



The Varsity Match

The match started in 1925 and has been contested every year since, with the exception of 1940-45. It was six-a-side in its first year but changed to eight-a-side thereafter. The top four players in each team have always played singles against their opposite numbers; two games until and including 1946, and one game only from 1947 on.

Many of the early matches were played on the Bank of England courts at Roehampton, but eleven other sets of courts have been used over the years, including those at schools such as Oundle, Alleyn's, Bedford Modern, Whitgift, Merchant Taylors' and Rugby. The match has been played on the six courts of St. Paul's School every year since 1983.

The provision of courts for practice and matches at the two Universities has been uneven, to say the least. Cambridge were fortunate to have the use of three courts at Portugal Place until St. John's College redeveloped the site for housing in 1995. Until last year, most of Cambridge's fives since then was played at Oundle School, almost an hour distant. Now the three magnificent courts with glass back walls at the new Cambridge Sports Centre are the Club's new home.

For many years, Oxford had only two college courts (at Worcester and Keble), so it was hard to build teams through practice sessions and home matches. There were also no social or even changing facilities near the courts. When the last court disappeared towards the end of the 1980s, the players were permitted to use the Radley College courts for practice, but since 1990 they have enjoyed the use of two fine glass-backed courts at Iffley Road.

It is a great achievement on the part of University captains and secretaries across the years to have maintained the Varsity Match at the standard which it has generally reached. There have been disasters, but they have been overcome. In many years, including this one, there has also been a reserves match between teams of four, known respectively as the Oxford Beavers and the Cambridge Sparrows. And a first in 2015: a ladies' match!

Lastly, a word about our hosts. Players from more than 60 schools have participated in the Varsity Match since its inception, but St. Paul's has played a major part in the last three decades. Not only has the School provided an excellent venue for the Match, it has also furnished both Oxford and Cambridge with a substantial number of expert fives players, whose enthusiasm and skill have contributed greatly to the quality of the encounters.

David Barnes. February 22nd 2015.