

The Scrum of a Dream

THE fire was warm, the arm-chair comfortable, and I was tired. I think the last thing I remember was the Voice from South Africa, "Hullo, New Zealand..."

I WAS coming down the steps of the University College with the Rector. He was saying good-bye. "And are you interested in football? You'd better see the Institute over there before you go—the Institute of Rugby Technology. Ah, there's the Director—Mr. Blackie! Would you mind showing my friend over the Institute?"

I felt rather embarrassed; I was a New Zealander and a follower of Rugby, yet I had not heard of such an Institute. Mr. Blackie, who probably took me for a newcomer, explained as he conducted me to the near-by building. He was an athletic-looking youngish man with an intense expression. "After the last tour of South Africa," he began, "it was fully realised by all those who had the interests of the game at heart that drastic remedial action must be taken without delay. So the Rugby Unions of New Zealand and some of the wealthy patrons of the game supplied the necessary finance to establish this Institute of Rugby Technology for the scientific study of the game in all its aspects. We were fortunate to obtain this site next to the University College, because we employ to a considerable extent the College's staff and equipment. It was proposed that the study of Rugby should be made a University subject, but the Senate declined to entertain the proposition. They were most unco-operative; in fact, quite intransigent."

"How do you mean you use the staff and equipment?"

"For such things as the designing of our scrum-demonstrating and measuring machines; measuring windage in kicking; co-ordination of mental and physical processes; diet; the psychological approach. But you will be able to see for yourself."

HE took me into a big gymnasium. There was the apparatus one usually finds in gymnasiums, and at the far end some young men were exercising, but there were also strange machines. Two were obviously artificial scrums. One consisted of two sets of curved steel rods, jointed at the height of a man's knee, and ending in feet.

"This is the basis of our work among the forwards," explained the Director. "An exact replica of a scrum, and it functions perfectly." He put a ball in the scrum and there was the click of a switch. The mechanical "hookers" on one side neatly advanced their feet and drew the ball back. The other "forwards" shot it out. The Director shut the switch and opened an-

A Fantasy, written for
"The Listener" by
ALAN MULGAN

other, and the robots on the other side went through the same actions.

"Marvellous," I said, "but what happens when you put them both on?"

"There's a tussle of course; I would rather not do it, for it involves a considerable measure of skilful manipulation. William Scraggs is our scrum expert. He can secure many interesting results. You grasp the idea? This is the perfect scrum, used for instructional purposes. Now here (touching the second machine) is a method of testing human forwards. You observe that each player can fit into his frame-work, and push, and the amount of energy expended and its direction are recorded on these dials. We can study all the angles of pushing. Mr. Barber!"

"Yes, sir." A young man from the end of the room came up and stood at attention before the Director. "Mr. Barber, would you please demonstrate to this gentleman how this machine operates?"

Mr. Barber placed himself in a frame, and threw his weight against the shoulder pads. Two needles on dials spun round. "Thank you, Mr. Barber." "Very good, sir." The young man stood up, came to attention, and walked away.

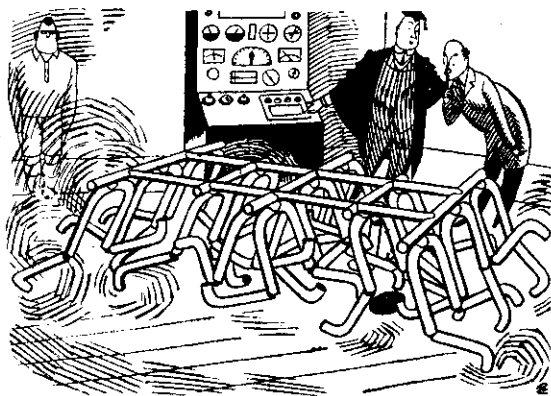
"A fine young man that," commented the Director. "He is really with us for the correction of a Mother Fixation."

"A what?"

"A Mother Fixation. Does that surprise you? Psychological investigation is an integral part of our operations. This particular Mother Fixation is part of a general national trend—the worship and imitation of the Mother Country, England. Mr. Barber had a Mother Fixation concerning Rugby football, possibly as a result of assimilating too many stories of English public school life. He preferred English methods of play, and actually spoke of the game as Rugger. We had to break down a subjective tradition in the patient and build up a new integration of personality. He is almost ready to be discharged now."

AS we strolled along corridors lined with photographs of football groups and famous players, the Director developed this theme. "We call in the

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