Mr. Lamb seems to think, develop into an endurance test. I have only too often discovered that skill will always win in the end.

I will end by saying that I hope "Alleyn Old Boy" will try the real Winchester game at Winchester and let us know whether he still comes away disappointed.—Yours, etc.,

A. H. T. CROSTHWAITE.

Vincent's Club,
Oxford.

Sg R, F, T & R

3/12/32

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Fives Courts

To the Editor of "Squash Rackets and Fives."

Sir,—I have followed with interest the recent battle in your correspondence columns, between the supporters of the Winchester game and the more orthodox (if I may be allowed to call them so) players of Rugby Fives. I wondered, too, how long it would be before someone or other would attempt to narrow the issue and now Mr. Crosthwaite has obliged. Mr. Crosthwaite declares that the Fives at Tonbridge is not Winchester Fives at all, but quite a different game. What then can it be? Obviously, if the only possible answer is Tonbridge Fives. But then, if "Alleyn Old Boy" cannot be allowed to have played Winchester Fives in a Tonbridge Court, surely he cannot be permitted to defend the Rugby game, for he does not play Rugby Fives but only Alleyn Old Boys Fives, which is quite a different matter.

And it is quite a different matter. There are, to-day, no two sets of courts which exactly resemble one another, although so as will differ in minor details. Rugby Fives players must be content to play their game in all manner of courts, and to my mind it is part of the joy of a new fixture, wondering before you arrive what exactly you are in for. With all due respect to the Rugby Fives Association and the Eton Fives Association and their struggles to standardise their courts, I cannot see that they are in any way benefiting the game. Perhaps I might express myself differently, I can see that they benefit the game, in so far as to make competitions possible, but who really enjoys competitions? But what I cannot see, is how they expect standardisation to make the game more pleasurable for the players.

The game of Fives, embracing all its branches, is to-day as varied as anyone could wish. Until now its appeal, for some at any rate, has lain in variety and what is even more important its obscurity. Championships and limelight are not good for a game; they make the players self-conscious; they make "to win" a necessity or at least the object of the player, whereas before it was only the game that mattered.—Yours, etc.,

CONSERVATIVE.

Sg R, F, T & R

10/12/32

Cups for Championships

To the Editor of "Squash Rackets and Fives"

Sir,—"Conservative" has my opponents on the hip. His argument is indeed unanswerable. I thought, however, we had agreed on those soft words, "a matter of taste." But the second part of "Conservative's" letter, "This Championship question." It is age-old of course. There was Cup fever with the Olympic Games way back in B.C., but consider two points. Firstly, the desire to excel. That is inescapable, natural, useful. It acts as a spur. It does not spoil the game. The desire to win is the game. Secondly, the giving of Cups. This is unnatural, vicious. Why? Because it is outside the game. Any good honest game produces its own reward. Find the best man, have a championship, yes. County cricket would not exist but for the Championship. But why give the man anything for winning? Isn't he pleased enough? There is a thin line between the desire to excel and sheer vanity. It's easier to be a good loser than a good winner!

"ALLEYN OLD BOY."