

Reviews

A HISTORY OF ETON FIVES

Dale Vargas and Peter Knowles
JIG Publishing, 2012

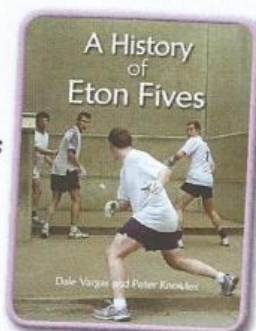
For most of the last two centuries the three-termly pattern of sport played at the major English public schools has been cricket in the summer, football of one code or another in the autumn and fives in the spring. In this term of bad weather, muddy pitches and winter illnesses, a game played on hard surfaces, under-cover and needing few players answered the requirement for pupil occupation and physical exercise. All that was needed was a small hard ball; hands, gloves, bats or rackets to strike it; and one, two, three or four walls to play against. Rules for play, scoring systems and codes of behaviour were at first passed by tradition from one generation to the next but when, from the 1850s, schoolmasters wrested control of sport from the boys so standardisation of play and uniformity of laws were promoted. Thereafter, the Eton version, born between the buttresses at the entrance to the school's chapel, became the elite code.

The authors of this first history of the game are long-standing officers of the Eton Fives Association. Working in partnership with the archivists at more than 50 schools, they have dug deeply in to school records, magazines and biographies to produce a comprehensive survey of the game; they would seem to have left no stone unturned. The large page format accommodates nearly two hundred photographs, biographies of famous players, songs and verses – and places them alongside the relevant text. The reader's eye slips easily from script to accompanying illustration, table or insert without disturbing concentration or flow; it is a seamless story. Six appendices list yet more information.

The authors have, throughout, placed their findings in the political, social and educational context of the period: the early years of sport in schools; the birth and development of fives at Eton; the expansion of the public school system and the spread of the game; the introduction of school matches and old boys taking the game to Oxford, Cambridge and the army; fives travelling abroad with Empire builders; the stunting effects of two world wars; spring-term competition from squash, hockey on all-weather pitches and the popularity of sports-centre games; the amateur ethos amidst the professionalisation of sport; the fickle nature of press coverage and spectator interest; and the challenges presented by co-education, fuller school timetables, academic priorities and ever-busier teachers. The ebb and flow of the popularity of the game is exposed and explained.

It is likely that this thoroughly researched, lavishly illustrated and lightly written history will appeal mainly to aficionados of Eton fives but, as the game's sole history, it should also find a place in the library of every university that boasts scholarship in sports history.

Malcolm Tozer



PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND SPORT IN INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

Edited by Malcolm Tozer
John Catt Educational, 2012

This is a very rich collection of contributions, from a wide range of authors, including luminaries like HRH The Princess Royal and Sir Clive Woodward as well as a wide range of practitioners – teachers, coaches, school governors/trustees, sport directors, school heads and managers – whose physical education and sport practice has been mainly in the independent sector.

Lord Colin Moynihan's widely-reported comment, during the 2012 London Olympics, that it is a matter of regret that such a small percentage of Team GB and its medalists came from the state sector, provides a political context for this book. There is ample coverage of the background data to support this difference, and the question is posed whether the gap between provision in the state and independent sectors is actually growing and, if so, why. The data stimulate many other questions, not least around the dynamics of distribution in representative sport. However, it is to the editor's credit that his major concern has been, rather, to reflect on and evaluate good practice in physical education and sport in independent schools, and to consider the historical and cultural context in which they have developed.

The contributors are predominantly male (29 of 36), although both female and male writers raise important issues of gender, sexuality and identity which influence the ways in which physical education and sport are constructed and used across the sector. But the gender imbalance does mean that ideas and practice in girls' schools, and even co-educational schools, are under-represented. It also illustrates the way in which the study of physical education and sport in the independent sector has been led by masculine notions of curricula and school life; it is time, clearly, for more reflection and review of the experiences of physical education and sport by girls and young women in the current independent sector. The slight treatment of Paralympic and disability sport mirrors the current lack of information and data about the background of Paralympic athletes.

The emphasis throughout is on the crucial importance of quality of teaching, learning and coaching – and on the role of inspirational teachers and educators – a focus which is shared, of course, by the state sector. Other issues, common to both sectors, include the wide range of interpretation of physical education and sport, and their purposes, across schools and between teachers; the different models of physical education that are adopted (for example, with contrasting emphases between team sports and outdoor activities); the challenges of catering

