

From *Trewman's Flying Post or Plymouth and Cornish Advertiser*  
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### ***Metropolitan Wrestling Matches***

The last week has been prolific in gymnastic sports; among which wrestling has occupied a conspicuous space. - The players met at two separate grounds, a sort of opposition having arisen. Those playing according to the Cornish system (without shoes) assembling at the Wellington Cricket-ground, Chelsea; and those pursuing the Devon mode (with shoes and pads) occupying the Eagle Tavern Garden, in the City Road. Prizes were given in both grounds, those at the Eagle Tavern amounting to £50. Men from all counties were permitted to contend for the honours of the field.

A considerable number of persons attended at the Eagle Tavern on Monday to witness the three days of play for 50£. The wrestling was open to players from all parts of the world, and was conducted on the Devonshire system. On the ground were many first rate players, and among them Abraham Cann and Stone from Devonshire. But these men did not exhibit on the first day and the bouts were of rather an uninteresting character.

On Tuesday the unfavourable state of the weather rendered it necessary to postpone the sports.

On Wednesday the grounds were thronged throughout the day by a numerous and respectable company. After some very good play among the minor competitors, Abraham Cann took off his *tile* [hat] and threw it in the ring, to contest with Blair, who, it was stated, would prove no easy customer of Devon's Champion. Cann approached his man with a smile on his countenance; but his opponent looked pale. A mutual grip, collar and elbow, took place and Blair, after half a minute's play, was laid on his back (*Great Cheering*) – Cann assisted his man up, and shook hands with him, and looked around the ring, in a very enquiring manner, for another to compete with. Two hats were hurled into the ring, but the umpires decided that the first hat belonged to Larkins, the pugilist, who lately fought Davey Hudson. Larkins having "togged" himself for the affray, entered the ring. He is a stouter built man, though not so tall as Cann, and is considered, next to Gaffney, the best Irish Wrestler known in London. The unassuming manner of Cann was a contrast with the fierceness of his opponent; the former was mild and gentle, and kept his temper; but the latter, after the first grip, became heated and impetuous. Cann seized Larkins by the collar of his jacket with his left hand, and Larkins made a similar grip on Cann's collar. They made play, and at each motion their eyes were steadfastly fixed on the toes of each other's shoes. Larkins was extremely cautious, and thrice he attempted to make a grip with his left hand at Cann's right hand, but failed. Cann drew Larkins more closely towards him, and appeared to be preparing for mischief. . Four minutes had elapsed when Cann drew Larkins across the ring, and repeatedly kicked his left knee with his right foot, but Larkins kept his feet and kicked slightly in return. Five minutes had elapsed when Cann gave the left knee of Larkins a tremendous kick. Larkins endeavoured with his right leg to get the outside crook of Cann, but with the rapidity of lightning Cann whipped his leg inside of Larkins and got the in-lock, when, after a powerful resistance on the part of Larkins, Cann brought him over and laid him on his back, in a style that drew forth bursts of applause. Cann became a double player by throwing two men. Several other turns took place, which occupied the remainder of the evening.

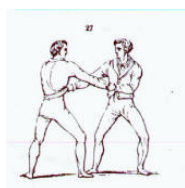
On Thursday, the Gardens were again crowded to excess by a most respectable crowd, to witness the final play for the prizes.

The number of double players not having been completed on the previous day, the single play was renewed until the number of double players amounted to 20.

There was nothing remarkable in the double play, but its excellence throughout. One turn, however, was highly amusing, and attracted universal attention. It was between the celebrated Cann and Avery, a baker; the difficulty of putting the latter on his back must be witnessed to be believed. As soon as he finds himself going he dexterously avoids falling on his back, by turning to some contrary position, and by this means is more dreaded than a far more formidable rival- being often thrown twenty times before the object of putting him on his back is accomplished. It was gratifying to witness the cool self-possession with which Cann proceeded, and although Avery saved his back in three falls, he was at last thrown fairly on his back; immediately after which Avery threw a somerset, at which Cann smiled, and remarked "You are the rummiest devil I ever played with!"

The triple play then commenced, and was as follows: - Pyle and Tozer, Cann and Knight; in which turns, Pyle and Cann were the victors. It being then nearly dark, the remainder of the sports were postponed to the following morning.

On Friday, the final play for the prizes took place. The sports commenced with the triple play, when Tucker was thrown by Thorne; Batson by Chappell, sen.; Euston by Clarke; and Davey by Chappell jun. The quadruple play then commenced and Chappell jun. was thrown by Pyle; Clarke by Chappell sen.; and Thorne by Abraham Cann.



QUINTUPLE PLAY. – Chapple sen. and Pyle – These men commenced the quintuple play. The match in point of strength and science was nearly equal. Hip to hip and elbow to elbow, they contended for ten minutes, in the course of which both were felled many times, and in the end Chappell was thrown.

Cann and Pyle – This was the last contest and excited great interest, although, from the first Cann was universally thought secure of the victory. Both played cautiously at commencing, and Pyle gained no small credit by the manner in which, notwithstanding his previous exertions, he stood up against his opponent. In less than four minutes however, Cann gripped him, and gathering him up laid him gently on his back.

This finished the play, and the prizes were declared to be won as follows: First prize, of 20£, Cann; second prize, of 10£, Pyle; third prize of 7£ Chappell sen. The remainder of the 30/- was distributed, 10s to the first double player and 5s each to each of the other double players.

James Stone was on the ground, accompanied by several men of known respectability, who declared, in allusion to a placard which had appeared stating that Magor, Clement and Lenyon would wrestle any three men in England, that they were prepared to back Stone against any one of the three, for any

sum, from 50£ to 500£. Cann also declared his willingness to wrestle any one of the three for any sum they might please.



THE WELLINGTON GROUND. – On Monday, the first day, the play was very good and fourteen men entitled themselves to be standards – namely, ten Cornishmen and four Devonmen, the majority of players being from the former county. Their names were, for Cornwall: - Williams, Lillycrop, Harrup, Barrett, Magor, Pardew, Dennis, Hutchings, Clements, T. Harrup; - for Devon; Middleton, Muke, Copp and Oldnay.

On Tuesday, from the state of the weather, there was no play, but on Wednesday the sports were resumed, when the celebrated Stone, from Devon, who had been attracted by a challenge from three Cornishmen named Lenyon, Clements and Magor, to wrestle any three men in England for £500, *just dropped in* to try their mettle, and very soon, entitled himself to become a double player, and with the following was added to the list of Monday: - *Cornwall*: James, Lenyon, Newman, Saunders, Austin, French, Phillips, Callaghan, Harvey, Benny and Julyan. – *Devon*: Stranger and Jones.



On Thursday the double play commenced, and after several encounters, exhibiting great tact, Stone was called on to contend with Lenyon, the Cornishman. Stone stands 5ft 4ins in height- weight 12½ stone. Lenyon stands 6ft – weight upwards of 14½ stone: the vast inequality in appearance was so great that the people trembled for the result, seeing as it were, an infant in stature opposed to a giant in magnitude. However the result gave universal satisfaction, for after one hour and five minutes severe struggling, the little Devonian took up the enormous Hercules from the earth, and dashed him to the ground. The double play having been concluded, 14 men became triple players and entered as follows: - Austin and Dennis; Harvey and Lillycrop; Martyn and Hutchings; Magor and Lee; Clements and Austin; and Pardew and Callaghan. Stone was not wrestled, and on appealing found himself matched against Jones, the only Devon man left, who he expected would have assisted him by being opposed to one or the other of the two men, Clements or Magor. This partiality excited his indignation. He felt that it was unfair to match two Devon and two Cornishmen together, the more especially as it was known that Jones would give him his back, and then leave him to oppose the two remaining best men of Cornwall, after having already thrown their best man and companion Lenyon. The Committee, however, said he must play according to their decision. This he refused and quitted the ground, concluding that the Cornishmen, from the specimen he had given of his talent were afraid to give him a fair chance.

Previous to Stone entering the arena, the Committee (from the recommendation of some influential gentlemen) gave their words “that as long as Cornishmen could be found, no Devon men should be matched together”. The former part of the day was marked with the greatest impartiality on the part of the Triers, but when the Gentlemen of Cornwall, who had been present, were gone, then the tide was turned, - things began to assume a different aspect, and of a sudden, everything was conducted in as unfair and partial manner as it had before the reverse. Stone, finding this, walked manfully into the ring saying he had come there single-handed, and after meeting with such treatment, he must beg

to say one word before he left, that was, in answer to the challenge of the three Cornishmen: Abraham Cann and himself (Stone) would play the three, for £500 tomorrow; and that to show how desirous he was of a match with them he offered to go half-way between the two different modes of the counties in wrestling, - that was, he would only have one shoe, and his opponent only one. Stone's friends were ready with the needful to have posted to any amount; however it was not accepted, and he left the ring amid loud cheers from all sides, - all the respectable part of the spectators accompanying him, and expressing their disgust at the conduct of the Committee.

The quadruple players closed the games. Magor threw Jones, Saunders threw Martyn, Pardew threw Harvey, and Clements was allowed the fall, having no opponent, in consequence of Stone's withdrawing. The prizes were then thus awarded - Magor £15, Clements £10, Pardew £5 and Saunders £1. 10s and a beaver hat.



*This article offers a real flavour of the sport. We see the role of the prize money and rich sponsors, usually referred to as “respectable gentlemen”. It demonstrates the duration of the events when the sport was at its height – on this occasion five days, including one day rained off. There is a suggestion of much time engaged in horse-trading and the ordering of the bouts - the bouts themselves comprising anything from short technical contests to long energy-sapping struggles, with much pleasure taken in the “scientific” nature of the holds and throws. Sportsmanship is much prized, and this seems to have been one of the characteristics of Cann’s behaviour that contributed to the high regard in which he was held. One theme that occurs often, not just in this perhaps partisan report from a Devonshire based newspaper, but in the national press too, is a suggestion that the Cornish authorities were less than even-handed in the way in which they administered the sport. The accusation of partiality against the Cornish is perhaps too common a feature of match reports to be dismissed.*

Nick Heard, April 2008