Rugby League Game
By James Kirkup

Sport is absurd, and sad.
Those grown men. Just look,
In those dreary long blue shorts,
Those ringed stockings, Edwardian,
Balding pates, and huge
Fat knees that ought to be heroes'.

Grappling, hooking, gallantly tackling –
Is all this courage really necessary? –
Taking their good clean fun
So solemnly, they run each other down
With earnest keenness, for the honour of
Virility, the cap, the country side.

Like great boys roll each other,
In the mud of public Saturdays,
Groping their blind way back
To noble youth, away from the bank,
The wife, the pram, the spin drier,
Back to the Spartan freedom of the field.

Back, back to the days when boys
Were men, still hopeful, and untamed.
That was then: a gay
and golden age ago.
Now in vain, domesticated,
Men try to be boys again.
Sport is absurd, and sad. (Sad that grown men play like children)
Those grown men. Just look,
In those dreary long blue shorts, (Indication that this was written awhile ago)
Those ringed stockings, Edwardian. (Edwardian era was rigid/specific way of doing things)
Balding pates, and huge (balding is associated with middle-aged men)
Fat knees that ought to be heroes’. (apostrophe use? The poet is disgusted and ridicules these middle-aged men, who are being childish, instead of doing something worthwhile and honourable)

Grappling, hooking, gallantly tackling – (poet mocks the men, comparing them to soldiers)
Is all this courage really necessary? – (rhetorical question, forces the reader to agree with his that these men are a joke!)
Taking their good clean fun
So solemnly, they run each other down (they take themselves and the sport too seriously)
With earnest keenness, for the honour of
Virility, the cap, the country side.
-Appear manly -they are not playing for their country, only a club, so it is not important!

In the mud of public Saturdays, (BATHOS: anti-climax in descending order, with humour - virility; cap; country side)
Groping their blind way back
To noble youth, away from the bank.
- only when your young do you think you are noble, men pretending to be boys is not noble.
The wife, the pram, the spin drier,
Back to the Spartan freedom of the field. (Spartans were simple living, military-based Greeks, not very concerned with wealth. The rugby players find ‘freedom’ in rugby, as the Spartans had freedom in their every-day life.

Back, back to the days when boys
Were men, still hopeful, and untamed.

That was then: a gay
and golden age ago.
Now in vain, domesticated,
Men try to be boys again.

Men play rugby in a futile attempt to be boys again.
Last two lines summarise the whole poem.