

tacklers, first-time men who knock their men down with perfectly legal but shatteringly decisive tackles. Among New Zealand backs of the postware generation, I can only name four whom I would place among the great — the brothers Graham and Colin Moore, of Otago and Southland respectively, Alan Elsom of Canterbury and Osborne. Of these, Bill was the finest.

The feature of a great tackle is that the tackler is accelerating as his shoulder strikes into the body of the opponent. The effect is decisive. Nepia recalled how, after he had lowered a tough schoolmate a couple of times, that man didn't come back for more.

When All Black teams of the 1930s toured in Australia, they encountered a famous five-eighths, Tommy Lawton, who had been a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford and who was, undoubtedly, a decisive and effective attacking player. "Rusty" Page, who marked him, was a trained Army officer who rose to high rank and who was a naturally brave man. Page was no great size, but he, like Osborne, was a great tackler. At the first encounter between the two men, Page, perfectly legitimately, put down Lawton with two or three savagely efficient tackles. They were the end

of Lawton. Practically speaking he was no longer a danger to the All Blacks — and he, it must be insisted, was also a brave man and a very fine player.

Out of all these, who? My ranking-list would be Smith in first place, with Gray and Osborne bracketed second and the rest in a photo-finish. What delight it would be to see the ploughman plod of Johnnie alongside the effervescent brilliance of Blake. And if these two were injured and Gray and Osborne came on, boy, what a party they would have!

from the wings

Somehow I am going to find great difficulty in omitting Barclay, a natural choice as captain of this mythical team, from the wings. I don't remember that he was as fast and elusive as Falwasser, Charlie Smith, Wally Phillips, Peter Goldsmith, Terry Mitchell, Opia Asher of the unbeaten 1903 All Blacks in Australia — "the best All Black team there ever was," said George Nicholson, of the 1905 team. "And Opai scored 17 tries for us" — and not a few more. But Wattie had mana. Once you met him, you never forgot him. Maoris know more about his quality than I could, as a pakeha, ever

hope to comprehend. But I am sure you appreciate my point about him.

I am torn between Falwasser, who missed only a couple of games of the long tour in 1926, and Smith, whose omission from the 1935 All Blacks to tour the British Isles was the scandal of the times and one of the stupidest blunders ever made by an all Black selection committee — and, heaven knows, they have, over the years, dropped some clangers. Phillips, who played against the 1937 Springboks, was a fine player too. He came from the waybacks, somewhere around Raglan; and to get to matches and training, had to ride his horse crosscountry, through rivers and streams, and keep on going for mile after mile.

I think, possibly, Smith. He was big, powerful and fast. With Mill, Stead, J B Smith and Blake combining to give him the ball, Charlie would have been an irresistible force at the end of the attack. But it's not easy to pass by Albert Falwasser. He held the ball way up by his shoulder and I used to think, as a schoolkid, that fire was coming out of his nostrils as he ran down the touch-line.

One of the great Ranfurly Shield memories was the first try scored by

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