

have done. You could have no rules for A. E. Cooke. Lewis Jones was the nearest approach to him, and Bob Scott the next one, because they were freaks at this game of football—you don't set laws down for them. But I would say that with the different type of game the backs have to play today we have not got the brilliant individuals we had in the past.

Mark Nicholls I've mentioned, Karl Ifwersen of Auckland, A. E. Cooke—they stand out as brilliant individualists. Who could compare with them in recent times? Fred Allen when he was at his peak, Johnny Smith quite definitely—he could have gone into any team—Maurice Goddard when he was at his best—I'm talking about inside backs now. They could have fitted into those teams of the past. And there was Doc Elvidge, not for his absolute brilliance, but he was faster than you think, he was a great try scorer, and he would be in my team since the war as a second five-eighth. On the other hand, he didn't have the side-stepping ability of men like Cooke and Nicholls. You see, his was a different type of game. He used to play in the Otago style—once into the 25 he would run, he would go down, he'd get out of it, he'd be back into position, he'd have another go on the right, and he'd end up scoring perhaps after the third or fourth ruck. He was a good player with a well thought out approach.

You might ask: why have we lost the brilliant individualists of the past in our inside backs? I would suggest it is because of the type of game being played today. Rugby changes every now and then, and today's game calls for brilliance further out from the scrum than first or second five-eighth. Mind you, we do have men who can be brilliant but club coaches generally don't want them that way. The brilliant individualist is no good to these men who want to play to a set pattern. I was talking to Vic Cavanagh one night at my home in Wellington, where we used to have some wonderful talks on Rugby. I said, "Vic, I'm going to do something for you. I'm going to give you Jimmy Mill as a half-back. I'll give you Mark



MARK NICHOLLS

He couldn't play the same game today

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PETER JONES SCORES IN THE FOURTH TEST AT AUCKLAND
"Fighting fit at 16.3; as fast as any forward who ever went on a paddock"

Nicholls or Karl Ifwersen—you can please yourself—as first five-eighth and A. E. Cooke as second. I'll give you Johnny Smith as centre, Jarden on one wing and anyone you like to name on the other. I'll give you Bob Scott as full-back. Or you can have Fred Allen at five-eighth if you don't want to go so far back. I'll give you the lot of them in your Otago team." He said, "So what? What's the answer?" I said, "Vic, you wouldn't have any of them." He said, "You're hard Mac." I said, "I'm not being hard." Those men were brilliant individualists as well as good team players, but they could never have conformed to what Vic wanted in his winning combination in that Otago team. They had to play to plan. I mean, just imagine Cookie, if he got the ball under his goal posts like Lewis Jones in that lovely try in Auckland, starting something off from his own goal line. Vic would have gone mad, really and truly. And he knew what I was aiming at, and even though he didn't entirely agree with me, I was only trying to emphasise a point.

Still, I'm not talking about Cavanagh when I come to coaches, because Cavanagh was something out of the box. I'm talking of club coaches who get in there to win games—which everybody tries to do—but it must be to their pattern. I've a case in mind. It was in Wellington. It was a club team. I saw a youngster, a five-eighth, make a break, a beautiful break, and he just couldn't help himself. He side-stepped and slipped his man and whoof! he suddenly stopped—for no reason at all—looking for somebody to pass to. I knew this lad and said to him afterwards, "What happened to you? A brilliant break through and yet you stopped." He said, "I was doing it

at practice, but the coach said to me, 'Listen, any more of that and you're out of the team. I want that ball out into the back-line, and every time you get it feed it out there!'" And the lad told me he thought of this when he made the break through the opposition. He thought, "Oooh, I'm out of the team next week." And that is the sort of thing that has killed the individual brilliance in our football. That and the Number 8 forward, who has been knocking these fellows about right along the line, not worrying about the ball, just hitting them—and, of course, our lack of first-class half-backs.

Now to set a backline alight you must be able to get the ball in the quickest possible time from the base of that scrum or the ruck out to your backs. Well, somehow or other we have lagged behind every country in the world in the calibre of our half-backs. Our passing—well, you've only got to remember the passing of the two Springbok halves who were here in 1956—the length of their pass, how quickly they could throw the thing out. The length is something that we just can't do in New Zealand. Take the British Isles halves who were here in 1950. Look at the pass Rimmer could throw out, Rex Willis and Gus Black. Goodness gracious me, they were throwing them 20 and 25 yards and landing them where they wanted to. Or you could take Cyril Burke or little Cox, who played for Australia.

Yet our players are good footballers. Why have we lagged behind with half-backs? I don't know, but I think it must have something to do with the early stages in primary schools. I think many teachers now don't take the interest in players they used to. I'm talking gener-

ally now. Some of them we know do take the interest. Anyway, we seem to have lost the art of half-back play. In South Africa in 1949 I was astounded with the half-back play. Every half-back we played against, right throughout the Union, you'd have put in an All Black team. And—strange but true—it was practically the same throughout the British Isles. Just to sum up, then, even though I say we haven't the individual brilliance in our backs today that we had many years ago, I still feel the players of today would really over-run the players of the past—because of this super-fitness today, which they must have to last the 80 minutes. And today's forwards would grind the lighter packs of the past into the ground.

(Great players he has seen are discussed by Winston McCarthy in next week's "Rugby in My Time." Mentioning first the great George Nepia, he compares his play with Bob Scott's, and among other backs he refers to J. B. Smith, A. E. Cooke and Mark Nicholls—"Mr Brains." Ron Jarden is discussed as a "type of freak" in Rugby, and Charlie Saxton as "the last of our half-backs with the long pass." Mr McCarthy names the most intelligent man he has seen on the side of the scrum and the greatest rucker, and he tells amusing stories of one of our great defensive backs. Recalling a conversation with Geoff Alley on the rigours of international football, he names a notable exception to the proposition that a man who gives everything a go in a strenuous Test season will never reach the same form again. With next year's visit from a British Isles team in mind, Mr McCarthy ends with a comparison of individual and team play in Britain and New Zealand.)