JACKSON'S EXTRA

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The Story Of How Wrykyn Beat Ripton At Cricket

The Ripton match was fixed for July the second, on the Ripton ground.

Wrykyn was more anxious than usual to beat Ripton this year. Wrykyn played five schools at football, and four at cricket, and at both games a victory over Ripton would have made up for two defeats in other games.

Every public school which keeps the same fixtures on its card year after year sooner or later comes to regard a particular match as *the* match to be won. Sometimes this is because the other school has gained a long run of victories, or it may be because neither can get far ahead in its score of wins, but wins and loses every other year.

This was the case with Wrykyn and Ripton.

Last year Ripton had won by eleven runs. In the year before that Wrykyn had pulled it off by two wickets. Three years back the match had ended in a draw. And so on, back to the Flood.

Wrykyn had another reason for wanting to win this year. A victory over Ripton would make the season a record one, for each of the other three schools had been defeated, and also the MCC and Old Wrykinians. Wrykyn had never won both these games and all its school−matches too. Twice it had beaten the schools and the old boys, only to fall before what was very nearly a county team sent down by the MCC. That is the drawback to a successful season. The more matches a school wins the stronger is the team sent against it from Lord's.

This year, however, the match had come on early, before the strength of the school team had got abroad, and Wrykyn, having dismissed the visitors before lunch for ninety−seven, had spent a very pleasant afternoon running up three hundred for six wickets.

It was in this match that Jackson, of Spence's, had shown the first sign of what he was going to do during the season. He made a hundred and eighteen without giving a chance. A week later he scored fifty−four against the Emeriti; and after that his career, with the exception of two innings of three and nought respectively, had been a series of triumphs. Wrykyn rubbed its hands, and wondered what would happen at Ripton. Now Jackson, apart from his cricket, did not shine in school. He was one of those cheerful idiots without one atom of prudence in his whole composition.

If he were bored by anything he could not resist from showing the fact. He would instantly proceed to amuse himself in some other way. Form−work always bored him, and he was, as a result, the originator of a number of ingenious methods of passing the time.

Fortunately for him, Mr Spence who was the master of his form as well as of his house was the master who looked after the school cricket. So, where other masters would have set him extra lessons on half−holidays, Mr Spence, not wishing to deprive the team of its best man, used to give him lines to write. Jackson would write them in preparation the same evening, and all would be joy and peace.

But, unhappily, the staff was not entirely composed of masters like Mr Spence.

There were others.

And by far the worst of these others was Mr Dexter.

It was not often that Jackson saw Mr Dexter, being neither in his house nor his form. But he did so once. And this is what happened:

The Ripton match was fixed, as I have stated, for July 2nd. On the afternoon of June 30th, Henfrey, of Day's, who was captain of cricket, met Jackson on his way to the nets.

"Oh, I say, Henfrey," remarked Jackson, as if he were saying nothing out of the common. "I shan't be able to play on Saturday."

"Don't be more of an ass than you can help," pleaded Henfrey. "Go and get your pads on."

"I'm not rotting. I'm in 'extra'."

If you had told Henfrey that the Bank of England had smashed he would have said: "Oh!"

If you had told him that the country was on the brink of war he would have replied: "Really! After you with the paper." But tell him on the eve of the Ripton match that his best batsman was in extra lesson, and you really did interest him.

"What!" he shouted.

"Sorry," said Jackson.

"Who's put you in?"

"Dexter."

"What for?"

"Ragging in French."

"Idiot you are to go and rag!"

"What else *can* you do in French?" asked Jackson.

"Go on," said Henfrey, with forced calm; "you may as well tell me all about it."

And Jackson did.

"For some reason or other," he began, "old Gaudinois couldn't turn up today got brain fag or something."

M. Gaudinois was the master to whom the Upper Fifth, Jackson's form, was accustomed to go for their bi−weekly French lesson.

"Well?" said Henfrey.

"So I'm hanged if the Old Man didn't go and send Dexter to take the Upper Fifth French. Bit low, don't you know, sending a man like that. You know what Dexter is. He's down on you for every single thing you do. It's like eight hours at the seaside to him if he catches you at anything. I do bar a man like that. I don't mind a man being strict; but Dexter doesn't play the game."

"Well, buck up!" said Henfrey impatiently; "don't be all night. I know all about Dexter. What happened?"

The injured youth resumed, in the injured tone of one who feels that he has been shamefully used.

This was the burden of his story:

From his earliest years he had been in the habit of regarding French lessons as two hours specially set apart in each week for pure amusement. His conduct in the form room was perfect compared with what he did in French.

"And it didn't occur to me somehow," said he, "that one couldn't rag with Dexter as one can with Gaudinois. I always thought it my right, so to speak, to rag. But the other chaps in the form lay low when they saw Dexter, and chucked rotting for the afternoon. That's why he spotted me, I suppose."

This was indeed the case. Their exemplary behaviour had formed a background for Jackson. His conduct, which in a disorderly room might have passed without notice, became now so apparent that, exactly a quarter of an hour after his entrance, he was sent out of the room, and spent the rest of afternoon school in the passage.

So far all was well. It was no novelty for him to be sent out of that room. Indeed, he had come to look upon being sent out as the legitimate end to his afternoon's amusement, and, as a rule, he kept a book in his pocket to read in the passage. A humble apology to M. Gaudinois at four o'clock always set him free.

But with Mr Dexter it was different. Apologies were useless. He attempted one, but got by it nothing but a severe snub. It now became clear that the matter was serious.

One of Mr Dexter's peculiarities was that, while he nearly always sent a boy whom he had fallen foul of into extra lesson which meant spending from two to four o'clock on the next half−holiday doing punishment work in a form room he never told him of his fate. With a refinement of cruelty, he liked to let him linger on in the hope that his sins had been forgotten until, on the afternoon before the fatal half−holiday, the porter copied the names of the victims out of the extra−lesson book and posted them up outside the school Shop.

Jackson, therefore, though Mr Dexter had not said a word to him about it, was pretty sure that he was a certainty for the "black list" on the following Saturday, and would thus be unable to go with the team to Ripton.

Henfrey, having heard the story, waxed bitter and personal on the subject of lunatics who made idiots of themselves in school and lost Ripton matches by being in extra on the day on which they were played.

He was concluding his bright and instructive remarks on Jackson's character when O'Hara, of Dexter's, another member of the eleven, came up.

"What's the matter?" enquired he.

O'Hara, as his name may suggest, was an Irish boy. In the matter of wildness he resembled Jackson, but with this difference that, while the latter sometimes got into trouble, he never did. He had a marvellous way of getting out of scrapes and quite a reputation for helping other people out of them.

Five years' constant guerrilla warfare with Dexter, who regarded his house as a warder might a gang of convicts, and treated them accordingly, had rendered him a youth of infinite resource. Henfrey went away to bat at the nets, leaving Jackson to tell his tale over again to O'Hara. "So you see how it is," he concluded: "he's said nothing about it yet, but I know he means to stick me down for extra."

"Dexter always does," said O'Hara. "I know the man. There's no getting away from him if you give him an opening. I suppose you tried apologising?"

"Yes. No good rot, I call it. Gaudinois always takes an apology."

"Well, I'll try and think of something. There's bound to be some way out of it. I've got out of much tighter places."

Jackson departed with an easier mind. He felt that his affairs were in the hands of an expert.

After he had had his innings at the nets O'Hara strolled off to the porter's lodge. He wished to see whether Jackson's fears had been realised. The porter offered no objection to his inspecting the extra−lesson book. Old Bates was always ready to oblige the genial O'Hara.

O'Hara turned the pages till he came to the heading "Saturday, July 2nd." One of the first items was "Jackson: gross misbehaviour. R. Dexter." He thanked Bates, closed the book, then walked thoughtfully back to his house.

"Well?" asked Jackson when they met next morning.

"Has Dexter said anything about it yet?" said O'Hara.

"Not a word. But that doesn't mean anything."

"It means a lot. I think I've got it now."

"Good man! What is it?"

"I can't tell you. I wish I could. Ye'd be amused. But the whole point of it is that ye can say, if they ask afterwards, that ye knew nothing about it at all. But anyhow, go with the team to−morrow."

"But, if my name's up for extra?"

"That's all right. Never mind that."

"But, I say, you know" (simply to cut extra lesson was a feat more daring than even he had ever dreamed of), "there'll be a ghastly row."

"I've allowed for that. What you've got to do is to keep clear of Dexter today and go to Ripton tomorrow. I give ye my word 'twill be all right."

Jackson breathed heavily, struggled with his timidity, and gave his decision.

"Right!" he said. "I'll go."

"Good!" said O'Hara. "Now, there's one other thing. How much will ye give not to be in extra tomorrow? Oh, it's not for me, ye know, it's necessary expenses. Will ye give me half−a−crown?"

"Half−a−crown! Rather! Like a bird!"

"Hand it over, then."

"You might tell me what it's all about," complained Jackson as he produced the coin. "I bar mysteries."

But O'Hara would not say a word. Tombs were talkative compared with him.

That afternoon the extra−lesson list went up, with Jackson's name on it; and at 8.30 the following morning the Wrykyn team, Jackson amongst them, started for Ripton.

When Wrykyn played away from home two telegrams were always sent to the school, one at the luncheon interval, the other when the match was over. The first of these telegrams read as follows:

"Ripton, one−six−eight for five. Lunch."

A hundred and sixty−eight for five wickets! It was a good start. The Wrykyn team would have to do all they knew, the school felt, when their turn came to bat.

At seven o'clock Mr Dexter, returning to his house for dinner, looked in at the school Shop to buy some fives−balls. Fives was his one relaxation.

As he waited to be served his eyes were attracted by two telegrams fixed to the woodwork over the counter. The first was the one that had been sent at the luncheon interval.

The other was the one that had caused such a sensation in Wrykyn. And it created a considerable sensation in the mind of Mr Dexter. The sensation was a blend of anger, surprise, and incredulity.

This was the telegram:

"Ripton 219. Wrykyn 221 for 2. Trevor 52; Henfrey 20; Jackson 103 not; O'Hara 41 not."

Only that and nothing more!

Mr Dexter, having made sure, by a second perusal, that he was not mistaken, went straight off to the Headmaster.

"I sent Jackson into extra lesson this afternoon, and he did not go." That was the gist of a rather lengthy speech.

"But, Mr Dexter," said the Head, "surely you are mistaken. Jackson was in the extra lesson today I saw him."

"Jackson in the cricket team?"

"I was referring to a younger boy, W. P. Jackson, who is in your house. Was he not the boy you sent into the extra lesson?"

Mr Dexter's face darkened. Like the celebrated M.P., "he smelt a rat; he saw it floating in the air."

"This is a trick," he said. "I will see Jackson."

He saw Jackson W. P. Jackson, that is to say; aged fourteen; ordinary fag; no special characteristics.

"What is this I hear, Jackson?" he said.

Jackson gaped.

"You were in extra lesson this afternoon?"

"Yes, sir."

"Who told you to go?"

"Please, sir, I saw my name on the list."

"But you knew you had done nothing to deserve this."

"Please, sir, I thought I might have done."

This was so true the average fag at Wrykyn did do a good many things for which he might well have received extra lesson that Mr Dexter was baffled for the moment. But he suspected there was more in this than met the eye, and he was resolved to find out who was the power behind Jackson.

"Did anybody tell you that you were in 'extra'?" he asked.

"Please, sir, O'Hara."

A gleam of triumph appeared in the master's eye. The aroma of the rat increased. O'Hara and he were ancient enemies.

"Tell O'Hara I wish to see him."

"Yes, sir."

Exit W. P. Jackson, and, later, enter O'Hara.

"O'Hara, why did you tell Jackson that he was in the 'extra' lesson this afternoon?"

"I saw his name on the list, sir."

"And, may I ask, O'Hara, if it is your custom to inform every boy on these occasions?"

"No, sir," said O'Hara stolidly.

"Then why did you tell Jackson?"

"I happened to meet him in the house, and mentioned it casually in a joking way," added O'Hara.

"Oh, in a joking way?"

Silence for two minutes.

"You may go, O'Hara," said Dexter finally. "You will hear more of this."

O'Hara made no comment; but Mr Dexter was wrong he heard no more of the matter. It dawned on the Housemaster by degrees that he had no case. A second conversation with the Head strengthened this view.

"I have been speaking to Jackson," said the Head, "and he says that you did not tell him to go into detention."

"But," added Mr Dexter, "his name was on the list for extra lesson."

"I have examined the list, and I find that you omitted to insert any initials before Jackson's name. You wrote 'Jackson,' and nothing more. That explains this somewhat ludicrous situation, I think," said the Head. "If no particular Jackson is specified it is naturally the Jackson with the guiltier conscience who accepts the punishment. It is a curious miscarriage of justice; but I do not see that there is anything to be done."

And that was the end of the affair.

It was an accident, of course a very curious and lucky accident.

And, of course, it was simply a guilty conscience that induced the younger Jackson to go into extra lesson that Saturday. However, it would be interesting to know how it came about that that worthy, who was notoriously penniless on the Thursday, was able to spend exactly half−a−crown at the school Shop on the Friday.