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LONG, COMPLETE TALE OF THE GREAT RUGBY GAME.



RUGBY RIVALS.

A COMPLETE STORY OF SCHOOL AND FOOTBALL.
By a Popular Author.

THE RUBBER MATCH!
"ELSMERE'S OFF! Good old Dick!"
It was a roar of delight from fifty throats.

There was a crowd of boys of all ages round the Bellingham football field, in the first September sunshine, looking on with the keen interest of the match.
There was an inter-house match, and for that reason keenly followed; but there was another reason why the Bellingham boys were so keen to see it. It is known that Northcote, the football captain, would be largely guided by the form shown in this match in filling the place in the first fifteen.
Talbot, one of the finest three-quarters round the school, had ever produced, had left suddenly, and it was a question whether this place would be filled by Dick Elsmere or by Hubert Locke. Dick was in the Fifth. He was a fine, clean-limbed lad, a narrow, narrow, and a sure kick. Locke was in the Sixth, and was a prefect and a chum of the captain's, and so was considered by many to have a better chance of getting the coveted place. He was bigger and heavier than Dick, but it was doubtful if he was quite so good as Dick.

Dick was backed up heartily by his Form-fellows, and their delight was unbounded as they watched the game, and saw that he was in splendid fettle. Handsome and very fit he looked in his house colours of blue and white. There was the shout as, receiving the ball from the scrum, he darted off with lightning swiftness.
"Elsmere's off!"
"Good old Dick!"
"How he sprinted! But an opposing three-quarter was upon him like a bloodhound, running as if for his life, and Hubert Locke, and in the breathless interest of that race, the other two died down, and the spectators watched with eager eyes and parted lips. The two claimants for the vacant place in the first fifteen were thus pitted against each other. Hubert was thus pitted that well enough, and he Locke showed every nerve to overtake the racing three-quarter. Hard and harder he ran, till, getting on a desperate spurt, he drew close to Dick, and lunged at his arm. But he has shot you. As if feeling his danger by instinct, Dick made a sudden effort, and shot ahead. Hubert's grip missed him by inches, and after that he had no chance.
But the cheer that trembled on the lips of the Fifth-formers was etayed as they saw the back racing to intercept the brilliant sprinter. Would he stop him? Would he? Dick spraved a little away from him, and ran like one possessed.

"He heard nothing, saw nothing but the mark before him. Could he do it? The back was almost upon him. There was almost a groan among Dick's Form-fellows as they saw Hubert make his tackle, and Dick went down. But it was followed by a roar. For Dick was upon the line, and the ball was inches on the other side, and he had scored a try for his fifteen."
"Good old Dick!"
"Hurrah! Hurrah!"
Dick was breathing hard, but looking none the worse for his big burst. The try was not counted, and shortly afterwards Hubert Locke scored a dropped goal for his side, and the game ended without further scoring. The result, therefore, was that Hubert Locke's side had won by five points to three. In spite of that, however, there was not wanting many who said plainly that Dick Elsmere had made the better display.
Northcote had watched the play keenly enough, and his expression was dubious when the prefect joined him to walk back to the school. The prefect gave him a sidelong look.
"Well, have you made up your mind, Northcote?" he asked abruptly, as the captain did not speak. "I thought you were going to decide on your man after the house match."
"The fact is," said Northcote, "I haven't made up my mind yet. We've got to be a stronger next week, and we have always strain every nerve to put a team into the fact that will beat them. Frankly, there isn't much to choose between Elsmere and yourself."
"We beat them."

"Yes, I know you did; but on the other hand, his try was worth a sight more than your dropped goal."
Hubert bit his lip.
"That's a matter of opinion," he said.
"That's all very well; but I have to decide by what I see. There's no getting over the fact that he's a brilliant tryer from near the half-way line, is there? To be quite just, Locke, I must say that if I gave Talbot's place to either of you on to-day's display, it would go to Elsmere."
"You can't mean that, Northcote! He's only in the Fifth, and has been only a couple of terms at Bellingham."
"I don't care if he only came yesterday, if he can help us to beat Redclyffe," interrupted for the place, wherever I find him—yes, even if he was in the Fourth, Locke. But I shan't decide by what I've seen to-day. I'll fix a trial match for Saturday, and you and Elsmere will play, and I'll let that decide."
Hubert Locke drew a deep breath.
"Very well. I think I shall be able to show you that I am a little bit ahead of that young rover."
"I hear so, I'm sure, Locke," said the captain of Bellingham, cordially enough. "What I must have is the best man, and you're too good a sportsman to want me to let friendship count in the matter."
"Of course!" said Hubert.
But his brow was clouded as he left the captain, and instead of entering the school, he strolled away moodily down the lane by himself.

Locke's Chum.
"HALLO, Locke!"
Hubert looked up and nodded to Albert Kenny. The latter was just crossing a stile from an adjoining field when he saw Hubert coming down the lane. There was a slightly uneasy look in his eyes, and a faint flush in his cheeks, as he stepped into the lane to meet the prefect.
Hubert looked at him curiously, and a slight frown wrinkled his brow. Kenny was his chum, though the two had little in common between them. But the prefect was sensitive to skilful flattery, and Kenny, who was not of a particularly scrupulous nature, knew how to keep on the right side of him.
"Where did you spring from, Kenny?" asked Hubert abruptly.
"Just strolling across the fields," replied the other, wrinkling his brow. "Kenny was his chum, though the two had little in common between them. But the prefect was sensitive to skilful flattery, and Kenny, who was not of a particularly scrupulous nature, knew how to keep on the right side of him."
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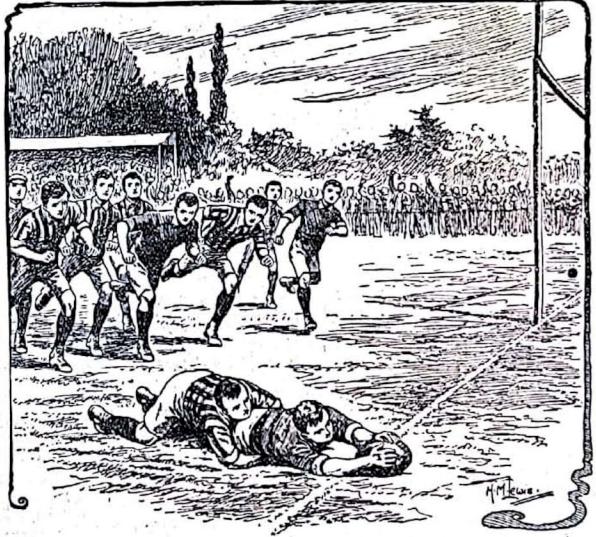
"You don't suppose I've been there, do you?"
"I hope not. The fact is, Kenny, that you'd do well to find some other field to stroll across. Since Blake was expelled for gaming with the sharps at the Green Man, the doctor has asked us prefects to keep a better look-out. Some of the fellows have been talking scandal about you."
"It isn't like you to listen to tattle about a chum."
"It's because you're a chum of mine that you ought to be especially careful, as I'm a prefect, and responsible."
"All right, I will be careful," said Kenny irritably. Then he changed the subject. "Has Northcote made up his mind about the three-quarter yet, Locke?"
The mention of football immediately drove everything else from Locke's mind, as Kenny knew it would.
"No," he replied, with a frowning brow. "We beat them by four to three, but Northcote thinks Elsmere made the better show of the two. There's to be a trial match on Saturday, and the skipper will abide by the result of it."
Kenny looked thoughtful.
"I suppose you're certain to get ahead, Hubert?"
"I don't know. I fancy I play rugby better than Elsmere does, but he's a good man, I can't deny that. And there's a lot of chance in football. He may have opportunities, and I may not get a look in. It's about an even chance, I fancy, which of us gets the cap. There's no influencing Northcote; he's as hard as nails."
"I suppose so."
The two discussed football generally, and the coming match with Redclyffe in particular, as they walked back to the college. There was a cunning twinkle in Kenny's narrow eyes.
"Quite on the cards that Elsmere may get damaged in the trial match," he remarked presently. "Then he would be out of the running."

"No such luck," said Hubert. "He won't be hurt."
"It would be a bit of luck for you if he were."
"Yes; but it won't happen. Of course, it would be rot for me to pretend I should be sorry if he got crooked just before the Redclyffe match. But it isn't likely to happen."
"You'll be playing against him," said Kenny significantly.
Hubert's brow darkened.
"What the deuce do you mean, Kenny? Do you think I would be cur enough to hurt him?"
"Oh, no," said Kenny hastily. "I didn't mean that! But, after all, he wouldn't have much scruple in putting you out of the game."
"You're mistaken there. I don't like him, but I know he's above any foul play. Hang it, Kenny, if I can't win my cap for the first fifteen fairly, I don't want to win it at all."
"No, of course not!" agreed Kenny. But there were thoughts in his mind that he did not communicate to his companion.
Near the school gates they met Dick Elsmere. The Fifth-former gave Locke a cheerful nod.
"It's still hanging fire," he remarked. "I hear there's to be a trial match on Saturday, and one of us will get his cap then. I can't wish you good luck, Locke," he added, with a laugh, "because I want the cap myself."
His manner was so frank and good-natured that Locke, in spite of himself, felt some of his ungenerous ill-humour vanish.
"Nor I you," he said. "But may the best man win, anyway!"
"That's right. I'd give my little finger to get my cap for the first fifteen, but I don't want it unless I can help Bellingham to win the Redclyffe match. And, of course, you feel the same about the matter?"
Hubert winced a little. As a matter of fact, he had not looked at the matter in that light before. Elsmere strolled away, and Kenny looked after him with a sneer. He could not understand, and therefore did not believe, in the sentiments of a true sportsman. But Hubert Locke's face had grown a good deal more genial.

The Trial Match.
THE trial match was eagerly looked forward to. The Bellingham fellows had a pretty good opinion of themselves generally, but most of all they fancied themselves at the good old game of Rugby. The college had a very good record, including a victory over a county team. But Redclyffe had always been a hard nut to crack. The

Redclyffians sent a team into the field which time and again had baffled the Bellingham side, and all Bellingham, from the captain down to the most diminutive fag, longed to give the rival college a first class tacking.
And Northcote had his hopes. He had worked hard to bring the school fifteen to the pitch of perfection. He looked forward to the great match with more confidence than was usually felt by the Bellingham captain. The sudden leaving of Talbot, his champion three-quarter, had been a bit of a "fiasco." But he was inclined to think that either Dick Elsmere or Hubert Locke would fill the place creditably, and he was himself somewhat in favour of Dick. The Fifth-former's wonderful running powers and his fine conduct were all in his favour. Unwilling as Northcote was to leave his own chum out, he was beginning to think that it was unavoidable. The trial match on Saturday was really a concession to friendship, and it was Hubert's last chance.
Northcote was very careful in his arrangements for the match. He did not intend to play himself, but to watch the form of the players. The members of the first fifteen were divided between the two teams, to give each of them a backbone, as it were. The rest of the places were filled by the best players from both houses at Bellingham. And Dick Elsmere had Albert Kenny as a three-quarter on his side.
It was quite immaterial which side Kenny played for, and so his wish to don the colours of Dick Elsmere's side—the Blues—was not disregarded. Kenny was pretty good at three-quarter, but nothing like Dick's form. He usually played in the second fifteen.
Saturday arrived, a clear, cool September day.

During morning school a good deal more attention was bestowed upon the afternoon's match than upon lessons, and lines were showered upon inattentive youngsters, who took them with reckless indifference. All were glad when the afternoon came, and nearly the whole school streamed down to the football ground.
Both fifteens looked very fit, and the rivals for the vacant post in the first fifteen both looked easy and confident. Dick's chums of the Fifth burst into a cheer when he appeared. He was on his trial now, and they looked for great things from him. Upon Kenny's lips for a moment a satirical smile flickered.
"Dick's looking at the top of his form," Frank West remarked to his companions. "See how Northcote is looking at him! I fancy there isn't much doubt he'll get the cap, kid."
The Blues lost the toss and kicked off. There was a light wind in favour of the Reds. It was not much, but Hubert Locke, at least, was glad of the slightest advantage.
The kick-off was followed by a forward rush of the Blues, which carried them well into the enemy's territory.
The spectators looked on eagerly when the first scrum was formed. The two teams were "much of a murchness" in weight and in training. The Blue's partisans cheered when the Reds were seen to be giving way. The ball came out, and Kenny was upon it with unusual rapidity, and away he went for the Reds' goal-line.
Like an arrow from a bow Hubert Locke darted at him. The back was not wanted, though he was ready, for Hubert tackled Kenny almost immediately, and pulled him down. Dick's brow wrinkled in a frown for a moment.



"Good old Dick! Hurrah! Hurrah!" The back was seen to make his tackle, and Dick went down. But he fell on the line, and the ball was inches on the other side. He had scored a try!

