



## RUGBY UNION FOOTBALL.

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RUGBY Union Football, as it is now played, is the direct descendant of the game played on the Close at Rugby as described in *Tom Brown's Schooldays*. The rules in vogue at Rugby were copied more or less closely by other schools which had playing fields suitable for the purpose, such as Clifton, Marlborough, Cheltenham, Wellington, Haileybury, Sherborne, and many others; and it was to the desire of the old boys of such schools to continue their old winter game after they had left school that the formation of clubs at the Universities and in London was primarily due. In this way the famous Blackheath Club, the *doyen* club of the country, was started in 1858, to be soon followed by Richmond, Civil Service, Harlequins and the school clubs in London. The idea was quickly taken up in the provinces, where several clubs were founded in the "sixties," the lead being taken, we believe, by Liverpool. In a marvellously short space of time what had hitherto been only a schoolboy's game became a national pastime, increasing by leaps and bounds until its supporters, whether as players or spectators, surpassed in number those of the old established game of cricket itself.

A small revolution was thus simply accomplished in the national habits—a change which few will deny to be for the good of the country when they consider that to many individuals of the hundreds of thousands who are now to be found week after week enjoying the open air of the football field, the principal attractions for the national weekly half holiday had previously been the drinking bar and the billiard room.

This rapid spread of the game all over the country forms one of the most noticeable features of the great athletic revival of the latter half of the nineteenth century. We need not stay to inquire whether that revival is due to a reaction from Puritanism as has been ably suggested, or to the natural desire of young Englishmen to find relief in hard muscular exercise from the hard work necessary in these days of increased competition. It is sufficient for our purposes to look at the results; there is now scarcely a county in England where the game has not gained a firm footing; in many counties there is scarcely a town, and in Yorkshire and Lancashire there is scarcely a village, which does not boast a football club playing regular matches throughout the season.

*Mutatis mutandis* the same remarks hold good to a minor extent for Scotland, Ireland, Wales and the colonies, and it is worth recording that in the last twelve months we have read accounts of Englishmen teaching the natives to play the game at Constantinople, and founding a new club in British Columbia, places which might naturally have been picked out as most unlikely spots for the game to thrive in. Less than thirty years ago football was almost unknown at the Universities, whereas nowadays every college has special caps and colours for its team, and the representatives of the Universities at football have been given their "blues" on equal terms with those of rowing, cricket and athletics—so numerous indeed have the votaries of football become that the boating men complain that they are being robbed of their most promising material. At the same time it is noticeable that, whereas in the early

Inter-University matches all the players were drawn from the English public schools, of late years quite a large proportion of them hail from the Scotch schools and elsewhere, whilst representatives of many of the old English schools are only conspicuous by their absence—a fact which we attribute mainly to the excellent system of school matches in vogue in Scotland, compared with the lack of such matches in England. It is true that school authorities in England were for a long time frightened by the traditions of the historic match between Marlborough and Clifton in 1864, which ended in a hacking match of considerable ferocity; but hacking and tripping have long since been eliminated from the rules, and as Marlborough has lately shown in its annual contests with Wellington that such matches can now be played in the best spirit and with mutual advantage, we hope to see school matches rapidly multiplied in England, and a much-needed fillip thereby given to English school football.

We must now refer to the history of the governing body under whose management and guidance the game has assumed its vast proportions in the country.

As soon as matches between clubs became common, the need for organization was felt, especially in the matter of the rules under which such matches were to be played. In the early days of the game the two captains had to settle before each match what the rules should be, and serious disputes were only avoided by allowing the rules of the ground on which the match was played to prevail.

In 1863 the followers of the dribbling game formed the Football Association. Their rules forbade all carrying of the ball, and thus put an end to the Utopian scheme which had been mooted of framing a common code for all players. In 1871 the players of the Rugby game formed an organization of their own, at the instigation of the Blackheath and Richmond clubs, called the Rugby Union, which made a modest start with thirty clubs on its list—a number which has been since raised to upwards of three hundred. From the very first the two organizations have prospered side by side without clashing; and though their views have often been widely divergent, as for instance on the burning question of professionalism, on which their respective policies are diametrically opposed, yet there is every reason to hope that their relations will always continue to be of a cordial and harmonious character.

The first task undertaken by the Rugby Union was the codification of the laws, and then followed the arrangement of international matches with Scotland, which adopted their code of laws, as did Ireland and Wales, with which international matches were arranged as soon as they were in a strong enough position to play the mother country. The Rugby Union laws were soon adopted in the colonies—first by Australia and New Zealand, and afterwards in all parts of the globe where Englishmen were to be found. There was at one time a scheme on foot for an Australian team to visit England, but it fell through from lack of funds; and when in more recent times the idea might have been revived with success, the Victorian game had practically supplanted the Rugby Union game in Australia. But a by no means representative team of New Zealanders did visit this country in 1888, and there is a prospect of a visit of a team from the Cape.

Meantime at home the game continued to advance with marvellous strides under the management of the Rugby Union until the international match with Scotland in 1884, when the first check occurred in the shape of a dispute on a point of law. Hitherto the only recognized body for settling disputes had been the Rugby Union Committee, but the Scotchmen naturally objected to this dispute being settled by one of the parties to it. They consequently claimed that it should be referred to an international board consisting of representatives from England, Scotland, Ireland, and Wales. If England had agreed forthwith, much further trouble might have been averted; but they argued the case to the bitter end. There was no Scotch match in the ensuing season; and then at last a compromise was arrived at by which England agreed to the international board for the settlement of disputes in international matches, but for that purpose only, on condition that Scotland yielded their contention on the point of dispute in the 1884 match. The Scotch match was forthwith resumed, and many people were sanguine enough to hope that things would work smoothly again; but they were doomed to be disappointed. The Scotchmen were only biding their time for an opening for bringing matters to a crisis, nor had they long to wait for their opportunity. In the following season the Rugby Union made a long-demanded change in the laws, by which three tries were made equal to a goal. This change the Scotchmen declined to adopt, not that they objected to the change

*per se*, for they have since adopted a more radical change of the same nature, but because they considered that the change should have come through the international board. The Rugby Union had consulted each member of that board as usual before making the change, but they had sent no reply. The board now proceeded to declare war with the Rugby Union by announcing that all international matches must in future be played under laws approved of by itself. To this resolution the Rugby Union declined to accede, because they considered that the sacrifice of the autonomy of English football was too great a price to pay for the continuance of the international matches, and on this point their policy has been endorsed by general meeting after general meeting. The Rugby Union was created to govern and to legislate for English football, which has spread over vast areas, from which demands for reform are continually arising. The three hundred clubs of the Rugby Union are more than treble those of the three other countries combined, and yet they proposed on national grounds absolute equality of representation for the four unions on the international board.

It is true that they have since offered England an extra vote, but as they have also passed a bye-law which makes a two-thirds majority necessary for all motions at their meetings, the increase was more apparent than real. They say that they do not wish to interfere with the laws of each country but only to settle the laws for international matches; but if they are to have any reason for existing at all, uniformity of the laws of the four countries would have to be their first object. The Rugby Union made several attempts at a compromise, but they were all rejected by the board, as well as the offer to play matches under the laws of the country in which each match was played. The result was an absolute deadlock, out of which it is now hoped that a way has been found by referring the whole question in writing to two arbitrators, Major Marindin, nominated by England, and the Right Hon. J. H. A. M'Donald, nominated by the board, whose award shall be final; after which we may hope for an immediate resumption of international matches for England.

We have said above that the modern game comes directly from the old Rugby school game, but the style of play has altered so much that an old Rugbians of Tom Brown's standing who had not seen the game in the interval might be justified in wondering whether they were indeed the same game or no; he would still find the old characteristic features of the game, those, that is to say, which have always distinguished it from the sister game of association, such as the scrummage, though shorn of its ancient glory; the drop-kick and the punt; running with the ball and tackling; but otherwise he would see but little resemblance. It is interesting to follow the evolution of the game from the slow and hap-hazard to the fast and scientific. The main factor is the number of forwards played. We thought nothing of fifty a side at school. This necessarily meant very long scrummages, from which it was no easy task to disentangle one's self at the end; the half-backs could stand well back and yet have plenty of time to secure the ball and get away. The solitary three-quarters had to make his own openings, but he had no nasty rush of close-dribbling forwards to meet; there were two backs to do the tackling and the kicking, and it is safe to say that all players behind the scrummage in those days had an easier game to play and more time to do it in than those who hold the corresponding posts in the modern game.

The reduction of the numbers, first to twenty a side, and then to fifteen a side, caused a complete revolution in the game. Pace and dribbling became the first requisites for a good forward, instead of, as before, the mere power to shove. The half-backs had to stand much closer to the scrummage, and to be very smart if they meant to get the ball at all; the three-quarters' work became so heavy that they were increased first to two and then to three with only one full back, because it was soon found that three-quarters must be the main line of defence against the rush of opposing forwards, who proved much more difficult to deal with in the open than they had done in the days when they were locked up in the scrummage for most of the game.

The new fast and open game gave scope for the introduction of refinements in style which would have been impossible in the old game.

The most important of these was the development of "passing" into a scientific system which was carried out at Oxford, and afterwards adopted all over the country with various degrees of success. The secret of scientific passing consists in transferring the ball to one of your side who is in a better position to make headway with it

than yourself, and it is the captain's business to see that his men back up the runner so that they will be in a better position when the critical moment arrives, and to see that no passing takes place or is called for except under such circumstances. By constant practice on these lines a captain can make his team well-nigh irresistible in fine weather; and for wet weather when the ball is slippery, or for a high wind when it cannot be thrown accurately, he should make his men practise dribbling on the same lines—that is to say, passing with the feet instead of with the hands. Combination of some sort he must have under all circumstances if he hopes to succeed. A team of strong men, who play no game in particular, but trust to luck to bring the ball right for them, will be easily beaten by a team of inferior physique who make their own game instead of playing the ball as it happens to come. Moreover, if their game is to be an interesting one to watch, the scrummages must be of short duration; but fortunately the interests of spectators and players coincide in this matter. Forwards have not failed to appreciate the fact that they have far more direct influence on the result of the game when the play is open than when they are wearing themselves out by shoving in the scrummages, with the result that a football match is much more interesting to watch than it used to be in olden times, and a captain has to pay more and more attention to securing good forwards, for without them he can hardly hope to win his matches even if his team is much stronger behind the scrum than his opponents. This season's University match and North *v.* South match afford excellent illustrations of the theory: in the one case Cambridge and in the other the North were supposed to be vastly superior behind the scrum, but in each case they lost the match because their forwards were routed. Perhaps we shall some day see the number of forwards reduced from nine to seven, with six behind the scrum as at present. Such a reduction would be welcomed by spectators, because it would tend to increase the amount of open play and to decrease the length of scrummages which are always uninteresting to watch. It would probably be a benefit to the game also, as the scrum is the place where most chances for tricky and unfair play occur; but before coming to a definite decision on that point we must see the system fairly tried by some first-rate teams, as it is possible that the increase of pace would be more than the forwards could stand.

In many parts of the country the growth of the game has been fostered by the institution of challenge cups, to be competed for by the clubs of the district, and a fierce controversy has for many years raged as to their utility. To our mind there can be little doubt that they engender enthusiasm for the game where it is in its infancy or in danger of being ousted by the rival game of association football; and if the cups could be withdrawn from competition after serving their original purpose there would be little to say against them, but county committees have never yet found themselves strong enough to adopt this policy. A cup once started is bound to continue, because the clubs take such keen interest in the competition that they would depose any committee which deprived them of the attraction. The county of Durham did once try to withdraw their cup, but they had to start it again the following season in deference to the pressure brought to bear upon them by the clubs. The objection to their continuance is that the desire to win the cup becomes so great that it leads to a "win, tie or wrangle" spirit amongst the competitors, which has a very bad effect both upon the play and the players.

And further, many of the ablest supporters of the game have come to the conclusion that the rise of veiled professionalism is due either directly or indirectly to these contests. The competing clubs naturally desire to secure good players, and the huge sums obtained by way of gate-money in cup-tie matches—often amounting to hundreds of pounds for a single match—undeniably afford the means for making secret payments to players—a temptation to which it has been proved that some clubs have yielded in the past. At the same time it is equally certain that many clubs have been absolutely honourable and above-board in their dealings with vast sums of money; and as the suppression of cup-ties cannot be said to come within the range of practical politics, the best energies of those responsible for the management of the game must be devoted, as they have been to a notable degree in Yorkshire, to the terrorising of evil-doers by exemplary punishment. The county of Yorkshire has the largest and best-managed cup-contest in the kingdom, and it is in this county that a large majority of the cases of professionalism, whether proved or suspected, have hitherto occurred; and though we have not a shadow of a doubt that the determined stand made by the Yorkshire committee, backed by the

Rugby Union Committee, will be rewarded by the success it deserves, still we cannot refrain from thinking that Lancashire and other counties are well advised to avoid the perilous path, and to hold aloof from cup-ties in spite of the immediate advantages which would probably accrue to them from adopting them.

We have rather begged the question that professionalism in the Rugby game is an unmitigated evil ; but as apologists have been found bold enough to support that state of affairs on its own merits it may not be amiss to explain shortly what it would mean. The arguments adduced in favour of professionalism are mainly those of necessity and analogy. As soon, it has been said, as Rugby football is admitted to be a pursuit at which regular wages can be earned, men will present themselves ready to earn such wages, and with equal certainty clubs will be found ready to make such payments. How much better therefore to legalize the system with proper restrictions at once, instead of driving men and clubs into a devious course of secret payments, which can do nothing but harm to the fair name of the game? Again, it is argued that the system of professionalism has worked very well at cricket and has not been a failure in association football. Why not therefore give it a fair chance at Rugby football too? To which we would reply that the Rugby Union Committee are convinced to a man that the introduction of professionalism would mean the ruin of the game as a pastime, and that it is therefore their bounden duty to act up to their opinion, and to use every means in their power to stamp out the first symptoms of the disease.

Matters had gone so far in association football that we are ready to believe that they had no other course open to them than the legalization of the professional ; but the Rugby Union were lucky enough to enter upon the contest before the professional element had grown too strong for them, and they have every reason to be encouraged to continue in the course they have adopted by the success which has so far attended their endeavours, and to hope that ere long they will have restored the game to its original purity.

Professionals are a success at cricket, because amateurs give so much time to the game that they are able to hold their own with them ; but what shall we say of running, rowing, and a host of other sports, in which the advent of the professional has worked nothing but harm? In the nature of things the professionals soon become too good for the amateurs, and must either drive the amateurs out of the field altogether or else be separated from them in a class by themselves.

There is every appearance that these alternatives will soon have to be considered by the association ; but in any case Rugby Union football is very different from association, and is even less suited to the admission of the professional. The contact of body to body is much closer ; the openings for foul play are both more frequent and more difficult to detect ; and it must not be forgotten that, if once the professional is called into existence, he must do his level best to win his matches for the sake of his bread and butter. If he cannot win by fair means he will be sorely tempted to win by foul, and it is a by no means difficult task to imagine a state of affairs in which the alarmist outcry against the game as brutal and dangerous would be more than justified by the facts.

The Rugby Union Committee have given referees ample powers to deal with all known forms of rough play ; and as long as referees remember that on their fearlessness in exercising those powers the credit of the game largely depends, we have no fear for the results under present conditions ; but if their difficulties and responsibilities were to be increased by the creation of professional teams, we should have serious doubts as to whether any one would be willing to undertake the well-nigh impossible duties of the post.