



HOCKEY.

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IN writing of most English games one is a slave to their past ; one is reduced to Homer's level as the remembrancer of heroes, and of that unponderable but important factor—their "form."

But Hockey, though its central idea is more ancient, probably, than Polo, has been, till within the last half dozen years, without form and void of science, and is most generally known as a contest between one man's shins and another man's temper, in which the weaker went to—keep goal, and consequently the past has no authority and the best players are still seekers after style. So that whatever is here written about the game must be in a measure experimental, and represent merely what up to the present has been most successful.

A certain amount of the interest taken recently in hockey is due, no doubt, to the steady decline of one branch of football towards the betting ring and the professional, which is rapidly disgusting English gentlemen with the best game in the world : but hockey proper, as understood and ruled by the Hockey Association, owes its progress, and dates its advent from barbarism, from the invention of the semi-circle of white-wash which surrounds its goals, and from within which only may a goal be struck. The inventor's name is unknown to the present writer, but it deserves to be duly honoured, for without the striking circle there would be no science in the game and very little skill.

Hockey, to begin with, is played in a marked parallelogram, a hundred yards by fifty ; between goal posts, twelve feet apart and set in the centre of its shorter sides, by twenty-two players, eleven a side. The object of each team is to drive the ball, a cricket one, painted white, through its opponents' goal ; a point being scored whenever the ball being fairly struck from within the circle, passes between the posts ; the side scoring the majority of such points during the period fixed for play, winning the game. The ball is started by a "bully"—which is a kind of mild war dance between two opposing forwards—and thereafter the game differs from Association Football only in being played with a small ball and a stick instead of with a big one and the feet, save in some few but important details. The "field" is placed in the same manner, five forward, three half back, two back and a goal keeper, and the style of play between each of the divisions corresponds exactly, the forwards advancing in a line and outwitting their opponents rather by their skill in receiving the ball from each other than by their power of keeping it to themselves, the "halves" being employed in support, and the back division in checking assaults and clearing their own lines. The differences between the two games, chiefly concern the individual player ; only one side of him—the right—is considered to be "in play," his left being sacred from attack ; and no body-charging is permitted.

The two combined give the game much of its character as a trial of skill and speed. At football weight is often a terror to the light dribbler ; to get past it with the ball is impossible, if the weight is brutal and at all speedy, to charge it would be

madness ; but at hockey it may be put as completely out of play for a few seconds, by a turn of the wrist, as if it had been dropped into the adjoining field. It is for this reason that hockey, is so suitable to men whose bones are growing brittle, and who cannot afford to break them, for at it they may obtain, with the least risk, more perfect exertion for every part of their bodies than any English game, not excepting La Crosse, can afford. They will require a cricketer's eye and hand, a fencer's wrist, a golfer's shoulders, a footballer's legs and pluck, for though few bones are broken, a good many are barked, and in addition, a special faculty for the game itself of using the head, hands, and feet in combination.

As this paper is for the many who are about to adopt hockey as their engrossing winter sport as well as for those who already play it, a word must be said as to equip-



"STOPPING." FIG. I.

ment. The most needed are a stick, and a pair of gloves and shin guards, and of these many a player only uses the first : the best boots are the lightest and closest fitting with a few bars on sole and heel. Nothing beats an old pair of cricket boots, minus the nails, and with the tag padded to protect the instep and tighten the uppers. The stick, from being, six years ago, the natural product of any holly bush or oaken underwood, has become a complicated weapon of accurate curves and weighted to its half ounces. Of course its shape and weight depend on the position of the player as well as on his wrist power and minor fancies, but, to discover these, something between twenty-three and twenty-five ounces may be recommended, cane handled, and with the foot curved at right angles to its shaft. The grain should be large and parallel to the lines of the stick, or to its face. Avoid a grain that runs tangent to the curve, or obliquely through the wood. Gloves are only needed to save the knuckles ; any kind used for batting that leave the palm uncovered will do ; and the less leather about them the better. Shin guards will explain themselves as the player gets used to the game ; if he play forward he is better without them, and if back, with them ; but he had best wear whatever will make him forget he has shins at all. He must be prepared to put his leg in the way of everything.

A novice is, of course, sent where he is wanted, but if he have any pace he should begin forward ; the game there is easier and his mistakes of less importance to his side, and, if nature has cut him out for defence, he will make all the better "back" for having learned how to pass one.

As a forward his attention will be divided between dribbling, passing, and shooting at goal, unless he play on the outside wing when he will have to study how not to shoot, for only the three inside forwards should be the goal getters, their wing men trying to draw off the defence and so give them an opening. But this is only a "counsel of perfection," for an outside man may occasionally run away from his supports, and be left to do his own scoring, but, when his "centres" are up, let him remember that his place is outside the circle and keep his eye on his inside man and not on the goal.

But first as to dribbling. In dribbling a football it has been said that the ball should kick the feet and not the feet the football, and in hockey the same advice applies ; the ball should be kept in front of the feet, and pressed forward, not struck, with the stick. On a fast true ground, and it must be remembered that hockey is played almost entirely on lawn tennis and cricket grounds, the ball may be kept spinning on its axis against a nearly rigid stick for a considerable distance ; in no case must the player appear to be chasing the ball with an unkind weapon, as too often

happens; he must carry it with him, coaxing it, and keep it running parallel to his own line of direction, so that his stroke in "passing" it may have some pretensions to accuracy, and the ball "passed" without an amount of avoidable cut or twist which prevents the best player taking it along with him in his stride.

In passing, the striker should observe, not only where the bulk of his men are and blaze into the middle of them like a cockney shooting sea gulls, but note where and how placed is the one to whom he is to entrust his charge. It is of little use to "pass" unless your friend is as prepared for your stroke as your enemy is the reverse, there is no use in "passing" to a man in a worse position than yourself, and there is positive obligation not to "pass" if you can carry the ball a yard further in safety yourself. Some men are unhappy unless the ball is for ever being smacked from one forward to another, but in fact, provided no attempt is made to get by an opponent unaided, the less passing done the better. Let the novice remember that the object of a pass is gained before it is made, for that object is to put one of his own side in a better position to advance by deceiving the defence as to his intentions, till by drawing it aside he have sacrificed his own progress and a pass becomes inevitable.



"THE POKE," I. FIG. II.

Lastly, as to "shooting." Recollect that the hardest shot is of no value unless it be straight, but that a rolling ball often scores; and look before you hit. Keep your stick low, use your head, and hit with your body not with your arms, and the rest will come by practice; advice as to other details is useless. In the bustle in front of goal, you must learn to be smart, to keep your eyes always noting the position of the posts when they are not wanted elsewhere, and to follow up every shot to the very throat of the goal; many a point has been lost for want of that final tap, after a fine "save," which no one is at hand to give. For the rest the forward must remember to keep his "dressing," keep his place, and hold his tongue, especially as to "off-side," about which he should never be in a position to have an opinion. With rare exceptions only one voice should be heard on the field—the captain's—and that should come from behind.



"THE POKE," 2. FIG. III.

Mention of the captain brings, or should bring, us to the back division; and first, as to the halves. The half-backs' duties are "stopping" and "feeding;" he is the pivot and most important member of his side, but often the least appreciated; few of his strokes are showy and he is most effective when he effaces himself and plays entirely for his forwards. A "half" who overruns his men and tries to get goals is a bad business for his side; but there are exceptions. His "stopping" is of the first importance; he *must* stop something, the player or the ball, the latter for choice, but not always. To accomplish it he has everything at his command—stick, hands, feet, or any part of his body—but he must use them for stopping only; if he do more than check the ball's progress, or lift it from the ground, a free hit is the penalty. The beginner would be well advised to keep both hands on his stick, unless the ball rise above the knee; much time is lost in fielding with the hand, and the fielder is put in an awkward position, and his hand in one still more so. It must be

mentioned however that many excellent halves, Merton Barker amongst them, use their left hand for stopping balls on the off side.

When the foot is placed for checking, the stick should be used as a guard, as shown in Fig. I., the arms being thrust out straight, as in the butt-guard of a quarter-staff, the shock to the assailant's stick, coming at full speed, being always sufficient to throw him off and sometimes to throw him over. A knowledge of fence is often useful at hockey. An opponent who stretches across from the left side, may always and deservedly be disarmed by a sharp upward cut somewhat above the balance of his stick, and in pursuing an adversary it is safer and far simpler to prevent his stroke by a thrust behind than by a blow in front.



"FULL DRIVE," I. FIG. IV.

best form for the assault, whether it shall be wedge-shaped from the centre or in *echelon* from either flank. His is the most important head on the field, and many a game is won, no one knows how, but the centre half; it was he who discovered the weak spot in the defence and pegged all his balls there till it was carried.

A half-back need not dribble, but he must be able to "feed" accurately; he should be able to hit the ball within a yard of any forward on the ground, and at a pace best suited to its disposal. If he cannot do this along the ground, and has the ball at his command, he may throw it by the "Poke" (Figs. II. and III.), the ball being lifted from in front of the right toe, by thrusting the left arm smartly down and throwing back the right shoulder, the arms acting as piston-rods. This is a very convenient stroke when there is a crowd in the striking circle, as the ball can be thus tossed dead right in front of goal.

One point may be noted in which half-backs are at present sadly deficient, namely, in passing to their backs. Many a "half" would sooner fumble the ball in crab-fashion right across the ground by himself than give it one clean stroke behind him to a man who can drive it out of danger at once. But he will not, probably because he thinks it beneath his dignity to seem pressed, or because he wants to do all the work himself. There should be also a system of passing from right to left between the "halves" themselves: no combination is prettier and none as useful, and more frequent openings are obtained by delicate play across the ground than by any amount of hard driving.

Driving brings us to the "back," whose business is to stop, and hit. Stopping has already been dealt with, but whereas the "half" often does best service by stopping the man, the back must stop the ball, if he have to stop it with his head;



"FULL DRIVE," 2. FIG. V.

and when he has it he must know how to hit it. When his side is pressing only an occasional drive will come to him, and his hitting will be merely feeding at long range, and he must endeavour to keep the ball "in"; but when pressed he must use all his weight and endeavour to drive the ball past the touch line in his adversary's "twenty-five." To do this he will want all his body power, for it must be remembered that no part of the stick may be raised above the shoulder. His left hand gripping the stick tightly at the button, must be carried across the body, the right slipped loosely up as far as it will go, the left leg braced up, and the whole body swung back above the right knee (Fig. IV.) the ball lying in a line with the left heel and at the extreme limit of reach. In striking, the right hand is run up sharply to the left, the body comes forward, the left knee bends, Fig. V. showing the position at the instant the ball is met; the hands, it will be observed, being slightly sunk and the face of the stick laid back to give some lift to the ball.



"THE CUT." FIG. VI.

Of course all these particulars can only be observed for a free hit, but practice will soon make them habitual, till a ball can be taken travelling with as much certainty as if at rest. It may be driven in this manner from 120 to 150 yards. When the stroke has to lift as well as drive, it must be shorter, sharper, and more oblique, and should be aimed at a point just in rear of the ball. The latter is somewhat nearer the right foot than in the full drive, the hands kept together and gripping equally, the right, if anything, the tighter; the body is square, both knees bent, and the right elbow close to the side (Fig. VI.).

Among strokes for which a special faculty is required may be mentioned the sweep like a square-leg drive at cricket, only more so, as the ball must be kept low and driven at an exact angle. The "corner" at hockey corresponds to its equivalent in football, but the defenders have to be behind their own goal-line and their assailants outside the striking circle, the former being allowed to charge out as soon as the ball is struck from the corner. A goal scored under these difficulties is, perhaps, the most brilliant piece of play in the game, but from its danger the Hockey Association have made many efforts to abolish it, and it is to be feared that in the event of a serious accident they will succeed.



"CORNER SWEEP." FIG. VII.

angles, will pass through the centre of the goal, that is, a little beyond the meeting point of a tangent from the corner, as he will have to step inside the circle to strike. Let him stand square to the approaching ball, his feet in a line parallel to the proposed direction of its flight, his hands holding the stick short and low, swung back behind the right thigh, and let his stroke be a mere mow, with both arms nearly straight. As the ball will have a lot of backward spin on, it should be aimed at the nearest goal-post. Arthur Giffard, who is about the best goal hitter in England, pulls his balls round in this fashion, without the least apparent jerk. This advice, of course, only applies to

To give himself the best chance the striker should place himself on the spot on the circle at which the ball if truly driven to him, and by him at right

balls hit from the on-side corner; from the off-side every man has his own notions and none of them are worth mentioning.

The goal-keeper comes last, and in many teams he does not come at all, and all that can be said of him is that when he does his work well it is wonderful how he does it, and when he does it badly it is wonderful why he does it. W. B. Barchard, of the Western Club, must be mentioned in this connection, if only for his brilliant performance last season against the South at Manchester, but chiefly as an example of how much a man can do with both hands or the stick. Barchard never stoops, and stops even rising balls with his body, "clearing" most cleverly with his stick and feet.

An illustration (Fig. VIII.) is given of a stroke frequently practised but quite illegal; it looks incredibly clumsy, but there is, in fact, strong temptation to use it in drawing a ball from the off-side to the on (off and on, it must be remembered, are the reverse in hockey and in cricket). Players seem to imagine that every forehanded stroke is permitted, but they only are so when made from right to left; and many umpires, up to the present, do not seem to have grasped this distinction.



"A FOUL STROKE." FIG. VIII.

To see hockey at its best a contest between the two metropolitan counties should be witnessed. Two such are played every season, but hitherto, though always carrying the odds, Surrey has only been once successful, for hockey is almost as delightfully uncertain in its result as cricket, and a team of individually inferior players often combines better than one of men

who are accustomed to overtop their side. At their last meeting Middlesex, though almost without backers, and playing several second choices, and though their opponents' forwards with one exception had worn Southern colours, won by two goals to *nil*. The famous line of dribblers, which a fortnight before had gone through the Northern backs as if they had not existed, never scored a point, and was broken and beaten on perhaps the finest defence that any side has yet exhibited.

One may conclude with a word to football players not to despise a game they have never seen, because its title suggests ragamuffins on a village green. See a good game played, and if you have any legs left and don't wish to join it, well, your day is over, and the sooner you take to badminton and skittles the better.

