

## **An exchange of emails on the subject of Scoring old-style i.e. before WW2**

E-mail from David Barnes 17.11.2008 to Bob Dolby

Dear Bob,

An article for 'The Fettesian', written in 1896 by GC Harrison, has a good summary of early scoring in Fives.

"15 is game. 14 is usually spoken of as gameball. If the score reaches 13-all, the side which has first reached 13 has the option of setting 5, i.e. claiming to start afresh at love-all and play till one side or the other reaches 5, 4 being then gameball. At 14-gameball there is a similar option of setting 3. The score should be audibly called by the server after each point is scored. This is very important in order to avoid mistakes."

I am sure this scoring system derives from rackets. Rackets matches in the 1830s show scoring up to 11 points per game as well as 15, but gradually the 15 point game took over, and there are game scores recorded in the 1860s of 18-17 and 14-17, indicating setting to 5 and 3. Possibly because bat-fives resembled a rough form of rackets, the scoring systems of the two games were also alike, and when hand-fives started to emerge as a serious alternative, the scoring for bat-fives was also adopted.

AC Ainger, writing in 1890, describes setting for Eton Fives 'as in rackets'. Eton Fives was played to 15 in those days. Modern Eton Fives has a variation of this, in its options at 10-all and 11-all, with the possibility of games ending at 12, 13, 14 or 15.

Vive la différence!

David [B]

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## **An exchange of emails in March 2014 between RLD, DB and DJH:**

David

Do we know when we moved to playing to 16 at 14-all?

Looking at the Varsity Match, there are various cases of 17-16, 17-15, 17-14, 18-17, 18-16, 18-15 and 18-14 up to and including 1929.

In 1930 all the scores are clear-cut.

Then, although 17 and 18 disappear, it goes a bit haywire: There is a 14-15 in the 1931 Varsity Match, and a first 14-16 in the 1932 one (Jock's); but 15-14 occurs twice in 1933, twice in 1934 while on the same scorecard there is a 16-14. 1935 has three examples of 16-14 and 1936 has two of 16-15, but then once more in 1938 we have two cases of 15-14 with a 16-14 to boot. 1939 has a 15-16 and a 14-16. It seems that during those years you could 'set' at 14-all to one or two.

From 1946 16 seems to be the norm, so -- unless we have some evidence of an RFA edict -- perhaps after the war it "just happened"?

Copying to Dave [H] for his interest.

Bob [D]

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**Sent:** Saturday, 15 March 2014, 12:23  
**Subject:** More on scoring (very boring)

The reason for the score of 15-14 must derive from the Rackets scoring system, which is a little more complicated than I thought.

Here are the Laws of the Singles Game at Rackets as far as scoring is concerned:

The game is 15 up, that is, the player who first wins 15 points wins the game, except when:

- a) The score reaches 13 all for the first time in any game, when 'hand-out' – the receiver – may, before the next point has been started, set the game to 5 or to 3, i.e. the first player winning 5 or 3 points wins the game.
- b) Similarly at 14 all for the first time in any game, hand-out may set the game to 3 (this cannot occur if set has been declared at 13 all).
- c) In both the above examples, i.e. at 13 all or 14 all, hand-out may choose 'no set'. This means the first player winning 2 points at 13 all or 1 point at 14 all wins the game.

This gives possible results as follows: a) 18-13, 18-14, 18-15, 18-16, 18-17, 16-13, 16-14, 16 - 15; b) 17-14, 17-15, 17-16; c) 15-13, 15-14.

I have come across cases in school mags of the score in one game of fives being recorded as (for example) 13-13, 5-0. It was simpler to just start again at 0-0 if the score reached 13 all or 14 all and the server (hand-out) wanted to set to 3 or to 5. We abandoned this scoring system at Winchester – it was too complicated for us Commoners!

DB

On 15 Mar 2014, at 12:44, David Hebden wrote:

Interesting not boring! I think the other factor is the relative independence & isolation of different fives centres. They often had courts with very individual characteristics and essentially adopted their own variations of the rules, certainly in the early days. Even as late as 1965 the Crewkerne School magazine extract I have shows that they played fives to 21 (or sometimes 22-20). Perhaps they were keen on table tennis, or just very fit?

Dave [H]

Thanks, Dave. It'll be your chapter, then!

But seriously, the old country system was to play up to 21, which is one of the possible reasons it was called fives – four groups of five and then one to win the game.

David [B]