

THERE'S NO ROOM FOR "PROS." OR SNOBS

An Ancient Player Discourses On The Game Of Bowls

Written for "The Listener" by ERIC BAKER

He was sitting on the bank during the Dominion Bowling Championships in Christchurch — an elderly man who followed every movement of the players in front of him, and murmured to himself now and then what he would have done in the circumstances had he been in the contest. I got into conversation with him. The old player dived into his pocket-book and offered numerous cuttings from newspapers, magazines and other publications and pieced together, for my benefit, a concise history of the bowling art, together with a wealth of sidelights.

FOR 351 years bowls has been one of the greatest outdoor pastimes in Great Britain. Its popularity spread with the colonising of the Dominions. Its only rival in age is archery, which is now springing up in various parts of New Zealand, going sometimes under the ugly name of toxophily! Bowlers may be seen on club greens in every part of the Dominion in the summer months, pursuing their leisurely but skilful game. When winter comes they flock to indoor greens, where they play on expensive floors of felt. Few games have a more interesting or romantic history.

Laws forbidding bowls were passed by Edward III. because it was feared that young men who should have been at the butts with their bows and arrows were wasting their time on the greens. Pessimists of that age declared that England had become effete and pleasure-loving. They probably thought that bowls was about to undermine the morale of the country; that she would never again fight for her liberties. But like many another prophecy about England it was unfounded.

Even after gunpowder had replaced the bow and arrow the ban on bowling continued. In 1455, there were bowling alleys attached to London, but they became the haunt of disreputable people.

In times of religious and political dissension it was always considered possible that men might gather at these bowling alleys ostensibly to bowl but actually to plot against the government. Simultaneously the game developed a respectable and social following. It became popular in private homes. Kings who forbade the game to their subjects played it with the nobles behind garden walls.

Shakespeare's Game

The writings of Shakespeare suggest that he was a player. They also prove three things — the mark was already called the jack in Elizabethan times, the woods were biased and women were fond of the game. Some men bowlers in New Zealand express surprise when they hear

Strange Version Of Bowls

W. S. Gilbert once wrote about the plight of the man who was compelled to play billiards with a twisted cue on a cloth untrue with elliptical billiard balls. But that is nothing to the problems associated with the game of crown bowls, a version of bowls which is still played in the North of England, particularly in Lancashire. The green rises from all sides to a crown in the centre, the rise being anything from six inches to a foot.

To make things more difficult the surface undulates, and the degree of undulation may vary for different greens. The woods have bias, just as in the more common game of bowls, but the jack is not an exact sphere. Crown bowls can be played in any direction, even from corner to corner, with the result that lines of different games may cross each other.

of women taking up the game and forming clubs, and there is a widespread belief that this is a new development. But all they are doing is to revive a venerable aspect of the game. In "Richard the Second" Shakespeare has the following dialogue between the Queen and the Lady-in-Waiting:

The Queen: What sport shall we devise here in this garden to drive away the heavy thought of care?

The Lady: Madam, we will play at bowls.

The Queen: 'Twill make me think the world is full of rubs, and that my fortune runs against the bias.

And no doubt Nell Gwynn threw a pretty wood, or would it be an orange? Pepys describes the great lords and ladies "in brave condition" playing a game of "bowles" in Whitehall Gardens.

In Scotland

New Zealand bowlers should doff their panamas to fellow woodsmen of Scotland, for the modern game owes its rebirth to those Scots who gave it a constitution, took it out of the tavern and put it on the club or the municipal green, and above all developed the democratic spirit which every bowler

prizes as one of the greatest characteristics of the game.

"Some people," said the old bowler, polishing his spectacles preparatory to having a roll-up during the lunch hour, "will persist in calling bowls an old man's hobby. Nothing makes me so annoyed. Why, man alive, it's an art, a science, needing a keen eye and the best of reasonable health."

Bowls is entirely free from professionalism. It is an amateur game, a sociable game. It breeds good fellowship. On the bowling green snobs are as popular as a grass grub. Even after all the strenuousness of Dominion tournament play bowlers will tell you that the days spent on the green are, to them, the happiest of all.

BOXING NOTES

Strickland-Alabama Kid Return Contest Definitely Off + Private Promotion in N.Z.?



SUPPORTERS of a Strickland-Alabama Kid contest in Wellington had everything worked out on clear cut lines, and as a number of Wellington Boxing Association officials were agreed that the bout would go over prospects appeared bright for the staging of the return bout.

But all plans have come to nought, for the committee of the Wellington Boxing Association has turned the proposition down. It took weeks to make all necessary arrangements, and it took the association's committee less than half an hour to throw the proposal overboard, so it seems there will be no further Strickland-Alabama Kid contests in New Zealand.

During the past 20 years frequent efforts have been made to have the New Zealand Boxing Association rules altered to allow private promoters to stage boxing contests throughout the Dominion, but so far all these attempts have been abortive. Finding that they were virtually up against a stonewall supporters of the movement became apathetic.

With the advent of boxer-manager and fight promoter Charlie Lucas, however, the subject of private promotion has again been raised. Mr. Lucas could not proceed on his own, but he was determined to see a big match staged, and of necessity an incorporated association — in this case the Manawatu Boxing Association — sponsored the show, which proved an outstanding success.

Mr. Lucas assisted the association with the ground work, and submitted expert advice in regard to the running of the tournament, but he was unable to have any direct financial interest. But now that it has been shown that "big box-

ing" can be staged in this country Mr. Lucas considers that the rules should have a quick and decisive overhaul. It is his hope to stage other high class bouts in the Dominion, and with this object in view he has applied to the Boxing Council for a private promoter's licence. At the time these notes were being written, the council had called a meeting to consider the application.

Without any alteration of the rules the prospects of the application being granted would appear to be remote. Mr. Lucas is eager to stage a Richards-Strickland contest in New Zealand, but if his application is declined it will be held in Australia, where private promotion is allowed the same as it is in almost every other country in the world.

S. Scott, who was one of Wellington's best amateurs two years ago, is keen to engage in a contest as a professional. Scott, who has a powerful right jolt, desires to "come back" as a boxer, and would accept a match with Billy Enright or Dick Branch. The latter is now in the Air Force.

Although one of the most active performers in the ring last season Vic Caltax, welter-weight champion, was far from impressive when he fought Johnny Hutchinson at Palmerston North in his last bout of the year. Caltax engaged in 11 bouts during 1940 and so headed the list for three years in succession.

Strickland states that he has been offered £500 and three return tickets to proceed to Sydney to meet Richards. As there are many obstacles in the way of staging the bout in New Zealand it seems very probable that he will accept the offer.

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