

Archie Curruthers

Journal of a Sporting gentleman

By his good friend and fellow Oxford Blue

Guffy Penberton.

1924

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Archie Curruthers tapped out his pipe on the net post and with a sense of satisfaction, warmly shook the hand of both his opponent, Sidney Fitherington and that of the umpire. He had, successfully, retained the Wimbledon championship for the third year in succession in what had turned out to be a close fought and crowd pleasing five setter. Replacing the pipe between his lips he said, "Good show, Fithers, old chap" and Fitherington returned the complement, thanking Curruthers for such a thrilling game. Archie, glancing at his watch continued with "I say, Fitherington, would you mind, awfully, if you were to accept the trophy on my behalf, old chap, it's just...."

"Of course", Fitherington replied, "the Cup match".

"Yes, I may just make it on for the second half, If I get my skates on!"

"It would be an honour, Curruthers", and as Archie strode, purposely, off court he added, "and well played old chap!".

As he drove his open top Morgan away from the famous croquet and tennis club he pondered how well the The Corinthian Amateur Gentleman's Sporting Association Football Club might be doing without the abilities of their top goal scorer. It was a crucial F.A. Cup tie. Being the serious amateur sporting gentleman, Archie knew the importance of maintaining ones energy levels at sufficient strength, so he resisted the temptation to drive onto the match directly and, instead, returned as planned to his dwellings where his cook had prepared a hearty roast with all the trimmings and a rather fine bottle of French red. His manservant, Wilkins, greeted him upon arrival.

"Cook has endeavoured to keep your luncheon warmed, sir", continuing with, "the young gentleman proved to be the worthy opponent you expected him to be?"

"Indeed! He played, excellently, well. When one considers it was his first year, a sterling effort", he added, thoughtfully, "although it has put me a little behind schedule. What news?"

The wireless crackled in the background. It was half time and the BBC was broadcasting a light operetta during the interval.

"Not the best, sir", came Wilkins' measured reply, "Losing three goals to one".

It was no less than Curruthers would have expected. The Corinthian Amateur Gentleman's Sporting Association Football Club had made the brave decision to play with ten men to allow Archie to join them on the pitch once the tennis final was complete. All had expected a win in three sets, but young Fitherington had excelled himself with a dazzling display of skill

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and a tenacious return. Time was now of an essence.

"Who scored?" Archie asked, swiftly consuming the last of the Yorkshire pudding.

"Foxley-Smyth for the Corinthians, sir", an announcement that was greeted with a "hoorah for Foxy Foxley!" from Archie.

"Indeed, Sir", Wilkins continued, unperturbed, "a consummately executed header from a well taken corner, I believe".

"And for them?"

Wilkins stiffened, raising one eyebrow, "An hatrick, their new signing, sir". A look of disdain upon his features.

The Barchester United had broken a gentlemen's agreement that had existed within the Football Association for as long as Curruthers could remember. Just prior to the commencement of the second round they had taken the unprecedented step of making a foreign signing. He had scored vital goals in the following two games and it seemed their unchivourous conduct was once again proving affective. Archie had been one of the most vocal opponents to this act. It was the thin edge of the wedge, in his opinion. Once one team had signed a foreigner, the others would see fit, or be compelled, to follow suit and the game he had admired since early childhood would be compromised in the most awful manner. It was not that Archie had anything against the Barchester United's latest acquisition on a personal level. The man had proved himself to be a player of some accomplishment, it was just that Archie believed the chap should play in his own competitions, in his own country. Quite simply put, the chap should return to Scotland.

"Better get off to the match", Archie said, jumping up, "thank my lucky stars it is an home fixture!"

What followed that afternoon will live on in the noble history of Association Football. Archie ran on to the pitch in the sixtyninth minute and his impact was immediate; a searing volley from just outside the penalty area that left the United Goalie floundering and grasping at air. The Corinthian's defence had stiffened under Curruthers' command, having been handed the Captain's armband upon arrival on the field. In the eighty secondth minute he dribbled the ball past three defenders, demonstrating his famous sidestep, to the appreciation of the crowd, both friendly and rival alike, before floating the ball in a delicately judged lob over the ill-positioned and hapless goalkeeper. Three all, and a replay looming, the Corinthians won a corner. The cross made, Archie vying for position in the goal area, a blur of green jersey as the goalkeeper sought to secure the football, and then, Archie crashed to the ground! The whistle blown and Mr Referee pointing to the penalty spot! Archie immediately requested a word with Mr Referee, explaining that he had, merely, lost his balance and the bump with the goalkeeper was of insufficient force to have caused his loss of footing. With respect for Mr Referee, who was undertaking his duties with expert competence, Archie requested that he reverse his decision, for it seemed unfair to Archie to gain such an unfair advantage. Handshakes were exchanged between himself, the United's goalie and Mr Referee and the game continued. Things were tense, if the contest were to need a replay, the fixture might well clash with Curruthers' preparation for his attempt on the land speed record. The nintieth minute and another corner for the Corinthian Amateur Gentlemen. The Barchester United packed the goal area with all their players. The ball floated in and was, robustly, headed out by a defender. It fell at Archie's feet as he hovered just outside the penalty area. He blasted it with his trusty right foot, it took an odd deflection, ricocheting off a number of players, leaving all in some confusion as to whether it should be another corner or a goal kick. James McNulty, the United's Scottish hatrick hero and most recent signing, stepped forward requesting the attention of Mr Referee. He explained that the football had struck his outstretched arm and this contact had, in his opinion, definitely altered the flight and direction

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of the ball from the goal. In short, he felt that he had committed handling of the ball and a penalty should be awarded to the Corinthians. Curruthers stepped up and with typical efficiency secured the victory for his team, to do less would have been unsporting and a slur on the honour of the players in both team, particularly, the Scottish striker, who was the first to congratulate Archie, and had shown honour and integrity worthy of the very best.

As Curruthers made his way home, his manservant at the wheel, he could feel himself dozing off. "A busy day, Sir" Wilkins offered, "I would suggest an early night, especially if it is your intention to catch up with the cricket tomorrow. A, particularly, crucial opening test for the ashes, I believe?"

"Indeed", came Archie's sonorous reply, "I rather intend to sleep late, but it would be spiffing to get along to The Oval tomorrow. It would be pleasantly relaxing to wind down with a spot of cricket".

"I took the liberty of insuring that your flannels are pressed, Sir, and I have, personally, replaced the grip on the handle of your favourite bat".