

# HOCKEY FOR MEN AND WOMEN

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## CHAPTER I.

### *Tactics in Defence*

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#### IMPORTANCE OF MARKING.

In dealing with play under the above heading, it must be borne in mind that the views expressed are personal ones, though, albeit, they are based on a considerable number of years of playing experience in Club, County, Divisional and International games. I quite understand that they may be subject to criticism, but, at any rate, I shall preach nothing that I do not try to practise.

While heading these few notes "Tactics in Defence," they deal chiefly with the proposition of defence from the stand-point of the full-backs, although to carry them into effect there

should be a perfect understanding between the full-backs and the line of halves in front of them.

First and foremost, the full-back must *mark* his man, the inside wing forward, and under general circumstances should close mark him. The formation adopted in most defences is that, while the wing halves are marking the outside wing forwards, or are keeping in such a position as to be able to anticipate the pass, the full-backs are some way behind, so leaving the two inside forwards unmarked, and simply *asking* for the pass, whether it be from one of their own halves or backs, or from one of the other forwards. **Why?**

#### WHY?

Why should full-backs leave those two men free to get the ball, and, having got it, free to have a look round and so get going, when one's whole aim and object is to prevent them from getting going, and even from getting the ball at all? As the pass usually must come from the side, or from behind, the full-back has everything he wants, as he is facing the ball all the time, whereas the forward opposed to him is not. Again, if the full-back is tricked by the forward, or fails to stop him, or has been beaten by a "through pass" from the centre or from behind, if he has been playing

right on top of that forward (given that this happens more or less in mid-field) he *has* a chance of getting back and retrieving the mistake, whereas, if he has been beaten when he is playing further back, and so nearer his own goal-line, he has no such opportunity.

#### "COVERING" TACTICS.

Now this game, to be successful, must be played by two full-backs who thoroughly know and appreciate the method, and who thoroughly know and have confidence in each other—which leads to the second great point.

The two backs must play "en échelon"—in other words, they must cover each other. When the ball is on the opponents' right wing or when it appears that a pass will be made to their right wing (for a full-back, to be successful, must have a big measure of intelligent anticipation inherent in his composition), then the left-back will be right up on his inside forward, and the right-back should be in such a position, behind and on his own side of the left-back, as to be able to cover his confrère, should that always dangerous "through pass" be given.

Now if this through pass be given properly, it will beat both back and forward, and the forward will generally win in the subsequent race for the ball, because the back will have to

turn. Hence the absolute necessity of the above "covering" tactics, which, in the event of the through pass beating the back who is playing up, the other back having "covered" intelligently, should always be able to get to the ball long before the opposing forwards. The same applies, of course, with the positions reversed when the ball is on the opponents' left wing, though the left-back always has an easier "covering" task than the right-back, as he always gets the ball coming from his left side, while the right-back has it coming on his right.

#### THE "THROUGH" PASS IN ATTACKING.

Now I grant you that, for these tactics to be successful, the backs must be fast, and, above all things, must thoroughly understand each other, otherwise absolute chaos will result, especially when playing against forward play, as practised in the North, where they cultivate, and are so excellent at, the long through pass.

It is strange, but one scarcely ever meets with this in the South, or at the Universities, though Oxford are more partial to it than Cambridge; in the South especially they seem to rely on the short square pass. But if forwards want to really harass the defence,

particularly a defence which consists of those who are not in the first flush of youth, let them try that long through pass, to the wings or down the middle, then, especially on wet or bumpy grounds, where the square pass is not nearly so effective, you will find many more goals will be scored, of that I am convinced.

#### CO-OPERATION AND COLLABORATION.

Another point in defence, quite apart from these tactics, that always pays, is co-operation and collaboration by a full-back with his wing-half. Quite a lot can be done with him from the throw-in from touch. When the opposing wing forwards get wise to this (it is amazing how long some of them take to do it!), then the back will find himself closely marked on the line. Good! He will then have drawn another man, and so relieved one of his own side from marking, or being marked by, him. It is a combination of small things such as these that helps the side as a whole, and makes, I think, for more general efficiency. Again, when there is understanding between full-back and half, when hard put to it, a short pass to the half will often relieve intense pressure, and more often than not, with the forwards right on top of the back, the half will



be left quite free to dispose of the ball advantageously, when the back would at best only be able to make a clearing hit for safety.

Though I believe implicitly in the defensive tactics of two full-backs, as I have attempted to describe them herein, I fully realise that they are not everybody's views, and I frankly confess that I have never yet played with a partner at full-back who in his play absolutely conformed to them. Many have done so up to a point, but I know that in their heart of hearts they would much prefer to keep further back—and they generally do so. However, *chacun à son goût!* One should always try to make one's own game dovetail in with the other man's, as, remember, you are playing as a pair for your side, and not for your own pet theories, however sound you may think them!

#### EXPERIENCED ADVICE.

In conclusion, a word to young and aspiring (as opposed to old and perspiring) full-backs! Remember that, while clean hitting of the ball is a great thing, hard hitting, with no objective, is not in the best interests of the game. Always try and find one of your own men, and hit the ball hard enough to reach him before an opponent can anticipate.

Never hit wildly into touch, and always keep the ball in play if you can do so without undue risk. Backs often let the ball go behind, when they could easily and safely stop it.

Never attempt to hit the ball hard when it is coming straight at you, especially if there is an opposing forward near, as, in addition to the fact that it is extremely difficult, if you do hit it, the ball is almost certain to rise, and, though you would never mean it, you might hurt him badly. There are remarkably few accidents in first-class Hockey, and it is due to little points like this being realised.

Play hard and play "clean," be good-tempered, and, above all perhaps, never "talk." You will find that your own side will appreciate playing with you, and your opponents against you.

*J. H. Bennett*