



Notes on Sport

TRIALS WILL PROVE TRUE STANDARD OF OUR RUGBY

CAUSE AND EFFECT To-day and Yesterday

NEW ZEALAND has two worries at present. As Athletic Park is easier to reach than Warsaw, let's concentrate on one at a time and think for the moment only of Rugby, and All Black trials.

Of the 70 players nominated to play in Wellington on September 23 and 30 in the North v. South match, and the three trials, it is possible at present to write nothing convincing. The trials, after all, are intended to classify the available talent. It's only a waste of time trying to do the job before they take place.

But there is room, perhaps, for a little philosophic reflection on wars and games, and the progress of Rugby in New Zealand. *The Listener* has no conclusion to offer, but it may be worth noting that none of the great players of the 1920-26 years had been old enough during 1914-18 to be seriously affected by the war; but that the present generation of players, aged, let us presume, between 20-28 years, is made up almost entirely of "war babies."

These trials may prove the pessimists wrong, but that is one point they can make in their general condemnation of the standards of Rugby to-day. It was made, very moderately, by G. T. Alley last week.

There is another, advanced last week in this office by a well-known referee. He said players now worry about the referee far more than they did 18 or 19 years ago. There is a far greater will to win, he thinks, and not enough taking the game as something to be enjoyed.

There is always, of course, a tendency to deify the old-timers. Old days always were better days. The process is nowhere better illustrated than in the subject matter of 90 per cent. of the radio talks on Rugby given in the last few months. But facts speak as well as reputations, and it has seemed to be a fact that Rugby has not been played in recent years with the brilliant abandon of the 1920's.



Until Taranaki defeated them last week, Southland, with tough forwards and fast backs, appeared to be invincible, in spite of a close call at Auckland. It still seems likely, however, that the Southland side will be well represented in the All Black selections. Here are some of them meeting Lord Galway before the match at Wellington.

MARK NICHOLLS Selects Some Five-Eighths

FOR the five-eighths positions in his World Rugby Fifteen, Mark Nicholls found he had to review a long list of famous players. As might be expected, his selection was made with much less certainty than for the centre three-quarters in the preceding broadcast. He found himself with three fine players, all coming up to standard as men of genius; each one suffering injustice if not selected.

Bert Cooke, he found, had dominated the centre and second five-eighths positions in New Zealand Rugby from 1924 to 1930. He was "terrifically fast off the mark," he had wonderfully good hands, a fine turn of speed, a remarkable swerve with changes of direction concealed until the very last minute, and he was unselfish to a degree. It was delightful to play outside him.

Bennie Osler had the hands and the speed, could punt, drop and place kick, was a master tactician, a match-winner, and a great Rugby footballer. In 1928 the South African backs were by no means outstanding, but Osler managed to play a lone-handed game. His playing methods naturally attracted the public's eye. Had Osler not played in 1928 Nicholls thought it highly probable that New Zealand would have won all four tests.

One other was ideally built, played with his brains, had excellent hands, could place-kick outstandingly well, bluff with the best, was a great player in all respects—Carl Ifwerson.

It was Ifwerson who made the choice difficult. Leaving him out would be an injustice, Nicholls said; but nevertheless he selected:

Bennie Osler
Bert Cooke

His team so far is: Nepia
Steele MacPherson Jauréguy
Osler Cooke

Once we had good cause to be proud that the smallest Dominion produced the toughest teams. Now, while we pretend not to be disconcerted, we are secretly ashamed that South Africa has made us look like a lot of ineffectives.

Alterations to the rules may have had something to do with it. National psychology, politics, economy, dietetics, ships, sealing-wax, and a host of other excuses might be made. The point really is that we blew ourselves up too high and can't complain about the debunking pin-prick.

Probably the only really bad thing about Rugby is that so many people watch it and so few play it. The game is sociologically more important and more healthy in a country village than in a city. Still, there will be some excuse for the crowds at Athletic Park these next two Saturdays, and for the thousands C. Lamberg will talk to on the air during the games, and George Aitken and Frank Kilby afterward.

The immediate fate of our national game is in the balance, with Southland's good men and true weighing down the right side. With all its faults, the game is still a good enough excuse for an Armistice. It will do us good to forget Europe on Saturdays, however vivid the reality may be during the rest of the week.