

John Pretlove: Recollections of Fives

Extracts from a letter of 03/04/2008



1st IV 1951 with Fletcher, Robinson, Pretlove, Smith and Church

John Fletcher: He and I were against JM Pickard and Mike Woodhouse in the Schools Final in 1951. We were in trouble by the middle of the 2nd game and they were playing everything on John, trying to tire him out. He fought valiantly, and right at the end he mishit a shot which sailed very gently against the front left-hand wall and then to just above the bar – and dropped dead! He had tired them out, not the other way round. I was not tired and ran through the final few points to win the Doubles 16-14.



JF Pretlove with JM Pickard (Oundle) and Geoff Charnley 1951

Mickey Stewart: At School, he was in the Soccer XI, Cricket XI – captained both games. He was also a 1st IV Fives player. He played a single against Dennis Silk in our courts. He had Dennis on the run and looked like winning the game. However, [when he played] what looked like another winning soft shot from left to right wall, Dennis, who was on the wrong side of the court, literally leapt off the ground and hit a right hand winner, followed within a second or two of this by his head hitting the right-hand side wall – shaking the court! He got up and finally won a spectacular game. Mickey has never forgotten.



Mickey Stewart and Dennis Silk 1950

The Jones twins were Tom and Sid. I knew them very well via the Old Boys Cricket, also their keenness for playing Fives for the Club. Sid was a batsman and Tom a good bowler. When John and I won the Singles and Doubles an old boy persuaded the headmaster to have a Dinner to celebrate our success. It was a very pleasant evening, with a number of toasts made. After the fifth or sixth toast Sid Batrick stood up and gave another toast as follows: Sid Batrick would like to take wine with anyone who would buy one! Silence, then a roar of laughter – Headmaster not pleased at all!!

David Palastanga: I told Geoff Charnley that I had seen him bowling in a House Match. He was genuinely quick. He shot into the 1st XI and was responsible for us winning most of the matches. He also played Fives and loved it as a game, but being well over 6ft he found it quite hard. He was a singer and actor. He went to Germany and was a successful actor for several years. We were all very envious when later he married Hildegard Knef [singer/actress].

John Clerici: played good cricket for the Old Boys and also played Fives to a good standard.

Basil Hope: Short, well built, a very good batsman and a crafty Fives player. Basil kept Fives going at his school [Rutlish] until he retired.

Derek Herdson: became an extremely good bowler and took many wickets in a long career at School and for the Old Boys.



John Pretlove 1994 with Bob Dolby

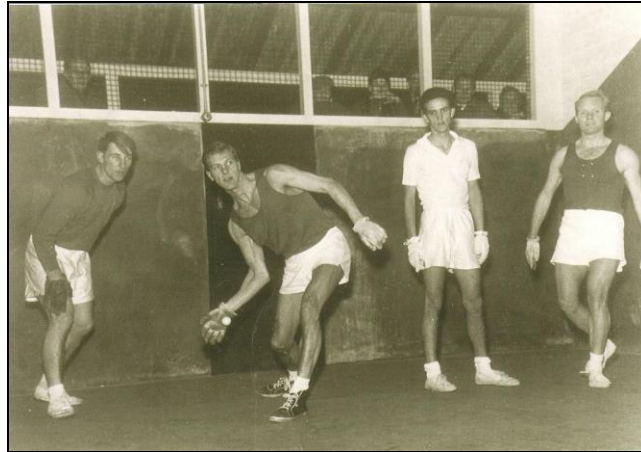
The great Doctor Cyriax: Dr. Cyriax was invited and played two games partnered by Sid Jones versus Roy Birmingham and myself. He had a habit of starting to get to the ball, realised he could not reach after a few steps and then shouted “Yours!” to Sid Jones. Poor Sid, he was completely out of breath but managed at the end to say: “I should have stayed at the office.”

A visit by Dr. Cyriax went as follows: He cycled down from his house in London. He played for about 35-40 minutes. We all showered, but he took a cold shower, did not dry himself and put his clothes straight on. He cycled to the Village where we were invited [by John Nye] for tea. He ate twice as much as everyone else and after excusing himself, got on his bike and cycled back to town to take an evening clinic. An amazing man.



John Pretlove at the Jock Burnet Dinner in Cambridge 2003

Bob Dorey: What a fine player – he always seemed to be in charge of the game. His usual partner was Pat Badmin. Dennis [Silk] and I went to Alleyn's [in 1960] using the first round game against the two above to get fit. They scorched us easily and our fifth Doubles win went out of the window in a very short time.

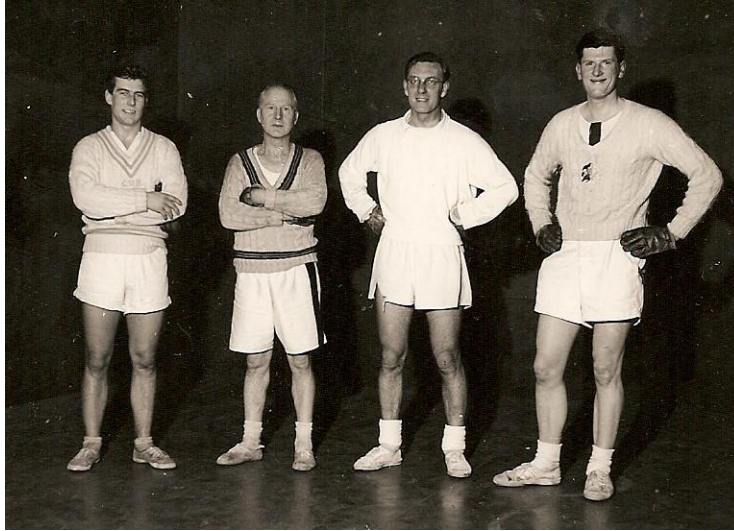


Badmin & Dorey versus Holt & Gardner 1960

Geoff Charnley: not only the Fives master, but also the 1st XI Cricket coach. He was a stolid bat but not a Fives player. What he was brilliant at was organising the two games extremely well and keeping the results. He ensured that the Fives players got plenty of training and advised us all on our match results etc. They were meticulously kept and he took photographs. In order to get us moving quicker round the courts he came onto court with a handful of balls and a tennis racquet! Half an hour of that left you exhausted, but it was well worth the time.

Bill Bailey: Charnley persuaded Bill Bailey to come into the courts and took turns to play and teach some of the boys. He also persuaded Bill to teach me in the small courts after Corps on Friday afternoons over a period of two years. He gave of his time and his talent to me over this gruelling 24 months. At last I beat him one afternoon and after we had finished he turned to me and said: John, you're now ready for the New Courts. He continued coaching me (and others) for a long time and I couldn't thank him enough. When we won the Public Schools Doubles I said that was my thanks for all the time he had given me.

Bill was at Alleyn's when Henry Cotton was also a pupil, and they played cricket together (and Fives, too, I presume). In 1951 the PGA launched a programme, covering the Public Schools all over the country, aiming of course to get boys to play golf. As Captain of Cricket at the time, I carried Henry Cotton's bag down to the 1st XI area, this after a film and a speech by HC. As we walked down Bill Bailey came towards us and as they got near another Bill said to Henry; I still remember the event – how are you? Henry nodded and said a few words in reply. They parted company in a few minutes. Henry put on a show with various clubs and mesmerised everyone for about an hour. Some time later I asked Bill what the event was.



Bill Bailey (second from left) in 1960 aged 55

It goes something like this: The coach carrying the 1st XI and the U15 Cricket teams arrived back one sunny evening and the job of taking the two bags back to the groundsman's hut was to be undertaken by four boys. One refused: that boy was Henry Cotton. His father was summoned by the Headmaster of the time, and he berated Mr Cotton. The Headmaster said: Henry must never refuse the task – and any other – or I will ask you to take Henry (and his brother) away from the School. Mr Cotton replied: Headmaster, you will not take that action. Headmaster – red in the face and very angry – said: I will! Whereupon Mr Cotton said: You cannot remove my boys from this school because I have already decided to do that. Good afternoon. The boys left. Henry immediately secured a job at a local golf club – the start of a wonderful career which lasted until well after the Second World War. At a cricket dinner in the AOB pavilion the last professional coach at Alleyn's sat next to me. He said that if Henry had continued to play cricket he would have played for England. [Wikipedia has a slightly different version of the story but in essence it is the same]



Pretlove batting and bowling for Kent 1958-9