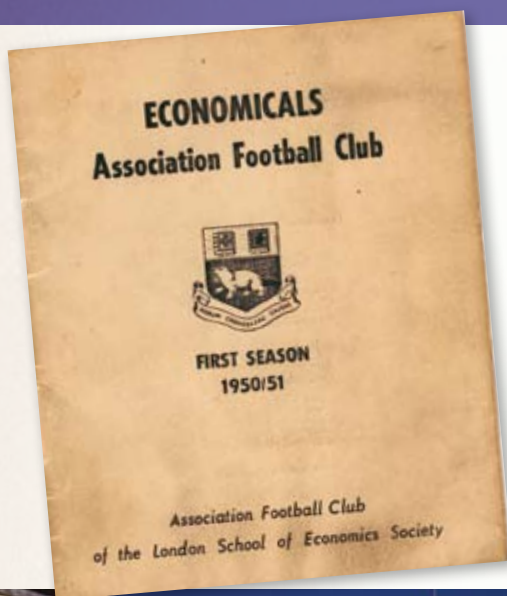




PITCHING IT RIGHT



As the Economicals, the LSE alumni football team, celebrates its 60th year, **Hilary Weale** looks at the history of alumni sport at LSE, from the ex-servicemen of the 1940s to the rugby professionals of today.



The story of the Economicals begins with the students who came to LSE in the late 1940s. It was an unusual intake, for the majority had served in the Second World War and only ten per cent were school leavers. The ex-servicemen brought with them the spirit of the forces – comradeship, trust, and endurance – and, with few halls of residence, often found themselves in lonely digs scattered around London. Playing sport for LSE was a natural activity which brought them together.

Derek Jakes (BSc Economic History 1949) recalls: 'I was the school boy. I came up and saw all these towering lieutenant colonels. One person had been in a Japanese POW camp, building the railway. They brought a whole new complexion to LSE.'

Of course, sport had long been a part of the student existence, and Berrylands had been purchased as a sports ground for LSE in the 1920s. It was turned over for war use in 1939 – variously to keep a horse, cows, grow vegetables, and as a training ground for the Local Defence Volunteers – and indeed the pavilion suffered bomb damage. Willis Wright, the groundsman who served LSE from 1929 to 1957, had been retained on site throughout the war, so that when LSE returned from exile in Cambridge, the ground quickly returned to its original purpose, and the new intake of students soon took advantage.

The social aftermath was as important as sporting endeavour: 'Socialising went on until late evening, before the last train to Waterloo,' says Derek Jakes. 'LSE sports teams during this period were among the few that had a post-game social life, something that to many was very special.' So special that a group of alumni still living and working in London sought to maintain the bonds which had been forged on and off the field with their own football club. Brian Rowntree (BSc Banking 1949), Frank Bealey (BSc Government 1948), Alec Crystal (BSc International Relations 1947), and Colin Furlong (BSc Statistics and Mathematics 1946) were the chief architects of the idea, and developed it at meetings in a pub on Ham common, establishing a committee, liaising with the School, recruiting players, and seeking opposition.

The club was elected to membership of the Amateur Football Association in May 1950, and began a full season of football fixtures against the likes of the Civil Service XI and Old Tiffinians on 16 September. They played in purple jerseys with white collars. With the backing of the School, the Economicals were allowed



to play at Berrylands from the outset, for very modest rates, and this continues today to be one of the biggest draws in attracting alumni to the ranks.

What the club should be called was a point of discussion, as a letter of 31 May 1950 to WHB Carey, chairman of the board of governors – who with the then director gave his blessing to the club – records: ‘The name “Cognoscenti” was felt by most of our prospective players to have been an unfortunate choice. The reasons were many, but the condemnation general, and the name was accordingly changed to “Economicals”... which is thought to be simpler and to exhibit our origin more plainly.’

Unsurprisingly, the Economicals (or ‘Comics’ for short) have had their ups and downs, and indeed they hit troubled waters early on. As the 1950s progressed, many graduates were unavailable to play while they undertook National Service, and at an AGM in the ‘50s there was talk of abandoning the 2nd XI, as their ranks were frequently raided by the 1sts to make up numbers. But the supply of players became healthy again when compulsory National Service ended in 1960, and by the 1970s, the football club was thriving.

Club stories and news circulated in *Purple Patch*, an irregular, generally light-hearted newsletter, which occasionally had a serious purpose, as this extract from issue 3, 1974-75, written by John Evans, shows: ‘Andy [Holt] and Dave Champion have both expressed their concern about the trend of players arriving late for matches. As well as putting us at immediate disadvantage, next season clubs will be fined for persistent lateness. I believe that it may be recommended at the AGM that such fines are paid by the recalcitrant (a new word I learnt today) individuals.’

The football club now thrives: there are five teams, plus a veterans’ side, and the 3rds won the South 2 league in 2009/10, earning not only promotion but the right to swap status with the 2nds. But football is far from being the only sport playing under the Economicals name, although the facilities at Berrylands have influenced the sports played. So while a cricket team followed football in 1953, and rugby in 1958, hockey has not featured – and in fact, the suspicion is that these days LSE alumni play hockey for King’s Old Boys/Girls. There are now three or four known netball teams, but there are so many leagues in London that it is likely that a lot more LSE alumnae play together.

Rugby, in fact, fell by the wayside until 1984, when it was re-established by Steve Bowen, and the club dates its existence from 1984, hence a Jubilee dinner which took place in 2009. Their early credibility was aided by the presence of Peter Coupe (BSc Industrial Relations 2001), who went on to captain Drummoyne in Sydney, while more recently former player Mark Baur (MSc Government 2006), who captains Stuttgart, has been

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invited to trials for the German national team. They now put out two XV’s, and club captain Pete Drewienkiewicz (BSc Economics 2002) says: ‘We are relatively rare. We play against plenty of school old boys’ teams, but I don’t think any university old boys teams play to the same standard.’

The Economicals travel too, not just for away fixtures but on tours in the UK and abroad. Perhaps the best ongoing example is the arrangement the rugby team has with ENSAE (Ecole Nationale de la Statistique et de l’Administration Economique) Old Boys, which ties in with the Six Nations, by travelling to Paris to take on ENSAE when England play France in Paris, and hosting the reciprocal fixture the following year when Les Bleus come to Twickenham.

Meanwhile, many of those who took part in the early days of the Economicals are still going strong, on the social side at any rate, through the MOFFs –

Muddled Oafs and Flannelled Fools – a lunch club formed about 30 years ago which still meets three times a year, testament to the role of the club in forging lifelong friendships and collective memories.

So the Economicals is clearly not necessarily a homogenous entity. The current sports clubs calling themselves Economicals rarely get together socially, and the teams are open to non-LSE graduates. Some traditions have died – *Purple Patch* is no longer, and the Mackrell Ashes are not now awarded to the footballers’ leading goal-scorer. But the commonalities are still there: keeping in touch, taking a break from office life, basking in sporting triumph (or sharing a drink with team mates whatever the result), formal annual dinners, and the recollection of Wednesday afternoons playing at Berrylands as a student.

The continuing health of the club in all its forms is acknowledged by a plaque soon to be placed on the pavilion at Berrylands, celebrating 60 years of friendships first forged on the pitch. ■



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For information about joining the Economicals, please email Chris Cooper: christopher.a.cooper@morganstanley.com

Rugby Football Club 1921-22; and Football 3rd XI, 1961-62 (below)



We would like to thank all alumni who sent in their fond recollections of LSE student societies. Please keep these coming – we are planning a major piece in the summer 2011 issue.