

Wallabies Winning.

(From Our Special Correspondent.)

LONDON, October 30.

The Australian Rugby football team is a puzzle for the critics. One day the "Wallabies" show themselves in the light of a moderate combination, and a day or two later give a display that suggests that they are very little inferior to the famous "All Black" team or the South Africans. Last Saturday at Richmond against a scratch team representing London, the Australians had to struggle hard to gain victory by a single try to nothing, and were lucky winners at that. On Monday at the Stadium they opposed Cornwall—the champion county, and presumably, therefore, a stronger side in their collective aspect, fore and aft, than the scratch fifteen they met on Saturday—and "smothered" the Cornishmen, winning by the big margin of 5 goals 3 tries (32 points) to a try (3 points).

For the purposes of Olympic football, Cornwall was England. The Australians should first have met France, but the Frenchmen could not raise a team, and scratched, leaving "England" and "Australia" to fight out the Olympic Rugby Championship.

"Australia" won, and fully merited victory. At Richmond their play seldom rose above mediocrity. They were certainly very sound in defence against plain attack, and the forwards were excellent. But, behind the scrum, nothing like brilliance was in evidence; there was a good deal of fumbling and misfielding, and good opportunities for scoring were lost time and again. A three-quarter back like George Smith, of the "All Blacks," would have revolved in the openings offered by the London defence, of which the "Wallabies" seemed quite unable to take advantage.

At the Stadium we saw the Australians in a far better light. Their forwards were first-class, and their back division gave a display of combined and individual excellence that made it difficult to realise that one was looking at practically the same division that played against London. The Cornish backs were certainly slower than those who did duty for London, but, allowing for this, there was no escaping the great improvement of the Australian backs.

The ample margin by which the Australians won would undoubtedly have been still larger had their backs realised earlier how easily the Cornish defence could be pierced by individual runs. Hickey showed this when he gained the first try, but the Australians only grasped the fact after they had scored twice by converting defence on their own line into attack the length of the field. Once they realised the effectiveness of the individual run the Australians made great use of it, and scored pretty much as they pleased, for the Cornish backs were as weak in defence as in attack, and seemed quite incapable of pulling down the straight running Colonials, who "handed off" in a very neat and effective fashion.

By virtue of the triumph at the Stadium, the "Wallabies" have given Australia the World's Rugby Championship. It is however an empty honour, for of the few countries where Rugby is played, only three even entered the Olympic competition, and one scratched. Moreover, the Cornish team is by no means representative of England, and, though the county won the Championship last year, it is not in the least probable that she will do so again this year.

Humours of the Game.

By

E. GWYN NICHOLLS and W. J. T. COLLINS.

Football has its humours. On the field and off it, in the team and in the crowd, there are humorous incidents and sayings, and as it does no harm to keep in mind the lighter side of things, we will try to recall a few of them. The seriousness with which the majority of football followers take the game is in itself amusing to those players and others who look upon it as a pastime, and the gullibility of numerous partisans gives the wit or funny man (most teams include such a man) the chance to have his little joke. Many are the yarns, more or less plausible, told of the joker coming in contact with the football maniac. On one occasion a team, dressed and ready to go on the field, had to wait for one of their players. Ten minutes or so after the ad-

vertised time for the start, an onlooker, more impatient than the rest, and puzzled by the unaccustomed delay, went round to the dressing room, where all the players but the absent one were assembled, and asked the cause of the delay. There had been a slight shower of rain a few minutes before, and he was solemnly told that they were waiting for the grass to dry! Quite satisfied with this explanation, he returned to his comrades to allay further anxiety. In districts where the public are accustomed to punctuality, these delays generally bring forth anxious inquiries, and on other occasions excuses were confidentially made that the "players could not get the money on" or that the captains "could not agree which team should win." For there is a sad sort of humour in the fact that an ignorant section of football enthusiasts do believe really that teams arrange the results, and back themselves or their opponents accordingly.

Before important matches, players are besieged by their followers and questioned in all seriousness as to the result of the game. "Who's going to win?" they ask, as though the players were prophets or gifted with clairvoyance. The questioners do not confine themselves to the day of the match, but at all times and places to pounce on players and question them as to how a certain game will go. A player had been pestered for a long time by one of these inane querists and at last lost patience on being buttonholed, in the middle of a conversation with a friend, with the usual question: "What are you going to do to-morrow?" "I am going to have a good breakfast for a start," he replied, and after that he was not questioned further.

A popular player becomes public property, and is treated most intimately and familiarly by all classes. Even the newspaper boys claim acquaintance and greet him by his Christian name, or the name by which he is commonly addressed by his personal friends. "Paper to-night, Arthur?" they will say, for they believe that football, like love and death, "levels all ranks," and makes the international brother to the newspaper boy who punts his ball of old newspapers, tied about with string, to the danger of hurrying pedestrians in the back lane. Once a team who had been away on a successful tour were met at the station on their return home by a crowd of their admirers, who followed them, cheering. One of the players, a man of big stature, managed to get clear of the "madding crowd," by turning down a side street. He was met, however, by two ragged mites, who at once recognised him. Much to his amusement, one said: "Here's ——— Let's shoulder him!"

While on a visit to Edinburgh, a team having nothing else to do on the Saturday morning, accepted an invitation to visit the Medical Schools of the University. They were shown through the dissecting room, and the sight of disjointed members of the human body thoroughly upset some of them. During a short stoppage in the match, one player, feeling something wrong inwardly, consulted a comrade—a doctor—saying he thought there was something wrong with his heart. The doctor examined him, "Heart be blowed," he said. "It's your d—— stomach that's out of order." And that particular player—now one of the "has-beens"—strongly advises present players to put off a visit to the dissecting room until after the match.

The advice given to players by spectators, and the remarks made from the ropes, are often very funny, and during the hushed and excited moments voices can be heard very plainly by those in the arena. It was during one of those moments that a player, receiving the balling appeal from one of the opposing forwards, who asked if "the gentleman with the jockey club breath" would kindly keep in the back row.

The reporter is sometimes the victim of the funny man. Whilst paying a visit to a Varsity team, one of the visitors was struck by the number of initials be-

At a small country town, the captain of the local team strutted on to the field with the word "captain" worked in large letters on his jersey. At another small town a first-class team played a match which was looked upon rather as a practice by the stronger team, and as an opportunity for scoring by individual members. In the course of the game a visiting player—noted for the tenacity with which he stuck to the ball once he got it within his grasp, got possession, and started across the field in his purposeless way. A colleague in a better position than himself called for a pass. "Wait," shouted the selfish one, "I'll be

back in a minute." Whereupon the other cried, half in despair, half in sarcasm—"I'll give you two bob for it!" In the same match a forward had been eating onions, and his deep breathing soon made itself—smelt. Then there came a touch in his own 25—from 70 to 80 yards from the goal—was instructed by an onlooker (evidently full of "confidence and refreshments") to "drop a goal." The shouts of satisfaction and the groans of disappointment heard during the progress of a game are a source of much amusement to the players.

There are humours connected with queerly-situated grounds. The top of a mountain was the most suitable one team could find, and every time the ball was kicked out of the field of play it rolled down the mountain side. Runners were in attendance to fetch it back. Another club had their ground alongside a railway. During a game the ball was kicked out of the ground, and at the same time a goods train was passing. The ball fell into one of the trucks, wedged itself in among the contents, and was carried away, to the consternation of the players.

fore many of the collegians' names. He thought to outdo those when he gave the names of his own teams, and there was much laughter when the papers were read the following morning. Each player found that he possessed at least three front names. On another occasion the same man was asked to give the weight and height of the individual players of his team, and on referring to the papers it was found that the long and lean man was given as short and of great weight, and the diminutive half back appeared as a man of immense proportions.

Practical jokes while on tour are numerous. One member of a travelling team went to the night porter, and gave instructions that he was to be called at an unearthly hour in the morning. He was careful to impress that he was on no account to be allowed to sleep on, as it was of the utmost importance that he should catch a certain train. But instead of giving the number of his own room he gave that of a room occupied by a member of the Committee. He told the porter that he would no doubt experience some trouble in getting him to turn out, and if necessary he was to be pulled out. The ruse worked well. The committee-man sat up late, and he had not been in bed long when he was awakened by loud knocking at the door. The porter, only receiving drowsy mutterings of "Go away!" entered in the dark and shook the occupant of the bed. There was an angry protest, a scuffle, but what really happened after that no one except the porter and the committee-man ever knew. But it is a fact that the porter got a guinea in the morning as compensation for damages received.

A mischievous member of a team once went round the corridors after all were a-bed, and collecting the boots cut all the laces to pieces, replaced them, giving each man an odd boot. The next day was Sunday, and laces were at a high premium. He was smart enough to cut his own to prevent being found out. Many are the tricks that are performed—from the simple making-up of the apple pie to the cutting off the legs and sleeves of pyjamas, but there is not much fun in that.

Of humour on the field of play itself, there is some, of course, but not so much as on the fringe of the game. It was the practice of one team, whose captain was a very short man—very little over five feet—on entering the field to place immediately behind him their two tallest members, men standing a couple of inches over six feet—a contrast which was a great source of amusement to spectators.

While playing in a match on Boxing Day, a forward who had been eating and drinking during the festive season not wisely but too well, soon found himself fairly pumped out, and unable to rise. A fellow player, grasping the situation, stooped, and started rubbing his leg vigorously, thus giving him time to recover his breath, while at the same time deceiving others as to the real cause of his distress. A great many "injuries" received in matches could be accounted for in this way.

One incident which happened some years ago was not without an audacious humour. A team who had been scoring phenomenally against all opponents, as the result of magnificent combination and individual ability, scored try after try, goal after goal, against a team in a far distant town. The beaten players were demoralised, and the full-back was flustered, after repeated experiences of tackling the man who had the ball when he went for him, but had it not when he

laid hands upon him. At length the ball was in his possession. One of the visiting forwards, before he could do anything with it, was up to him. "How dare you have the ball?" he asked, took it out of his hands, and ran in with a try.

The performers of touch judges often call out ironical remarks from the spectators, and certainly some of them are a little—peculiar. On one occasion the touch judge with a visiting team aroused the ire of the home crowd, and it reached the climax when he allowed a try for his side when the player had gone into touch on his side. The home captain took the visiting captain aside at half time, and said: "You might say a word quietly to that touch judge of yours. We don't want any bother, but I am assured by men on the spot that your man was at least six inches in touch before he scored. You might give him a hint." So the captain went to his touch-judge and said that he must be careful, as their opponents complained that the player who scored was in touch. "Indeed he wasn't," said the touch-judge. "It was like this, Jimmy had got the ball under his left arm, and it was only his right foot that went into touch, so the ball wasn't in touch at all!" But one rather suspects that this was guile in the guise of innocence.

LAWN TENNIS.

Alexander Visits New Zealand.

F. M. Alexander, the American tennis player, has arranged a six weeks' tour of New Zealand at the conclusion of the Australasian tournament.

Auckland Inter-club Championships.

In the second series of matches for the inter-club championship banner of Auckland, West End beat Devonport by 21 points to 3, Eden and Epsom defeated Auckland by 19 points to 5, and Parnell beat Onehunga by 19 points to 5 also.

THE DAVIS CUP.

MELBOURNE, Dec. 1.

The concluding stages of the Davis Cup competitions were fought out yesterday. In the end Australia won by 3 matches to 2, Wilding winning his single against Alexander, and Brookes losing his against Wright. Now that all is over, it must be admitted that much of the success of the recent contest—for a memorable sporting success it was, irrespective of which side won or lost—was due to the address of the men America sent across. Whether the result would have been different had Larned and Hackett made the journey it is useless now to inquire. The two who came were thoroughly representative of the flower of American tennis, and both, as is generally admitted, played right up to their home form. They were not only representative but an admirably matched pair. A better doubles combination has seldom been seen anywhere. The freedom and dash of Alexander, with his magnificent sweeping shot from the base line, could not have been better placed than alongside the coolness, generalship and overhead work of Beals Wright. In beating this pair on Saturday, even by the narrowest of margins, Australia deserved to retain pride of place.

Interest in the series of games was maintained right up to the finish. Despite the heat, and the absence of shade, some 3800 people were present to see Wilding make the winning stroke. The young New Zealander was the hero of the occasion. There were many who thought, after Brookes' defeat, that he was leading a forlorn hope. Some doubt of how he would fare against such an opponent as Alexander, and the majority thought the test would be a trifle too severe. No one underrated Wilding's ability, but the downfall of Brookes had prepared them for anything, even for the loss of the cup, which on Saturday seemed almost won. As it happened, the second string proved a brilliant success when most wanted. Wilding has played many fine games and has won many trophies, but he has never done anything finer than his performance yesterday. He championed a wavering cause, and his championship was its salvation. Even the way he gripped his racket as he walked on to the court put heart into those who already, in imagination, saw the cup on its way to America. Serving finely, hitting out finely, judging every-