

COMPLETE FOOTBALL TALE BY CHARLES HAMILTON. SEE WITHIN.



The Boys' Realm

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THE PRIDE OF THE TEAM

By MAXWELL SCOTT



Jack and Lyons rushed for the ball together. A collision was inevitable, but neither of them shirked it. Crash! Their shoulders met in a good old-fashioned, lusty charge.

The Reform at St. Ronan's

A Football Tale By Charles Hamilton.



THE 1st CHAPTER. A Case of Dry-Rot.

"T'S rotten!" said Thurlow dismally. "Beardy!" said Montague. "Make us look such silly asses, you know!" remarked Vernon.

"Blowed if I know what to do about it, though," said the first speaker. "It seems as if a sort of rot has set in in this school."

"I suppose it has."

"We used to play a good game—"

"Once upon a time," murmured Montague.

"And now—"

"Now we've just had our eleventh consecutive licking."

"It's rotten!"

"That ain't the word for it. Did you notice how the Updale fellows were chuckling after the game?"

"Five goals to nil! 'Nuff to make them chuckle!"

"Yass, by Jove!" said Vernon. "I never felt such a silly ass in my life, you know. It seems that we can't win."

"We'd better chuck up footer, and take to playing marbles, I think!" said Thurlow dependently.

And the committee of the Sixth Form at St. Ronan's, gathered together in Dick Thurlow's study, looked at one another with doleful glances.

Matters were indeed in a particularly "rotten" state at St. Ronan's just then. Eleven consecutive defeats on the football-field, received by a college that had prided itself on its play, were enough to make the St. Ronanites pause and consider themselves.

They had attributed it to a run of bad luck at the start; but when the bad luck had lasted through three-quarters of the season, they felt that they had to look further for the cause of it.

Although they did not like to admit it, they had a hazy feeling that the fault was in themselves. They liked footer. They played the game because they liked it, but they didn't like work.

There was one fellow in the Sixth Form at St. Ronan's who played the game as it should be played. He was the finest forward the school had ever seen, and his name was Bob Yorke, and Bob Yorke had solemnly withdrawn from the first eleven, and kicked the dust of the pavilion from his feet, so to speak, early in the season.

Asked for his reasons, he had stated, in the plainest of plain English, that he didn't intend to play any longer with a team made up of sly slackers, who went out looking for lickings.

Yorke was a North-country fellow, with huge limbs and a frank and honest nature, and he had a painful way of telling the plain, unvarnished truth at all times and on all occasions.

The truth from Yorke's lips had jarred on the nerves of the first eleven. They liked to play footer, but, then, they wanted to play in an easy-going, gentlemanly sort of way, without making any great efforts, or spoiling their nice jerseys.

Yorke, having expressed his opinion, and washed his hands of St. Ronan's football, was cheerfully left out of the eleven; but after that the team had worse luck than ever.

Thurlow was captain, and he was the best-natured fellow at St. Ronan's; but it was beginning to dawn on the St. Ronanites, and upon Thurlow himself, that a football captain required other qualities besides good-nature—and more important qualities, too.

As a matter of fact, Thurlow was quite right in saying that a "rot" had set in at St. Ronan's. Fellows were slacking, and slacking more than ever. They had had a record bad season at cricket during the summer; but it was reserved for the football field to witness the utter downfall of St. Ronan's.

Things could hardly reach a lower ebb than they had reached now. St. Ronan's had

played eleven matches, and counted up eleven defeats. No wonder that even the easy-going Thurlow was disposed to be snappy.

The first eleven had just come home from a match—the eleventh licking. Five goals to nil was rather a severe defeat, even for St. Ronan's, and the fellows were worried a little about it.

Their opponents had openly grinned at them, and had as openly ceased to make efforts in the second half of the game. Without making efforts, they had succeeded in walking over the St. Ronanites in an easy sort of way.

It was not only the defeat that rankled; but the first eleven felt their pride touched. They were all fellows of the Fifth and Sixth—the top Forms—and they had to keep up their dignity in the eyes of the youngsters.

Fourth-Formers and Shell chaps had greeted them on their return with impertinent questions. The juniors did not ask, "How did it go?" They knew beforehand how it was certain to go. They asked, "How many goals were you licked by?" which was a painful way of putting it.

And it was no use cuffing them. As Montague pathetically explained, the more you cuffed them the more they shrieked at you from inaccessible corners—shrieks about lickings and slackers and muffs, which were exasperating to the high and mighty seniors of the Fifth and Sixth.

Thurlow had called a meeting of the football committee in his study. They came in with downcast faces. They found a notice pinned on Thurlow's door in the scrawling hand of a fag. It ran:

had not been asked back. Since leaving the first eleven, Yorke had been hard up for football, but he put in a good deal of practice by himself, helped the junior Forms a great deal, and sometimes found a chance of playing in a team in the neighbourhood.

The committee had expected him to come back and ask for his place again; but he hadn't come back, and he showed no intention of doing so.

The committee met with glum faces. They all agreed that it was rotten, that it was beastly, that it was intolerable, and that something must be done; and there they stuck.

Something certainly had to be done; but what it should be remained a mystery. Thurlow had an idea in his head, which he hesitated to communicate to the rest. He waited till they had all spoken; but nobody had any thing to suggest.

"Well," said Thurlow at last, "are we going to disband the Sixth Form Football Club, and drop the game?"

"And be laughed out of existence," said Montague. "This is better than that, though things are bad enough now, goodness knows!"

"There's only one alternative."

"You don't mean to say you have an idea?"

"A sort of one," said Thurlow slowly.

"Then get it off your chest, old chap!"

"Look here, the fact is, we haven't played hard enough. It was true what Yorke told us to our faces."

"He had a doocid unpleasant way of puttin' it!" said Vernon.

"Perhaps he had; but it was true. We've been slacking. We don't take the game

seriously. We muffed everything. What we want is to be bucked up, and made to work. We've been too easy-going; I can see that now. It's a case of general slacking, and I tell you plainly that I don't feel up to dealing with it. I'm going to resign."

"I mean say, Thurlow, old chap!"

"I mean say, Thurlow, old chap!" "I mean suggest a new captain—one who will pull the team through, and give us a chance—if we still have a footer match."

"There was a general chorus of inquiry. 'Who?'"

"Bob Yorke."

"And a silence of amazement fell upon the football committee."

**THE 2nd CHAPTER.
Yorke Consents.**

"YOU'RE joking, I suppose!" said Montague at last.

Thurlow shook his head. "I'm not joking. I mean what I say."

"We're on bad terms with Yorke."

"Yorke's not bad on good terms, I suppose."

"Well, he has such a doocid unpleasant way of puttin' things," said Vernon.

"If you can put up with the fags' sneering at us, you can put up with Yorke's deuced unpleasant way. Verily, old man."

"But what can he do?" said Montague. "I don't see how Yorke can pull us out of this. You're a jolly good captain, Thurlow."

Thurlow grinned. "I'm too jolly good, and that's what's the matter. I've thought it out. You fellows have been kicking—"

"Oh, come, old chap; don't begin to talk like Yorke!"

"It's the plain truth. The job's too big for me, and I chuck it up. If you like to ask Yorke to be captain, there's a chance for the club yet. If not, we may as well dissolve it."

"I don't like the idea of asking him," said Norton; "he will be able to grow over us."

"Yorke's not the sort to grow over anybody."

"Well, I'll be him the justice," agreed Vernon. "The only fault I have to find with him is that he has such a doocid unpleasant way of—"

"Only, mind, if we ask him, and he consents, we've got to play the game," said Thurlow.

"There can be no backing out afterwards. Yorke will be a real live captain, and his orders will have to be obeyed."

"Yes; but—"

"You know my opinion. Take it or leave it. I tell you plainly, I've had enough of this rotting."

Thurlow's tone was final. He could be firm sometimes on rare occasions—and it was one of those rare occasions now. Thurlow was a good footballer, and a good fellow, but Nature had not made him for a leader. He would back somebody else up through thick and thin, so long as he had his orders; but as a leader he was lost. He realised it himself, too.

The football committee looked at one another. The task of asking Yorke to be their captain was a pleasant one, and besides, they didn't like to oppose Thurlow; and, besides, they felt that it was the only thing to be done. The suggestion had come as a surprise; but after the first surprise had worn off, most of them saw it to be a good idea, and the only possible way of saving St. Ronan's.

For, slackers as they undoubtedly were, they were good fellows all, and they had the honour of their school very much at heart. Things had got in a way of drifting; that was all, and had gone from bad to worse, for want of a tight hand on the rein.

"Well, is it agreed?" said Thurlow.

"Yes—er—; I suppose so."

Thurlow rose briskly enough to his feet. "Then let's get along and ask Yorke."

"All of us?"

"Yes, certainly. It will look like a deputation, and Yorke will see that we are all going to back him up, if he accepts."

"Oh, very well!"

And the Sixth-Formers made their way to Bob Yorke's study. Yorke was sitting by his window, reading a very big-sized footer belonging to a hero of the Lower Fourth. He looked up as the fellows came in, and nodded rather grimly.

"Hullo!"

"We've come to see you, Yorke—"

"Well, here I am."

"We've just played the Updale fellows—"

"Win?" asked Yorke sarcastically.

The deputation of the Sixth Form blushed visibly.

"No," said Thurlow; "we lost—five to nought. We've come to ask you to rejoin the first eleven—"

"Can't he did."

"But—"

"I told you what I thought about you when I left. Do you want me to repeat it?"

"N-no; but—"

"Don't be so doocid unpleasant, Yorke, old chap."

"I don't want to be unpleasant. But I'd rather play in a fags' eleven than in a team of slackers."

"We want you to rejoin as skipper," said Thurlow.

Yorke gave a start.

"You want to resign the captaincy to me?"

"Yes; and I'll back you up."

Yorke was silent for a few moments, evidently very much taken by surprise. The deputation watched him anxiously.



The members of the First Eleven at St. Ronan's found a notice pinned on Thurlow's door, written in the scrawling hand of a fag. The gist of the notice brought a flush of anger and mortification to their faces.

"I suppose you've thought and talked this over," said York.

"At least one of the Sixth-Formers blushed at the imputation.

THE 3rd CHAPTER.

YORK had said that he would make the first eleven "skip," and he kept his word.

Vernon, for instance, had a way of staying in bed till the very last possible moment.

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"I'm ordering you about. I'm your football captain."

"What's that?" roared York.

"I'm captain of the first eleven," said York.

"It will have to do. Norton has set himself up against his captain."

"I'm sorry," said York; "remember, I'm captain next time, won't you, old chap?"

York's drastic measures could not be called popular.

And it could not be denied that the new training was making a difference to the eleven.

"It's raining," he said, "and out of the window."

"It's enough to make me jolly yet."

"You can turn me out if you like," he said.

The forthcoming match was with Turberville, a neighbouring school.

When, after school on the Friday before the match, the eleven turned out for a final practice.

"Good for you, old fellow," he said; "I hardly thought it would work out like this, but it has."

THE 4th CHAPTER.

The Result.

RIGHT and early the next afternoon the St. Ronan's first was on the Turberville ground.

Such were the kindly intention of the home team that they did their best to carry them into it.

But somehow it didn't work out like that before they realised that there was a team in their opposition.

Two goals to nil in the first half! Turberville gasped with astonishment.

But it was the solitary flicker of the candle before expiring.

Six to one! The players went off the field breathing hard.

"You've done it, Bob!"

THE END.

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