

Football Broadcasts Again in Limelight



THE hardy annual, the question as to whether or not the Rugby matches will be broadcast this year, is again with us. Rugby authorities would have us believe that broadcasting is ruining the sport—or rather, not the sport, but its finances, which seems to be the more important side. The Canterbury Rugby Union, for instance, takes the stand that if the Broadcasting Company pays (presumably the amount estimated by the union as the loss caused by the people who prefer a broadcast description to seeing the actual event), permission to broadcast will be granted. Capping their attitude they argue that in any case, as the Rugby Union arranges matches at its expense, the Broadcasting Company should not be permitted to carry out broadcasts without paying for the right to do so.

This last argument suggests that, after all, there may be some doubt as to whether broadcasting does really cause a loss in the gate takings—but that, nevertheless, the Broadcasting Company should be made to pay royalty for each match broadcast.

That, at any rate, is a definite stand for the union to take up. Hitherto it has been wrestling in a sort of catch-as-catch-can way with an unorthodox adversary, or what it thought to be an adversary. We have seen all manner of weird "holds."

In the case of the Canterbury Union, which was afraid of the "gate" being affected on wet days, it reserved the right to cancel the broadcasts on those unpropitious afternoons. This "hold" slipped badly one week when 3YA could not announce till the very last minute, when it went on the air to do the match, that the broadcast had been cancelled.

This was a good test, but the very large attendance at the match did not suggest that many people had stayed at home, preferring the broadcast to seeing the match. This was an experience that made the union stand off and survey broadcasting from another corner of the ring.

Last year we had the spectacle of the Christchurch Union insisting on all or none of the local games being broadcast. What conclusions were drawn from that experiment have not been published. But this year the union says, "Cash up, and no argument." It is certainly a more dignified stand than the manoeuvres previously witnessed.

Securing £ s. d.

THE question of securing £ s. d. seems to be the main thing that the Rugby authorities are concerned about. They seem to see the value in broadcast publicity all right. If a description of a match is good, they think people will prefer it to seeing a match for themselves; if an announcer does not enthuse over the play they think people will not attend next week's match.

This was actually an acute point and caused a rift between the New Zealand Rugby Union and the Broadcasting Company a couple of years ago. The New Zealand Rugby Union an-

Trenchant Criticism by Rugby Follower

[Contributed]

thorities insisted that the sports announcer of the company should not indulge in any expression of personal opinion as to the merits of players—except, presumably, to say when they did well.

There must be no adverse comment. Thus, if a man fumbled the ball, the announcer was not to say so, because, after all, it might be only the announcer's opinion, as the player may have intended just what he did!

So poor old broadcasting got the kick both ways. But the newspaper critics could say what they liked about the standard of play and of the players. The union would tolerate the most drastic written criticisms, but not verbal ones over the air. It was a strange attitude for men to adopt, but it was an unconscious tribute to the power of broadcasting.

THIS attitude of the Rugby authorities, which is almost typical of their attitude right from the inception of broadcasting, shows how they have failed to realise or endeavoured to take advantage of the potentialities of the wonderful development of science. They have looked upon broadcasting as an enemy and have sought for only the worst side of it. But as broadcasting is in the world to stay they should make the most of it.

The people who refuse permission to broadcast on relay consider that by so doing they are penalising the Broadcasting Company.

Why they should want to do so is not at all clear, as the company is a semi-public institution in the same category as a newspaper, which

is afforded every facility for reporting events.

But it is not the Broadcasting Company which will suffer. The benefit to be derived from the publicity is far greater than is the loss to the Broadcasting Company if an event is not broadcast.

"The better a broadcast is, the better it is for the sport. No follower of a sport would stay at home just to listen to a description of the game. He would be disappointed with a poor description, and if he heard a thrilling account he would feel that he had missed an exciting event. He would look rather shamefaced when he had to confess to his mates next day that he had stopped at home and listened-in, in order to save a shilling.

There is no broadcast that can quite come up to seeing or hearing the real thing, and everyone who listens to a thrilling account cannot fail to think that the real thing must have been much more exciting.

So, the more brilliant a description is, the better it is for the sport, because it enthralls people who are not very interested and invites them to attend the sport next time.

The Broadcasting Company has always sought to encourage sport, and particularly amateur sport, in New Zealand, but it has never been able to see that it should pay for the publicity which it gives, any more than a newspaper should be expected to pay for publishing a description of a match.

Last year, on the occasion of the tour of the British team, the Broad-

casting Company went to great expense, and although it is not publicly admitted, the financial success of the tour exceeded all anticipations. This was largely because of the publicity given by radio.

WHO would hazard a guess as to the number of people who listened-in to the description of the first match of the tour, played at Wanganui and broadcast by 2YA and 3YA? That broadcast ensured the success of the tour. It aroused phenomenal interest, which interest continued until the final. Many thousands of people who never had an opportunity of seeing the matches in reality saw them through the announcer's eyes.

Will anyone suggest that the attendance at any match suffered because the match was being broadcast? "No, but the attendance at country games played at the same time was," will be the retort. Even so, was it not worth while for the good of Rugby in general? The whole tour was undertaken for the purpose of stimulating interest in Rugby and it succeeded in its purpose, thanks largely to broadcasting which was carried out, handicapped—right and left by the Rugby authorities, who should have invoked the aid of the Broadcasting Company as being the first essential to the real success of the tour. Broadcasting, conducted by a capable announcer, is the greatest friend Rugby can have.

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