

# BADMINTON

## CHAPTER I

### *Introduction*

**B**ADMINTON is one of those games which have made great strides in popularity since the War. One has only to think of the large increase in the number of clubs and players to realize this fact. Yet in spite of this the ignorance of the ordinary man on the subject of Badminton is so colossal as to be almost unnatural. He has probably never played it and never seen it played, yet he states confidently that it is a very easy game—in fact a game for women. Such a criticism is of course nonsensical, as these critics would be the first to admit if they took the trouble to go and see a first-class game. There is perhaps no other form of sport for which a higher standard of physical fitness is required. This is due to the fact that you have to hit an extremely light object with all your strength frequently, as long as the game lasts, and that you have to keep travelling, with hardly what may be called a rest, mostly at full speed, during the same period. Those tournaments in England where the singles are completed in one day are becoming at present more a test of physical endurance than skill at the game. It is for this reason that some of the best players do not

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always enter for this event. They find that it takes too much out of them. To last through three half-sets demands a very high degree of bodily fitness, yet a degree not too difficult to attain. But when it is necessary to play off four or five singles in one short day there are not many players who are able to endure to the end. If you once become 'done' there is not time to recover. Your opponent has won before your second wind has arrived, for your strokes have become weak and inaccurate and your movements slack and lethargic. You cannot rest for a short time, as at lawn tennis, and then start again after a brief repose like a lion refreshed. There is no time for that—rapidity and accuracy are essential factors of success, and without them defeat is certain.

To say that it is an easy game is a half-truth. It is true only so far as it is correct to say that any game is easy—that is, easy up to a point. It is not very difficult to obtain a certain proficiency in cricket, or tennis, or football, or any other game that may be mentioned. Many players reach a certain standard at Badminton without very much trouble, but only a few are able to advance beyond that standard. What seems to be a shadow of Victory's crown hovers over their heads, but somehow it usually remains a shadow and seldom becomes a reality. The reason for this probably is that, having found it comparatively easy to go so far, they think the rest of the journey ought to present just as few hardships and do not find out their mistake until it is too late. The bad habits contracted during this

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period of semi-hibernation, if I may use the phrase, ~~take~~ So firm a root that they cannot be eradicated. It is when you have reached the stage at which you are able to extend good opponents without beating them that the hardest part of your course comes. Only strict and unremitting attention to detail will carry you on to the top of the tree. Every fault that you can see must be pruned with an almost religious fanaticism before that wished consummation can be achieved. It can be accomplished by careful and assiduous practice from the beginning. There is an unfortunate tendency at present to regard practice not as a season for improving weak shots and attempting to learn new, but as a sort of tournament, to triumph in which is as deserving of honour as victory in an open tournament. This naturally does not improve one's play—rather does it confirm ancient faults. It is better not to practise at all than to practise in this manner. More promising players are spoiled in this way than can be imagined. So long as you object to being beaten in practice games, so long will you only be little better than a mediocre player. You should, of course, always play your best whether practising or playing in a tournament, but with this difference—in the former you play to improve, in the latter you play to win. It may or may not be true to say that Athene sprang fully armed from the forehead of Zeus. But certainly no person can become fully armed at Badminton without long labour. Nature gives genius ; practice gives accuracy. Only a combination of these two can form the complete and perfect player.

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Every young player must found his game on correct and sound principles. If you learn to play your strokes properly right from the very beginning, then you will have laid the foundation of a successful career at Badminton. There are two chief methods of learning a good style—first, by reading what has been written on the subject; and secondly, by watching a good stylist play. Of these the second perhaps is slightly more important than the first, yet the former ought not to be neglected on that account. A player who wants to become really first-class will find no better subject for study than the play of Sir G. A. Thomas, when he is being fully extended by an opponent. I mention him, because, of all those playing at present, his stroke-equipment and stroke-production appear to me to be most excellent. It is a sort of liberal education to watch his tactics, if the tide of battle happens to be rolling against him. You will be amazed to find how his surpassing knowledge of the game enables him to turn what looked like a certain defeat into a brilliant victory. Also you will notice how easily and yet how effectively each stroke is executed. Everything seems very simple, but it is a case of art concealing art, and this, we are told, is the highest expression of art. Let simplicity and ease be the characteristics of your style, and you will not go far wrong. Tactics—that is, the knowledge of employing the right stroke in the right place—involve a different question. To be a good tactician requires much experience. Therefore be ready always to draw profit from your own mistakes as much.

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as from those of your opponent. To know where you err is to be able to correct that error.

Badminton is a game that has come to stay, and all the signs point to a great future. Players are multiplying fast, and the standard of play, according to the critics, has not degenerated, even though conditions are not quite the same as when the All-England tournament was first held. It is perhaps more rapid and vigorous than it used to be, but the ideas that form the sound foundation of good play are just the same as ever, for principles cannot alter. In this more than in many other games quickness of brain, nimbleness of foot, accuracy of direction, and delicacy of touch are the great essentials. The space is so confined—occupying only a little more than half a tennis court—that quick thinking is an absolute necessity. A player with an agile brain will keep his opponent on the move, if he is allowed, and can be best checked by an equal mental swiftness. But quickness of thought without the rest avails little. When a game demands such accomplishments as these and to such a marked extent, it will always attract disciples and can never lose its charm.