

## CRICKET AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE

### The social make up of the Varsity team

Until the late sixties, playing sport, particularly cricket, was not incompatible with academic achievement, particularly in the hard sciences. Non arts students came from Colombo schools and from English speaking or bilingual backgrounds. For instance, the Royal cricket team of 1969 produced four engineers and a doctor. One image which never left the chronicler was a twice Royal captain pulling out his study notes after being dismissed in the game against St. Sebastian's in the third term (1968).

In 2013 the Island of 18 March 2013 covered the reunion of the University of Ceylon cricket team of 1962-3 which took out the Sara trophy of that year. The full article is available in appendix VI. The first four paragraphs of the article are as follows -

"Former members of the University of Ceylon '62/63 will gather at the NCC on the morning of March 23 to celebrate their winning the Sara Trophy 50 years ago. Their feat has never been achieved by any other university team. In spite of the heavy burden of studies, they had to contend with, they were able to excel in their chosen sport to win the Sara Trophy in the 1962/63 season. The team consisted of a very talented group of youngsters who were not at all overawed by the might of the opposition, sporting All Ceylon players of that era. They, in their youthful exuberance, overcame all odds in capturing the title. Their conduct off the field was exemplary. They were gentlemen to the core in their behaviour.

Many of them were also accomplished musicians. All these cricketers, without exception have reached the pinnacle of their chosen careers as doctors, engineers, architects, civil servants and veterinarians, both locally and abroad.

The year 1962 saw the coming together of a number of very talented students from various schools in Ceylon of that era to be members of a fantastic cricket team to represent the University of Ceylon in cricket in the local premier tournament, vying for the Saravanamuthu Trophy. These young students of that era, mainly from the Colombo schools, entered university, after passing the very competitive university entrance exam of the era.

The team was skippered by **Carlyle Perera**, a Josephian, a no-nonsense leader and a fourth-year medico at that time. He was a hugely talented batsman with an astute cricketing brain and the incredible skills of man management to extract the best efforts from his team members. His deputy was a Thomian – **Buddy Reid**, another fourth-year medico, who was a great cricketer with a never say die attitude and possessing true Thomian grit."

The other members of the team were – Mano Ponniah, Nihal Gurusinghe, Lareef Idroos, U.R.P. Goonetilleke (STC), N.J.S. De Mel, Harsha Samerajiva, K. Wimalaratne, Nanda Senanayake (Royal), Cyril Ernest (SBC), Mohanlal Fernando (Ananda), V. Sivanandan (St. John's Jaffna), Kingsley Fernando (St. Sebastian's, Moratuwa), and Merrill Guneratne, Adiel Anghie (St. Peter's).

The University had a good all-round team consisting mainly of Royalists and Thomians, with a few Peterites, Josephians, Benedictines, Anandians and St. Sebastianites thrown in. The Colts had Royalist Darrell Lieversz, who, with the sort of support the University captain received from his team, would have won the day for the Colts. Even then, University just scraped through.

The Varsity team was considered young compared to the average age of players in the teams they played against. However, Darrell Lieversz at 19 years was probably the youngest in either side.

The two batsmen who survived the Colts bowling onslaught in the final innings of the game, Reid and Gurusinghe, were both Thomians. N.J.S. de Mel, who top scored in both Varsity innings, was a Royalist. Darrell was single handedly trying to overcome Thomians backed by fellow Royalists. And twice in two years, at the Oval and at Havelock Park, the Thomians survived.

(In the game against the S.S.C. it was Darrell versus fellow Royalists. S.S.C. had Kodituwakku, L. Senanayake, S.C. Samarasinghe and C.I. Gunasekera.)

The weather and umpiring conspired to thwart the Colts. And as a result, the reputation of Dr. Carlyle Perera, the University captain, has acquired legendary proportions. But if the Colts had captured one more wicket, he would have been consigned to the dustbin of history. He was featured in a Sunday Times article of July 11, 2010, penned by Maxie Kariyawasam which is carried in full at appendix VII.

The University met the Colts in the final and a victory for either team would have been their first Sara trophy win. It turned out to be the first and only premier trophy win for the University which doesn't field a cricket team these days, and this has probably a lot to do with the socio-linguistic background of students in the hard sciences today. The changing of the medium of instruction in Sri Lanka from English to Sinhalese has finally taken its toll.

Ironically, while the University doesn't field a cricket team, the majority of Sri Lanka's leading cricketers now come from rural areas and presumably are of Sinhalese speaking backgrounds. Could it be that, unlike the science students of yesteryear, who were both sportsmen and scholars, the bright students of today, urban, or rural, from Colombo or the outstations, find it hard to combine study with sport, and are either sportsmen or studious, not both.

The fifties and sixties were a quieter time and the lifestyle slower paced. Even those who were studiously inclined learnt sport in their youth and obtained a passion for it. Hence, those schoolboys who were good at maths and science had a tendency, while studying hard for their "A" levels, to pursue their sporting interests.

The chronicler was speaking to two doctors who were his classmates at school. One of them was a talented hockey player at both school and university. They both said that in the sixties it was hard to combine sports at the top level with academic achievement in the hard sciences. Hence, quite a few Royalists and Thomians who led their schools at either cricket or rugby, focused on entering university after leaving school. This was certainly the case with those wishing to pursue a medical career where the bar was higher than for other professions.

One had two chances at the "O" level in getting the five credits required to enter the science class. And one had only one shot, out of three, at the "A" level, from school, if one sat for the "O" level twice. Clever students usually left school a year earlier than their sporting peers, and often this involved forfeiting the captaincy. The students who went on to become doctors and engineers after completing their school cricketing career, studied the appropriate subjects at school and this held them in good stead when they attempted to get high "A" level grades after leaving school. And sports also interfered with undergraduate study. For instance, a former Thomian cricket captain who was older than his colleagues at medical school was involved in numerous sports at university and as a result he kept failing his exams.

But as pointed out by a former Royal cricket captain, it is much more competitive to get into our universities today, at least for the sciences, due to the spread of free education. And cricket too has become more professional. A student talented in cricket and study will have to choose between the two rather than juggle the two. An ambitious student will consider the delay in achieving academic potential detrimental in a competitive academic environment.

Also, a cricketer with good academic ability and with good English skills and the money, may prefer to study overseas which means that he is lost to the local university. In the sixties and seventies, students usually did their first degree in a Sri Lankan university and only went overseas to do post graduate study.