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THE BISHOP SCORES

At this point Wilson finished the toast, and went out. As he went he thought over what he had just heard. Marriott and Gethryn frequently talked the most important School politics before him, for they had discovered at an early date that he was a youth of discretion, who could be trusted not to reveal state secrets. But matters now seemed to demand such a revelation. It was a serious thing to do, but there was nobody else to do it, and it obviously must be done, so, by a simple process of reasoning, he ought to do it. Half an hour had to elapse before the bell rang for lock-up. There was plenty of time to do the whole thing and get back to the House before the door was closed. He took his cap, and trotted off to Jephson's.

Norris was alone in his study when Wilson knocked at the door. He seemed surprised to see his visitor. He knew Wilson well by sight, he being captain of the First Eleven and Wilson a distinctly promising junior bat, but this was the first time he had ever exchanged a word of conversation with him.

'Hullo,' he said, putting down his book.

'Oh, I say, Norris,' began Wilson nervously, 'can I speak to you for a

minute?'

'All right. Go ahead.'

After two false starts, Wilson at last managed to get the thread of his story. He did not mention Marriott's remarks on football subjects, but confined himself to the story of Farnie and the bicycle ride, as he had heard it from Gethryn on the second evening of the term.

'So that's how it was, you see,' he concluded.

There was a long silence. Wilson sat nervously on the edge of his chair, and Norris stared thoughtfully into the fire.

'So shall I tell him it's all right?' asked Wilson at last.

'Tell who what's all right?' asked Norris politely.

'Oh, er, Gethryn, you know,' replied Wilson, slightly disconcerted. He had had a sort of idea that Norris would have rushed out of the room, sprinted over to Leicester's, and flung himself on the Bishop's bosom in an agony of remorse. He appeared to be taking things altogether too coolly.

'No,' said Norris, 'don't tell him anything. I shall have lots of chances of speaking to him myself if I want to. It isn't as if we were

never going to meet again. You'd better cut now. There's the bell just going. Good night.'

'Good night, Norris.'

'Oh, and, I say,' said Norris, as Wilson opened the door, 'I meant to tell you some time ago. If you buck up next cricket season, it's quite possible that you'll get colours of some sort. You might bear that in mind.'

'I will,' said Wilson fervently. 'Good night, Norris. Thanks awfully.'

The Nomads brought down a reasonably hot team against Beckford as a general rule, for the School had a reputation in the football world.

They were a big lot this year. Their forwards looked capable, and when, after the School full-back had returned the ball into touch on the half-way line, the line-out had resulted in a hand-ball and a scrum, they proved that appearances were not deceptive. They broke through in a solid mass--the Beckford forwards never somehow seemed to get together properly in the first scrum of a big match--and rushed the ball down the field. Norris fell on it. Another hastily-formed scrum, and the Nomads' front rank was off again. Ten yards nearer the School line there was another halt. Grainger, the Beckford full-back, whose speciality was the stopping of rushes, had curled himself neatly round the ball. Then the School forwards awoke to a sense of their responsibilities. It was time they did, for Beckford was now penned up

well within its own twenty-five line, and the Nomad halves were appealing pathetically to their forwards to let that ball out, for goodness' sake. But the forwards fancied a combined rush was the thing to play. For a full minute they pushed the School pack towards their line, and then some rash enthusiast kicked a shade too hard. The ball dribbled out of the scrum on the School side, and Marriott punted into touch.

'You must let it out, you men,' said the aggrieved half-backs.

Marriott's kick had not brought much relief. The visitors were still inside the Beckford twenty-five line, and now that their forwards had realized the sin and folly of trying to rush the ball through, matters became decidedly warm for the School outsiders. Norris and Gethryn in the centre and Grainger at back performed prodigies of tackling. The wing three-quarter hovered nervously about, feeling that their time might come at any moment.

The Nomad attack was concentrated on the extreme right.

Philips, the International, was officiating for them as wing-three-quarters on that side, and they played to him. If he once got the ball he would take a considerable amount of stopping. But the ball never managed to arrive. Norris and Gethryn stuck to their men closer than brothers.

A prolonged struggle on the goal-line is a great spectacle. That is why (purely in the opinion of the present scribe) Rugby is such a much better game than Association. You don't get that sort of thing in Soccer. But such struggles generally end in the same way. The Nomads were now within a couple of yards of the School line. It was a question of time. In three minutes the whistle would blow for half-time, and the School would be saved.

But in those three minutes the thing happened. For the first time in the match the Nomad forwards heeled absolutely cleanly. Hitherto, the ball had always remained long enough in the scrum to give Marriott and Wogan, the School halves, time to get round and on to their men before they could become dangerous. But this time the ball was in and out again in a moment. The Nomad half who was taking the scrum picked it up, and was over the line before Marriott realized that the ball was out at all. The school lining the ropes along the touch-line applauded politely but feebly, as was their custom when the enemy scored.

The kick was a difficult one--the man had got over in the corner--and failed. The referee blew his whistle for half-time. The teams sucked lemons, and the Beckford forwards tried to explain to Hill, the captain, why they never got that ball in the scrums. Hill having observed bitterly, as he did in every match when the School did not get thirty points in the first half, that he 'would chuck the whole lot of them out next Saturday', the game recommenced.

Beckford started on the second half with three points against them, but with both wind, what there was of it, and slope in their favour. Three points, especially in a club match, where one's opponents may reasonably be expected to suffer from lack of training and combination, is not an overwhelming score.

Beckford was hopeful and determined.

To record all the fluctuations of the game for the next thirty-five minutes is unnecessary. Copies of *The Beckfordian* containing a full report, crammed with details, and written in the most polished English, may still be had from the editor at the modest price of sixpence. Suffice it to say that two minutes from the kick-off the Nomads increased their score with a goal from a mark, and almost immediately afterwards Marriott gave the School their first score with a neat drop-kick. It was about five minutes from the end of the game, and the Nomads still led, when the event of the afternoon took place. The Nomad forwards had brought the ball down the ground with one of their combined dribbles, and a scrum had been formed on the Beckford twenty-five line. The visitors heeled as usual. The half who was taking the scrum whipped the ball out in the direction of his colleague. But before it could reach him, Wogan had intercepted the pass, and was off down the field, through the enemy's three-quarter line, with only the back in front of him, and with Norris in close attendance, followed by Gethryn.

There is nothing like an intercepted pass for adding a dramatic touch to a close game. A second before it had seemed as though the School must be beaten, for though they would probably have kept the enemy out for the few minutes that remained, they could never have worked the ball down the field by ordinary give-and-take play. And now, unless Wogan shamefully bungled what he had begun so well, victory was certain.

There was a danger, though. Wogan might in the excitement of the moment try to get past the back and score himself, instead of waiting until the back was on him and then passing to Norris. The School on the touch-line shrieked their applause, but there was a note of anxiety as well. A slight reputation which Wogan had earned for playing a selfish game sprang up before their eyes. Would he pass? Or would he run himself? If the latter, the odds were anything against his succeeding.

But everything went right. Wogan arrived at the back, drew that gentleman's undivided attention to himself, and then slung the ball out to Norris, the model of what a pass ought to be. Norris made no mistake about it.

Then the remarkable thing happened. The Bishop, having backed Norris up for fifty yards at full speed, could not stop himself at once. His impetus carried him on when all need for expenditure of energy had come to an end. He was just slowing down, leaving Norris to complete the thing alone, when to his utter amazement he found the ball in his

hands. Norris had passed to him. With a clear run in, and the nearest foeman yards to the rear, Norris had passed. It was certainly weird, but his first duty was to score. There must be no mistake about the scoring. Afterwards he could do any thinking that might be required. He shot at express speed over the line, and placed the ball in the exact centre of the white line which joined the posts. Then he walked back to where Norris was waiting for him.

'Good man,' said Norris, 'that was awfully good.'

His tone was friendly. He spoke as he had been accustomed to speak before the M.C.C. match. Gethryn took his cue from him. It was evident that, for reasons at present unexplained, Norris wished for peace, and such being the case, the Bishop was only too glad to oblige him.

'No,' he said, 'it was jolly good of you to let me in like that. Why, you'd only got to walk over.'

'Oh, I don't know. I might have slipped or something. Anyhow I thought I'd better pass. What price Beckford combination? The home-made article, eh?'

'Rather,' said the Bishop.

'Oh, by the way,' said Norris, 'I was talking to young Wilson yesterday evening. Or rather he was talking to me. Decent kid, isn't he? He was

telling me about Farnie. The M.C.C. match, you know, and so on.'

'Oh!' said the Bishop. He began to see how things had happened.

'Yes,' said Norris. 'Hullo, that gives us the game.'

A roar of applause from the touch-line greeted the successful attempt of Hill to convert Gethryn's try into the necessary goal. The referee performed a solo on the whistle, and immediately afterwards another, as if as an encore.

'No side,' he said pensively. The School had won by two points.

'That's all right,' said Norris. 'I say, can you come and have tea in my study when you've changed? Some of the fellows are coming. I've asked Reece and Marriott, and Pringle said he'd turn up too. It'll be rather a tight fit, but we'll manage somehow.'

'Right,' said the Bishop. 'Thanks very much.'

Norris was correct. It was a tight fit. But then a study brew loses half its charm if there is room to breathe. It was a most enjoyable ceremony in every way. After the serious part of the meal was over, and the time had arrived when it was found pleasanter to eat wafer biscuits than muffins, the Bishop obliged once more with a recital of his adventures on that distant day in the summer term.

There were several comments when he had finished. The only one worth recording is Reece's.

Reece said it distinctly reminded him of a thing which had happened to a friend of a chap his brother had known at Sandhurst.