

# RUGBY FOOTBALL: SOME HINTS ON FORWARD PLAY.

By J. DANIELL,

*Of Cambridge University and English International Teams.*

## HEELING.

A GREAT number of forwards imagine that so long as they get the ball out to the backs, it makes no difference how, when, or where it comes out of the scrummage, and that once they have got rid of it, the responsibility is off their hands for a while; but this is very far from being the case, for a great deal more depends upon the proper heeling out of the ball than most people imagine.

How often one sees the ball come out of the side of a scrummage instead of in the very middle of the back row! How often when it does come out at the back it is shot out like a rocket and with a force that carries it yards past the halves, or else it takes, at the other extreme, about a minute to get through the various rows of legs that bar its way, giving the opposing halves heaps of time to creep round and follow it up! The ball must be heeled out properly, cleanly and quickly, or else the forwards don't give their halves and three-quarters a chance.

When the forwards have obtained the ball and have got orders to heel it out, it is most important that they should still continue shoving. It is quite impossible and useless to heel the ball if the forwards are getting shoved. Keep shoving, and send the ball back quickly, avoiding letting it touch the legs if possible, and not giving it violent kicks back. Of course, it is sometimes absolutely necessary to help it on its way back, but this should be done carefully with a push, so as to avoid driving it too hard for the halves to get hold of. Another excellent method is to shove straight when you have got the ball and walk over it. By this means you give your own halves more time, while also placing the other halves on the defensive behind their own men.

The great thing is, however, not to let the ball come out at the side, as this does not give your own halves, who are following behind you, a chance, while it falls right in the path of your opponents. If a forward at the side of the scrummage sees the ball going out at the side, he must hook it back into the scrummage at once, and then the

forwards must again try and heel it out properly. Never let it come out at the side. It is far better to wait a few seconds and have it done properly, than to think that the great thing is speed and that it does not matter when the ball comes out. Personally I consider, if your pack is strong enough, that the best way of heeling is the one I have just mentioned—*i.e.*, walking over the ball.

## QUICK BREAKING UP AND TACKLING.

I have always strenuously held that the front row of the scrummage should lock tight, but this advice allows of reservation. In saying that the front row should bind tight, I must insist that the binding, although tight, must be able to undo in a second. Forwards must be able to break up immediately, both for purposes of attack and defence; and to be able to break up at a given moment without delay the ball must be watched. Forwards have got to remember that directly the ball is out of the scrummage they must be out as well. The shoving must continue till the last moment, but when the ball has gone, break up and help your behinds. Of course, the wheel and the quick rushes of forwards depend almost entirely on the quickness with which the scrummage is broken up. Also, forwards must bear in mind that they have got to help in the defence. When your opponents have got the ball and begin their passing movements, all the forwards must be at hand to help the behinds. How often I have seen a half or three-quarters run single-handed through a whole side of forwards, who simply stand stolidly still and stare at him, without ever thinking of laying a hand on him, or perhaps one, a little more awake than the rest, will make a grab at his neck, or hair, or ear! But a forward must tackle, tackle always, and tackle hard. High tackling is, as a rule, quite useless. The place to tackle is either just above the knees or round the waist. The latter is perhaps preferable, as the ball may be held at the same time. But the great thing in all tackling, for a forward or a behind, is to



ENGLAND v. SCOTLAND AT BLACKHEATH, 1901. FROM THE PICTURE BY ALLAN STEWART.





AN INTER-VARSITY MATCH: "WELL PASSED, OXFORD!"  
From a drawing by Ralph Cleaver.

tackle hard and low, and always to go for the man with the ball. Never mind the other people who *may* get the ball, go for the man who *has* got it. There are far too many forwards just at the present moment who are very weak in tackling, which is one of the most important points in the Rugby game. Gentle tackling is useless (I don't wish anybody to misunderstand me and think I am advocating roughness): you must throw yourself at your man and down him. One often sees quite a good tackler miss a man because he does not throw himself at him. It is fatal to think you can never tackle a certain individual, for then you never try. Make up your mind to go for him and bring him down at all costs. To me there is always great pleasure in bringing off a good tackle. There is a feeling of satisfaction about it that does me a lot of good and makes me try harder than ever for the rest of the game. Weak tackling amongst forwards is one of the most prominent features of the Rugby game in the South. One frequently sees a forward or several forwards make a fine dribble and at the end kick the ball perhaps a trifle hard; then, instead of leaping on the full-back or whoever the player may be who has obtained possession of the ball, they appear paralysed, and quite possibly all the ground is lost again.

#### PLAYING OUT OF TOUCH.

Playing out of touch, as at present in vogue in the Rugby Union game, appears not to find favour with a number of the spectators of the game, and the Northern Union have adopted another style of play. I have no wish here to discuss the merits of one style over the other, but the change does not appear to me to have benefited the game very materially. I will grant that it makes the game faster and also rather more open, but that is all; and I do not think it would suit the requirements of the once-a-week players of the South.

There are many different styles of play out of touch, and on a great number of occasions when the ball is thrown out of touch the result is merely a scrummage. It is not an easy matter for a forward to gain much ground out of touch, or at any rate it should not be, if the opposing forwards mark their men properly. A forward has no business to be allowed to catch the ball when thrown out of touch and run away with it. If this does happen, it is simply a sign of carelessness on the part of his opponents. A powerful forward often makes several yards for his side by struggling on until he is finally thrown down or the ball is held, but the best way of gaining ground out of touch



is by breaking away with the ball at your feet. When the half throws the ball out to his forwards, the man who catches it must try and put it down at once in front of the man next to him, who must then break away into a dribble, followed by the others. It is better to put the ball in front of another forward, as it is generally a good deal easier for him to break away than for the man who has caught the ball, as the latter is already probably half collared by his *vis-à-vis*, and is thus hampered. I have seen this done most successfully—the only danger being at the very commencement, when the forward who is breaking away is rather apt to kick the ball too hard, and thus feed the opposing three-quarters, who will then have time either to get in a kick or start a passing run.

Another good way of making ground easily out of touch, and one that is very disheartening to the other side, is for the forward who catches the ball to throw it back again to the half, who must run behind the line-out immediately he has thrown the ball out of touch, or else to one of his three-quarters, who can then kick it over the forwards into touch again a long way down. I have often seen the ball carried right down the field like this. To carry this out properly there must be a perfect understanding existing between the forwards and the halves; and the forwards have to be very careful that the ball is passed straight to the half

and not thrown wildly away anywhere, while the half has to make sure of his kick clearing his forwards and also finding touch. It is useless kicking it anywhere up the field, it must go into touch; while if the half kicks it right into the backs of his forwards he very often lets his side down badly. Both these methods I have mentioned should only be adopted as far as possible in mid-field, as when playing on the defensive or in one's own twenty-five it is foolish to risk anything, while again, when one is in the attack it is the behinds who must do the scoring by passing movements, and the ball must be kept out of touch as much as possible.

I always consider it advisable when playing on the defensive to give the preference to a five yards' scrummage rather than risk a throw out of touch, especially if one has the better scrummage, and also when on the attack a five or fifteen yards' scrummage may be advisable.

Every kick-off must be well backed up by the forwards, and when the kick-off is with your opponents the same *three* forwards should always drop back—one in the centre and one on each touch line. It is, above all, most important that the touch lines should be marked, so as to prevent the ball from bouncing and rolling into touch.

Forwards should, besides this, always be able to use their hands, and be capable of receiving and giving a good pass.

