

HAMPSTEAD & WESTMINSTER HOCKEY CLUB

THE HISTORY OF HOCKEY IN 10½ CHAPTERS

In the first of a series of articles specially commissioned for the Hampstead & Westminster match programme, Julius Barnes traces the early development of hockey and examines its place in the socio-economic development of Western society. Julius Barnes is Emeritus Professor of Sport at the University of South-eastern California and author of 'Oedipus, myth and competition - a study of the role of ball sports in Greco-Roman mythology'.

The game of hockey has been around in one form or another for over 4000 years, but it was not until about 300 BC that it started to be played in anything like its modern form. A number of oral traditions in northern India refer to a game called 'oggee' being played in the Kashmir at about this time.

The first written evidence is a 5th century Pali manuscript, purporting to be a transcription of earlier writings, which describes in some detail a 'meditative retreat' attended by one Dipankata (believed to have been a close friend of the Buddha) at which oggee was played as some sort of meditation exercise.

The game involved about half a dozen monks trying to hit a yak's testicle around the monastery courtyard. There appears to have been no particular object to the game, rather like many Hampstead 5th XI matches, with no winners and losers - although it does seem to have been the yak who was generally the loser. The only rule mentioned is that if enlightenment was reached before half time then the match was abandoned as a draw, a rule which the Hockey Association is planning to reintroduce next season. Plans to bring back the use of the yak's testicle in a bid to rekindle dwindling television interest are also under consideration.

Next week : Oggee and the Judaeo-Christian tradition.