

Football in Our Village

by DENIS GLOVER

QUITE the most important sporting event of the year in our village is the Rugby match between the supporters of the Royal Duke and the supporters of the Hawthorn. The fact that most of us are supporters of both has very little to do with the barracking, and very little to do with the selection of the teams. That is a matter of intrigue between the rival captains. We barrack because it is always high time that the non-holders of the Cup possess it; and the referee is expected, as far as sportingly possible, to observe the etiquette of the occasion by seeing that the team which may be winning handsomely has many penalties awarded against it, and by not seeing notable infractions by the team with the score against it.

By these simple means excitement arises to a fine frenzy, and when the Cup is finally presented (in a neighbouring shed), the halting speeches are at least relieved by many heartily false hurrahs from one side and gentle booing from the other. The Cup itself, so solemnly presented, so strenuously worked for, is the usual elaborated utensil which never fails to evoke the sense of humour in young and old alike.

The game is put down to start at two thirty. So we go along at two forty-five, and sure enough there are only about eight men a side changed and ready, with many queries about Bill and Herb, and Shorty, and anyway, where's the referee? But the local Silver Band is there, the local Silver Band to whose uniform fund we have all subscribed with proper local pride. The

day being warm, it parades round the ground in white shirts and flannels. It is only a band practice. No matter that today's practice has only one tune; at the shrill of a whistle it wheels, inclines, or turns itself inside out, every man in perfect step and formation, out-marching the marching girls. The occasion deserves no less.

Small boys appear, kicking the man-size football, yes, even into the phalanx of the band, and fathers on the sideline glow with pride. A couple of dogs hunt the field. The dogs are a good curtain raiser, but later, during the game itself, seem to imagine it an All Black trial from which they have been unjustly excluded.

Cars begin to arrive, full of men, women and children. The men are mainly wearing various sporting blazers, honours of pre-marital prowess, and their wives are in colourful clothes, with a tendency to earrings and imitation pearls in honour of the occasion. The children play joyously under the feet of the spectators.

The referee gets out of one car. True, he is not the referee appointed for the game, but he is a willing substitute, and an expectant hush settles. The Royal Dukes have twelve players mustered, and the Hawthorns thirteen. The time is now three o'clock, and the referee rules for an immediate start. The captain of the Hawthorns, an impartial patron of both establishments, thinks this an unfair advantage; until a volunteer is impressed from the sideline. He is equipped with a sweaty jersey and, in default of boots, with sandals and detailed off to do his best



"And by not seeing notable infractions by the team with the score against it"

for the Royalists. His appearance on the field excites great applause, not because of his football ability, but because he is called Bongo and he is a popular character. (He is conspicuously offside all the game, and from this position, once the issue of the game is beyond doubt, is allowed to score the best try of the day.)

The game is much like other friendly games. There is much willingness on the part of the forwards, and a great deal of doubling to and fro by very nimble backs—brilliant combination and positional play marred only by those who hang on to the ball like a hot-water bottle and those who can only

collect one pass in ten. The referee receives, and often adopts, much discerning advice from the sideline.

"Offside there, George!" "Line-out back here, George!" George has not refereed for some years, and he puffs after the slowest of the forwards. Who are we not to help him out, when the jerseys on both sides are a non-committal selection from the whole spectrum?

Bert, gallant captain of the Hawthorns, is not as fit as he was, and is now impervious to sideline exhortations. "Thank God it's not coming my way," he is heard to exclaim when the Royal Dukes sky the ball.

The captain of the Royal Dukes, with a handsome lead, gives all his worst kicks a chance to convert. The linesmen, busy chatting with friends, do not bother to flag the results.

Alf, a partisan of both establishments, originator of the annual match, donor of the precious Cup, patron of the Silver Band, organiser of the ground for the occasion, chief speech-maker and beer-server after the game, is standing by us. His son, young Alf, is playing a great game as fullback.

"Oh, good for you, Alf! Well played, Alf! Wasn't it, Alf?"

"Aw, the trouble with that boy, he takes the game too seriously."

The final whistle blows, to the satisfaction of the panting players—and of the referee, who has only breath enough left to blow the whistle. He confesses he is not sure of the final score, within a point or two.

We adjourn to the shed, where there is a keg to go with the speeches. The assembled men and women applaud each speech, whether they can hear it or not. Somebody takes round a hat "to pay for the ground." This means that a couple of six-ounce glasses costs anything up to half a crown. The bandsmen, restrained from an impromptu, change their trombones for tankards. The referee is impartially thanked, then impartially abused. Soon everyone begins to drift away in the late afternoon sunshine.

In Wellington the Ranfurly Shield is being fiercely contested with all the skill and dash that provincial rivalry can muster. Time enough to find out that score when we get home.

(Solution to No. 661)

D	E	B	A	R	P	R	O	P	O	S	E
E	R	A	T	O	U	R	E	N	E	N	
C	R	M	S	O	N	N	E	E	D	S	
A	G	E	E	G	O	M	A	N	A		
Y	E	A	R	E	G	O	M	A	N	A	
	N	E	R	E							
S	E	D	A	N	O	N	O	S	E		
P		G	A	T							
E	S	U	R	E	N	T	H	E			
C	P	N	E	N	E						
T	A	S	T	E	E	N	V	I	R	O	N
R	E	E	N	I	A	I	S				
E	N	T	E	R	E	D					
							L	A	T	H	E

Clues Across

- When it follows, the French sea shows worth.
- Olive runs into a sudden violent change of feeling.
- Author of 15 across 21 across; he also wrote "Shepherd's Calendar."
- Out of place.
- Coin made into a funny man.
- More voluble than sincere.
- Wait upon.
- See 8 across.
- Missing with an electric clock.
- Stern man (anag.).
- See 8 across.
- Urged.
- "I know a bank whereon the wild thyme blows, Where oxlips and the nodding violet grows,

"THE LISTENER" CROSSWORD

Quite over-canopied with luscious woodbine.

With sweet moss roses and with — ("A Midsummer Night's Dream." Act 2. Scene 1).

- "From morn To noon he fell, from noon to dewy — (Milton. "Paradise Lost").

- "Oh, good old man, how well in thee appears

The constant service of the — world!" ("As You Like It," Act 2. Scene 3).

- One of the signs of the Zodiac.
- Walk like a crab.
- Presently nameless?
- Tell not.

No. 662 (Constructed by R.W.H.)

Clues Down

- "—, when soft voices die, Vibrates in the memory" (Shelley).
- Cut me hair (anag.).
- Ringside living?
- A green thought in a green vale; spring like of course.
- "Come away, come away, death, And in sad cypress let me be —" (Song from "Twelfth Night")
- This cream is naturally frozen.
- Striking, but could be without ability.
- Leg to rent (anag.), but actually it's to aid the eyes.
- Lean crab? No, it's another crustacean.

