

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY: MAINLY FOR PARENTS
AND SCHOOLMASTERS

PERHAPS the greatest drawback to the progress of athletics in England lies in the prejudice, deeply embedded in the minds of most men, that success therein depends almost entirely on natural ability. Interest, real lasting enthusiasm, for anything depends to a large extent on its capacity for gripping the mind. Games such as golf, cricket, and tennis hold the interest of their devotees in varying degrees from early youth till second childhood. The reason for the enthusiasm which these games inspire lies, to my mind, in the fact that there is a great deal *in* them. They are, in fact, something more than mere “games”; they are sciences full of possibilities and refinements of skill. About them many books have been written and many more are yet to come, each citing reasons to prove that their own theories and methods are the only ones which can possibly claim the consideration of any reasonable being.

The trouble with athletics is that practically all boys and the majority of men think that a sprinter does a fast Hundred and the high-jumper clears his own height just because Nature cut him out that way. In other words, they think there is very little *in* athletics, though most people do realize that, in order to excel in the longer races, even the man whom Nature has chosen for her own must get himself reasonably fit.

The chief purpose in writing this book is to show that even “ready-made” champions, if there be any, can profit from a study of the technique of their event. In fact, just as any boy with a good eye can become a very reasonable cricketer if he is ready to be taught at the nets,

so can any boy or man who is reasonably well constructed become a very decent performer at some branch of athletics. For, just like cricket, athletics is a science, and though some branches perhaps are more intricate than others, yet I have never met any athlete, however experienced, who thought that he knew all there was to know about his event.

Personally, however, I have found that the more I study the subject, the more fascinating it becomes, and I am certain that thought is not thrown away. Indeed it would be easy to write a long essay on champions and others who have improved themselves in a short time, sometimes out of all knowledge, by tackling their problems in a thoughtful way and persevering with their experiments in spite of disappointments. My aim, however, is to cut down this introduction as far as possible so as to get on with the actual subject-matter. Nevertheless I shall pause here to discuss some aspects, which perhaps may be of interest to parents and schoolmasters, of the physical, mental and moral effects of athletics on boys.

PHYSICAL EFFECTS

A great deal has been said and written about overstrain in athletics. Alarmists make much of the enlarged heart and early demise of those who do much running in their youth. As yet, the medical profession as a whole has not studied the question of overstrain very carefully. But Professor A. V. Hill has now been carrying out experiments on athletes for several years, both here and in America; also for those with sufficiently technical minds there is in *The Lancet* of March 3rd, 1928, a lecture delivered by Dr Adolphe Abrahams on this very question—"the physiology of violent exercise in relation to strain". To summarize expert medical opinion is a difficult matter, and I hesitate where angels might well

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fear to tread; at the same time I must give my opinion, which is backed by considerable experience, both with myself and others, men and boys, during the past twelve years. I think that I err, if anything, on the side of safety, and I do not believe the following conclusions will be contradicted by those who have done most research work on the subject.

PRECAUTIONS. *First*, then, I should say that, if it be at all possible, every boy—or man, for that matter—should be thoroughly overhauled medically before he begins training for any race of a quarter mile and over, especial attention being paid to the time taken by the heart to resume its normal beat after exercise, as shown by the pulse. Here, I admit, there is difficulty for the school doctor dealing with large numbers of boys; nevertheless that reaction of the heart, I am convinced, ought to be taken in every school where this is practicable.

Second. It is a great mistake to run in competition without due preparation. More is said of this in the chapter on Training.

Third. Boys should never be allowed to run more than one exhausting race in an afternoon. After a really hard struggle—this, of course, is a relative term—the heart may not resume its normal beat for several hours, and although this will not harm a certain type, *i.e.* the natural long-distance runner, it is asking for trouble in many cases. Be it noted that this hits both at the custom, still prevailing at some schools, of running off everything on a single day and also at the “Victor Ludorum” system, which has the added demerit of over-emphasizing the individual. I shall deal with this question at more length in the chapter on Organization.

Fourth. Young boys should not be allowed to run long distances. “Long” again is a relative term, and I have made suggestions as to the maximum lengths which seem safe at the various ages (see page 12).

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So much for the negative side. On the positive side you have a fine system of physical training, building up stamina and developing not only the legs but almost every muscle of the body, especially the heart and lungs, if the training is correctly carried out.

MENTAL EFFECTS

There is a certain danger for the highly strung boy, who may find that, if he is running in competition, the thoughts of the race tend to fill his mind to the exclusion of his work. Probably it is the exception rather than the rule when this worry persists; nevertheless I myself have been troubled by “nerves” and it may not be amiss to give what I have found to be the best remedies. The conscious side of the worry may be dealt with by a calm consideration of the importance of the race in (*a*) the world’s history, (*b*) one’s own life. A little thought on these lines, I find, does help to restore a sense of humour and to get things in proportion. But unfortunately the conscious side is not the most insidious trouble. It is the subconscious which is often the greatest enemy to thought-concentration, and this I have found can be dealt with most effectively by auto-suggestion. I have outlined the methods in Appendix B (page 140) for those who care to look therein.

On the other hand, Mind plays a considerable part in athletics; for each branch, especially the field events, presents its own special problem. To attain the style which will produce the best results for your own self needs careful thought. Indeed it would not be exaggerating to say that those who have given the deepest consideration to their problems are the successful athletes, though not necessarily the most physically gifted in the first place. Of course, it is difficult to think things out unless you have previous knowledge. Hence this book, which attempts to give the elements of the modern style

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in each event, so that, with the printed matter plus the photographs, it may be possible to acquire a sound basis upon which each can build his own theories and thereby solve his own difficulties.

MORAL EFFECTS

It is not impossible for the really successful boy athlete to get his “head turned” by over-much adulation. At the same time there are two things which strongly militate against conceit in athletics: first, enthusiasm to do well for your team, and, second, a real interest in athletics for its own sake as an art and science rolled into one. It is generally the thoughtless and ignorant who think most of themselves and least of the game.

Practically all schools now run their Sports on inter-house lines and in most of them the relay race is coming to the fore. Rivalry between houses is, I think, to be encouraged, as the keener it is, the more it not only tends to lay the emphasis on “team” rather than “self” but also means that boys will become enthusiastic enough to coach and criticize each other. Moreover, directly they try to teach anyone else they themselves begin to learn and want to go into the details of action. Such is my experience, and despite the varying forms of conservatism, I believe that on these lines keenness can be stimulated at any school.

Success in athletics generally demands a great deal of hard work, though it may be possible for a boy at school, but not after, to carry everything before him on his natural ability alone, more especially in a place where there is no real attempt at scientific athletics. Whether the events be cross-country running or high jumping, there is, in their different spheres, the same demand for keenness and persistence in the face of disappointment. It is a comparatively easy matter to produce the extra yard or two necessary to win a race when you are keyed up

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to it and everyone is watching you, but it is an infinitely harder business to carry through a scheme of training when there is no one to applaud your efforts. But, given the encouragement and a certain amount of knowledge, boys will work really hard with wonderful enthusiasm. And this is where the character-building value comes in.

SUMMARY

Athletics, then, when run on the right lines and tackled intelligently, are a game which will have splendid effects in developing physique and turning out really healthy, strong men. They will provide an interest to occupy boys' minds, once keenness is stimulated. The training also will test and strengthen their moral fibre, especially when it is emphasized that what matters is, not individual performances and the breaking of records, but rather doing their bit, great or small, for house or school.

CHAPTER II

ORGANIZATION

THIS subject demands a whole book if it is to be dealt with adequately; however, I must try to do what I can in a small space. It will be best to split the chapter up into three parts. In the first will be outlined a general scheme for Sports at a Public School, which will doubtless seem ambitious to many people, but is nevertheless possible, as I know from my own experience. The second concerns itself with the possibilities of improving the education of boys in matters athletic, and also with methods of training and coaching before the heats of the Sports begin. The third deals with organization on the ground during competition.

None of the suggestions made here are merely theoretical, as they have all been actually carried out; yet I feel a trifle diffident in making them, realizing, as I do, how various the conditions are at different schools and how conservative the customs. Nevertheless I think it may be worth while putting my experience, such as it is, at the service of others who are doing the same work, but perhaps have not had so much time to think things out or such ideal conditions in which to work as I have had.

A GENERAL SCHEME OF ARRANGEMENT FOR THE SPORTS

One of the first questions that arises is how much of the term is to be allowed for the Sports. The answer, so far as this chapter is concerned, is that, if the scheme herein suggested be carried out, there must be a good month to do it in and, if possible, a week before the heats start, to allow boys to do some training. But here straight-way is met the problem which probably concerns the

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schoolmaster more than anything else connected with the Sports—if all this time is given up to the Sports, what guarantee is there that all the boys will, on the one hand, get exercise, and, on the other, be kept out of mischief each afternoon?

The great difficulty of course is that those who are naturally athletic get through to the finals and have very often more than enough to do, while the rest, if they enter for the heats at all, are speedily eliminated and spend the rest of the term, perhaps, watching the athletes disport themselves, and probably eating too much the while. Now if this were an unavoidable situation, it would be a very serious argument for cutting out athletics from the school's calendar, as it seems to me vital that all the boys should have regular exercise combined so far as possible with amusement. Therefore, before going any further, I want to suggest a scheme whereby the whole school does get its exercise every afternoon—and also a good deal of fun into the bargain.

Later on, a plan will be indicated by which all the boys will do a certain amount of training to get them fit and also will be taught a few of the fundamentals of athletics before the heats actually begin. The scheme which I am trying to describe now is intended to occupy all those who are definitely out of all school heats.

INTER-HOUSE LEAGUE RELAYS

This is a system arranged as follows. The staff-work is done by a master and one responsible boy in each house. Every evening in the term, after the heats have begun, the names of all those who are no longer in for any event in the School Sports are collected by these boys and sent in to the master, under two headings, senior and junior. These names are taken by him and made up into senior and junior relay teams of four each. Heats are then arranged, which should be, as far as possible, inter-

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house affairs. Each afternoon these heats are run off, if possible on a separate track. For the seniors each stage might perhaps be one of 440 or 220 yards, and for the juniors one of 220 or 110 yards. The teams are made up each evening at random, quite irrespective of the abilities of the runners, and very rarely should a boy find himself in the same four two days in succession. Juniors are under no circumstances allowed to compete in the senior relays and no boy must run more than once in an afternoon.

Points are counted on the same principle as in cross-country races, *i.e.* the first team in each heat gets 1 point, the second 2, and so on. The numbers available from each house will of course fluctuate as more and more are eliminated from the heats of the School Sports, so that the scoring is worked on a system of averages. For example, one house may in an afternoon have three teams running, and these may gain second, third, and fifth places in their respective heats. Its total number of points will be 10, which, being divided by 3, gives an average of 3.3. Another house perhaps has more boys out of school heats and has five teams performing, who together amass 17 points. Their average is then 3.4, *i.e.* a shade worse than the former.

I have now seen this system working with considerable success for several years, but it seems to me essential that it should be taken light-heartedly. If this be so, the boys will enter into the spirit of the thing with zest, and indeed I have often seen a large troop of boys pouring round the track urging the representatives of their own houses to put their best foot foremost. At times there have even been gala days in which fancy dress is allowed, and historical characters, such as Boadicea, have put in an appearance. In fact, the more variety and fun there is in it, the more will boys be occupied during the afternoon. Sack, obstacle, and three- or four-legged relays

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might be introduced now and again to dispel monotony; and if it will not add too much to the seriousness of the business, small challenge cups could be presented for houses winning the senior and junior relays.

INTER-HOUSE RELAYS

Perhaps of all the methods for encouraging the team, as opposed to the individual, spirit in athletics, relay racing is the best. Let that be my excuse for dealing with it before the individual events of the School Sports. In practically every school now there is one relay event in the Sports, but in many cases it has gone no further than that. The relay system, however, is capable of considerable development. There are, in fact, at least seven relay events which can be run off as an inter-house competition, with a cup for the house getting the largest number of points and a silver-mounted baton for each event. These, excluding possible junior events, are:

Two Miles (four half-miles)	} . Teams of four.
One Mile (four quarter-miles)	
Half- or Quarter-Mile (four 220 or 110 yards)	
480 Yards Hurdles (four 120 yards)	
High Jump	} . Teams of three.
Long Jump	
Putting the Weight	

The Two Miles is the longest relay race which is likely to produce interesting competition among boys. When teams of first-class milers are opposed, the race may be extremely thrilling, because the runners are good enough to be evenly matched; but with boys the Four Mile Relay tends too much to become a procession. It is possible that in an inter-school relay meeting, when it is desired to make the competitions as fair as possible for the school which is strong in long-distance runners, a "medley relay" may be introduced, possibly over Three Miles with two mile and two half-mile stages. On the