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PICKINGS FROM THE SCRUMS.

BY THE GOAL POST.

It was only natural to expect that an unwonted amount of interest would be taken in the grand trial match between representative teams of the Midland and Western Counties, which was played on the new ground at Gloucester on Thursday; and as none but the best of players would take part – so far at least, as the committees or representatives of the various clubs could judge – a well-contested game was inevitable. In fact, one of those very much becoated and becaped individuals who haunt football and athletic grounds who always wear brown boots and tweed caps, and who always know before hand what the result of any event will be, assured me on the way to the ground that the game would end in a draw, no point being scored by either side. "Mark my words," said he, in accents peculiar to his class both sides will be so good that the one will not allow the other to score." I *did* mark his words; but I came away from the ground sorrowing in a subdued manner. For with the majority of my fellow cits I take a pride in the orange and red stripes, and not only a pride, but I feel assured that the side on which they play must be victorious.

Such was not the case however on Thursday; and I and the thousands of others who like myself went to the ground in the full expectation of seeing the Westerners come out victorious went away very much convinced that, as a team, they had received a most decided licking, albeit the play of some of the individual members of the city team, and of one or two outsiders eased the smart of defeat considerably. But upon this I may touch later on. Nature proved remarkably kind to players and spectators; the sun shone brilliantly from a clear blue sky, the air was sharp and crisp, and the turf, while extremely greasy in places, was soft and yielding, which was very much in favour of players who were brought down suddenly.

There was but one objectionable feature connected with the ground, and that was the abominable smell of pigs wash and decaying vegetables which assailed the olfactory organ near the entrance, and I hope the committee will remove this cause of offence before long.

Yes, I forget, there was one other matter which requires remedying. Small boys and youths have a practice of getting under the ropes, and running out when play moves down the touch line, to their own danger and the annoyance of other spectators, and some means should be taken to prevent their doing so.

But to the game. It was punctually on the stroke of half-past three when the Midland Counties in all whites, with the exception of a marone[sic] or blue sash in some cases stepped on to the field, followed by the Westerners in jerseys of various hues. Many of the Gloucester team – in fact I think all – wore their own colours, with the exception of Jackson, who sported a deep marone jersey.

I don't know whether anyone else was struck, as I was, by the great difference in size and weight of the opposing teams; the Westerners had G. J. Witcomb, a tall and heavy player from Somerset, Healing, Mayo, and another who were big and powerful, but taken as a whole the Midlanders looked by far the heaviest and most powerful lot, as they soon showed themselves to be.

With the sun in their faces, the Midlanders kicked off from the Dean's Walk end; Evershed, of Burton, starting the leather, which was quickly rushed into the Westerners 25, and play at once became desperately fast. From one side to the other the leather was taken with remarkable rapidity, the all whites striving in vain to break through and get over the line. A splendid rush and dribble by Whitcombe and Healing, which moved the scene of action to the centre, was the first feature of note, and called forth loud and ringing cheers from the large number of spectators who filled the grand stand and lined the ropes.

A detailed description of the game would be too much for your space, and might also prove monotonous; suffice it to say that as the game had commenced, so it continued – extremely fast, first one side and then the other gaining a slight advantage. Whitcomb, Healing, W. George, Jackson, and Taylor of the Gloucester team and Wilcox of the Somerset[sic] were throughout conspicuous for brilliant play.

The prettiest bit of play during the whole game was when from a scrum near the grand stand Jackson had a pass from George returned it to the latter again when pressed, George in turn passing over to Taylor, who, having an opportunity of showing his speed, did not fail to embrace it, racing in a grand style right up the field, and taking the leather to within a few feet of the Midland goal line before he was brought down. All through he showed much better form than on any previous occasion when I have seen him this season; if it had not been for his speed the Midlanders would have scored at least once more in the second half.

It was during the second half of the game that the Midlanders scored their first try, and their combination was afterwards better even than in the first part. Except for brief intervals the ball was kept near the Westerner's twenty-five, and again and again, roused to greater exertion by the cries of the multitude to "Play up Westerns," varied occasionally with the query, in a stentorian voice, "Will you please play up, Gloucester?" which caused considerable laughter, they forced the ball over the centre, only to have it forced back by the superior weight and combination of their opponents.

By a grand piece of play, Witcomb once broke through the opposing lines and got well away with the ball, but looked in vain for someone to pass to, and a splendid opportunity of scoring was lost. George later on found himself in a similar predicament. The latter, I must not omit to mention that the way George looked after the ball was a treat to witness, and I may say the same for Jackson. Wilcox, who donned a Gloucester jersey in the second half played a splendid game, and made a rattling attempt at a drop goal, which fell only a foot or two below the bar. Jackson also made a capital shot, but it was charged down.

The end, as all your readers are probably aware, was in favour of the Midlanders by 1 (drop) goal 2 tries and 10 minors, to three minors. The Westerners were conspicuously weak in the forward division as compared with their opponents. Mr. Vassell was referee, and Mr. Rowland Hill one of the "touch" judges.

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