

'Croucher' and son

Tiddy Wijeratne must have been a very good schoolboy cricketer in the 1940's for Mahinda College. This is perhaps why he was chosen to represent the Combined Schools in 1943 against Fairlie Dalpathado's champion schools team from St. Joseph's. Taken in the context of the various prejudices that prevailed at the time, it may be considered a signal honour for any Mahindian in those days to represent the Combined Schools at cricket. Later, Tiddy became a very successful teacher and cricket coach at Mahinda College, and produced some wonderful teams from around the late 50's till almost the mid 60's.

Tiddy migrated to Australia in 1970. He is now in his 80th year and a regular reader of this column on the internet. He has sent me an extraordinary account of two matches that took place way back in the early 1940's and 1950's, and I am happy to allow him the centre stage to recount his own experience as well as what might be termed its sequel, about a decade or so later in England. Both occasions bear a stunning resemblance to each other in terms of the heroics of one man who happens to be the central character in the two stories.

• An unusual cricket match.

"This was an unusual cricket match" says Tiddy. Mahinda College was playing against the Royal Air Force. Way back in 1942, the R.A.F. had a strong squadron based at Koggala, which is about 12 km from Galle".

"They were the war years and most schools had moved out of their permanent premises. Subsequently, there was very little organized

school sports."

"Mahinda College played against the R.A.F. almost every weekend. If we did not play them at cricket, then we played them at soccer. Invariably, we won at cricket but when it came to soccer, the story was different. R.A.F. had some good soccer players and one of them was a man by the name of Todd who had played for the Wolverhampton Wanderers. And Wolves were a top Division I team in England. Todd was also a good cricketer and a fine gentleman."

"Mahinda batted first, and rattled up about 170 runs in just about three and a half hours, leaving the R.A.F. nearly a hour's batting before tea. At the break we had six of them out for about 60, and were heading towards another comfortable win."

• A visitor to the dressing room.

"During the tea break, we had a visitor to our dressing room. He was the next man in for the R.A.F. He was all ready to go to start his innings except that he did not have a bat. And so he came around to borrow one of ours."

"During the war years, cricket bats were very scarce, and therefore very precious. All bats had to be imported from England, and cricket bats would have been at the bottom of list of essentials shipped from England."

"This R.A.F. man looked a lot different to all the others. He was slim, bearded and looked very frail. In fact, he did not look the part of a cricketer at all. So we gave him our new bat - the only one we had - convinced that we could get him out cheaply. He looked pleased as he walked out of the dressing room with our new bat."



• When a tornado hit us!

"When play resumed, our bearded friend with his friendly smile took guard. What followed in the next half hour had to be seen to be believed. It was as if we were hit by a tornado with winds up to 200 km per hour! This frail and ascetic looking man hit our bowlers with such power and precision that all we could do was to retrieve the ball from beyond the boundary with monotonous regularity. Like all tornadoes, this one did not last long. But in the half hour it lasted, it certainly did the damage. Eventually he made the winning hit and we all trooped back into the dressing room."

"Soon afterwards, this strange R.A.F. man entered our dressing room with our bat. As he handed it back we saw that pieces were literally falling off it. What was a brand new bat

just a half hour ago, looked to be in a sorry mess. He told our captain "Don't worry son, you will have a new bat". True to his word, Diana & Company delivered us a new bat within the week."

• The new Chaplain.

"Curious to find out who this new R.A.F. man was, we asked our friend, Todd. All that he was able to tell us was that he was the new Chaplain, Rev. Jessop. We wondered how a man of god could mete out such severe punishment to a bunch of schoolboys."

• The 'Croucher'

"At the time the name Jessop meant little to us. Years later, when I began to read books on cricket, I came across another Jessop - Gilbert Jessop - who played for Gloucestershire and England at the turn of the century. He was known as the 'Croucher' and he had made the fastest Test hundred for many a long year. Maybe the record still stands."

"In one of the books on cricket I purchased a few years ago which contains cricketing letters to the 'Times', a match played in the early fifties is recounted. There in Bristol, England, a certain Rev. Jessop had upset all calculations by smashing the bowlers to all parts of a cricket ground. My attention was drawn to the uncanny similarity between this match and the one played at Galle in the early forties which I have recounted above."

• The father and the son.

"The writer of the letter to the London Times was also a participant in the match he described. And he says he was briefly in touch with the Immortal, when he learnt that Rev.

Jessop was actually, the Croucher's son!"

"It took me over 50 years to unravel the mystery of the bearded R.A.F. chaplain, who gave us a lesson in controlled hitting on the Galle Esplanade in 1942. And I enclose an extract from the book relating to the match played in Bristol, half a century ago".

THE CROUCHER AND HEIR.

From the Principal, Bishop Otter College, Chichester, 23rd May 1974.

Sir, Alan Gibson's tribute to a Gloucestershire father and son (Sportsview, 18th May) recalled a hot west-country morning in the early fifties. Opening the attack for the University of Bristol against a touring Cambridge College, I was deluded by a few successes toward a vision of early lunch and an afternoon swim. A slight delay, a bizz from the pavilion, and a portly figure emerged with a look of mild surprise, fostering our hunch that he might be 'through' the real batting.

What followed was a sharp lesson in line and length, as the best we could offer was peremptorily dismissed to all parts of the ground. Withdrawn, chastened, from the rout to ruminate at third-man, near the score box, I enquired after my mysterious assailant. 'Reverend G. L. Jessop', came the grinning reply. 'We were a bit short, so we picked him up on the way over.

Self esteem repaired, I felt - like Mr. Gibson at his Cornish revelation - briefly in touch with the Immortal.

Yours faithfully,

Gordon McGregor.

Alan Gibson has seen the Reverend Jessop in the manner of his father, a vigorous 80 for Dorset against Cornwall.

A lot more to prove in our chess-Luxman Wijesuriya

by Revata S. Silva

In the wide array of sports spread in this island, chess is outstanding, but for very strange reasons. It is obviously a nightmare for any sports fan or sports journalist who loves to be in a ground or a stadium watching physical actions and movements, thrills and frills of competitions where players sweat for glory. But hang around inside a hall where two people are looking at a sixty four square board, scratching their heads, posing their long faces is surely an irritating thing for any ordinary sports lover who has got used to seeing bodies in action and all the tensions associated with it.

But, if mind and body are two different phenomena according to the traditional world-view, chess is the game for the former. Hiding its deep roots in India, the land of oriental mysticism, chess is the final word of combat strategy put into a sports format. A minimalist articulation of a battle between two armies comprising of kings, queens, knights, bishops, castles and pawns, etc., chess demands you of not your extensive muscle power, as in the host of other sports, but the power of your mind; it is all about evaluation, application and extraordinary, or sometimes maddening, concentration.

Even though it is spread throughout the entire island through schools, clubs and through those who like to have a 'mind-boggling' pastime, chess is a somewhat unknown entity when compared to the other more astir sports.

The game has a controlling body with a history of 20 years. And there is a national championship conducted annually. From recent times, Sri Lanka has become the venue of one of the most prestigious events in the region, the Asian Junior Championship.

It was to get to know the background of chess in Sri Lanka, its origins here and its

greater picture at the international level that the "The Island" met Luxman Wijesuriya, the present Secretary of the Chess Federation of Sri Lanka (CFSL), who has been in the chess scene here for over 30 years while becoming two times national champion in the years 1996 and 2000. While being involved in the hectic work of organizing the on-going Asian Junior Chess Championship in Negombo, he firstly explained the so-called "awkward" nature of the sport that has the notoriety of making its players ludicrous after some years of playing! "That may be due to high amount of concentration they pay on the game for a very long period of time. They have to focus thoroughly on something mental day by day. That should have some physical after-effects, at least in your behavioral pattern. Though this is a mental game, you should be physically fit in chess."

For Instance, a World C'ship match between Gary Kasparov and Gary Karpov once went on for 6 months. They played 48 games at a rate of 2 games per week and at the end Karpov was leading 5-3. But the organizers stopped the match because they felt that both players were in poor health," said Luxman.

History of chess in Sri Lanka -

Unfortunately, there is no written history of the game here. Luxman has published a periodical named "Chess- Game of kings and kings of games," on chess that has sold over 1000 copies.

"N.M. Perera and J.R. Jayawardena are some famous politicians who have played the game here. N.M. has donated his personal chess library to his school Ananda College," Luxman said.

The World C'ship game between Russia's Boris Spassky and America's Bobby Fisher has been a landmark in the history of world chess. It was during the times of 'cold war.'



Sri Lanka's Dimuthu Priyadarshana (right) plays against P.Hohijerine (Iran) at last year's Asian Junior Chess Championship staged in Marawila, Sri Lanka.

The Russian won the first match but Fisher then returned to America citing the fact that his demands were not met by the organizers. One such demand was to allow him to use his own chair that he had been using since childhood for chess.

Later he returned to the venue and won the C'ship. The final result created a huge anger among Russians and an increasing popularity for the game world over. Russia did not even allow Spassky to go out of the county after the match. "The Lankan chess circles too were impressed and encouraged by this incident". Simultaneously to this, a National C'ship too began in 1973 and a private firm like Brookbond came up as sponsors of the game organizing tournaments," explained Luxman.

How was our chess before "Spassky-Fisher scenario"? Luxman said that there were some very good players but the game had been restricted to a very few.

"True that there was a Royal - Thomanian dominance. Gamini Seneviratne, M.Nesaiyah, V.Ambalamana and M. Mahawatte were well-known in the very restricted local chess circles

during the 60s," Luxman said.

Two Parakrama brothers, Christopher and Arjuna, were there during the 70s. Arjuna who later became popular in the country's political spheres captained Sri Lanka and represented the country in three Olympiads held in Argentina, Greece and Switzerland.

"The Royal - Thomanian dominance began to fade away from the mid 70s. Ananda won the Under-15 schools age group in 1974 and became schools overall champ two years later. Two Athurapana brothers, Harsha and Harinlal, of S.Thomas' College emerged during this time. Harsha won three Nationals and the latter won about six.

T.D.R. Peiris won the title twice and then Ishara Weerakoon, Muditha Hettigama, R.T. Amarasinghe and myself won the Nationals time and again. The present winner is Nirosh de Silva. My sister (Suneetha) came from Kotikawatta Rajasinghe MV to win the women's title 10 times. Anoja Seneviratne and Amarangane de Silva were two dominant winners," said Luxman elaborating on some famous names in the sport here.

"Suneetha later took over as the President of the Anatomy Karpov Chess School attached to the Russian Centre in Colombo and did a good job to popularize the game in the country," he added.

Chess Federation -

Ranapala Bodhinagoda had been doing a great service as the President of the SLCF for a long time. Gamini Seneviratne was the President during the year 1997-8.

"A highly notable revival took place under the Presidency of Derrick V. Perera from 1999-02. He earned a lot of international exposure to our chess and now he is the General Secretary of World Chess Federation (FIDE). During his period the highlight was the unity between the two major rivals in the scene, Colombo and Kandy. We could work as a team for our success," explained Luxman.

The Federation conducts four major annual tournaments. Sri Lanka Nationals in both men's and women's categories, the Open Tournament, Junior Nationals and Inter-Club Championships are those tournaments.

How have our players performed in the international level? "We have only two FIDE (International Chess Federation) Masters. They are the two Athurapana brothers. We are yet to produce champions in the upper two categories, International Master and Grand Master.

The game has a huge popularity in the island especially through schools. More than 200 schools play chess because players have a very easy access to the game. But internationally we have a long way to go. We have to forgo all the disputes we have among us and try to work on a broad vision. That's what we are doing at the moment. Truly we have much more to give to the people in this country, as those who are involved in a very different sport," Concluded Luxman.

Around the Premier League football clubs

Java Lane SC folds up and rises again

by Gamini Perera

Amongst the earlier football clubs in Ceylon, Java Lane Football Club was formed in 1925.

An European T. W. Hockley was its first President, while J. A. Tarbat was its Vice-President, with Tom Laxana, as Secretary. The club which was housed in Slave Island catered primarily to the Malay community, the then largest ethnic group in that area.

For a number of years, it was the most impressive football outfit, which dominated the De Mel League and City Football League competitions.

Some of the renowned players who donned the Java Lane colours in the initial years were: the Mowlana Brothers, Basheer, T. K. Buhar, Saman, Hallon, M. A. Hassan (known as Sudu Kotiya), Drahman, Zain Ahamath, Bammon, Muthiah, Muthalip, Hajireen and T. G. Amith. Muthiah, the solitary outside national was its first captain.

Java Lane won the De Mel League City Football League titles in 1926 and 1927 respectively.

In 1927 City Football league final, Java Lane beat United Sports SC by 2 goals to 1.

Wekanda United SC, White Stars SC, Diamond SC and Venus SC, were a few clubs of yore which gave Java Lane a run for their money.

Club folds up

However, after World War II Java Lane began to fold-up. With new clubs emerging on the scene, most of their players began to move away and sought new grass for their feet. For several years, this club went off the beam and was lost. However in recent times, some soccer enthusiasts had resurrected the club and now we see taking part in the City and Colombo league competitions. Even, today, Java Lane fields a very young side in the ongoing Premier League championship. While it is a fine effort to have brought back the 'Old war horse', it has quite a long way to go, before recapturing its former glamour and glitter.

Java Lane is a club as old as the hills. Many a road name in Colombo has been subject to change with the passing of time, but the name Java Lane still continues to remain. Malays, in

and around Slave Island are optimistic that the authorities concerned will not change the Java Lane at any cost.

Java Lane which had produced some of Sri Lanka's foremost soccerites is situated in a by-way off Malay Street and it is opened to debate whether this club or the lane came first.

The club had brought immense popularity to the Malay community and those wizards of old of the famous barefoot era emerged from it. With the old 'uns who did yeoman service to the club with their magical brand of play fading away, the club went into the limbo of the unfortotten once again.

Java Lane SC revived

In 1981, a new chapter in the history of Java Lane FC was written when Fakir Ahmed Yaseen, one of the youngest to assume the Presidency of the City Football League took steps to revive the club and restore it to its past glorious times. As a matter of fact many of those giants of Java Lane are no more.

The stockily built, the late T. K. Buhar who was popularity known as 'T.K.s' in Slave Island led Java Lane to dizzy heights during his day.

'T.K.' represented the club from 1920 to 1938. Many of those titanic clashes of Java Lane were witnessed during 'T.K.' time and it was during his career as captain that Java Lane won such prestigious titles like the Times Cup, the Abdul Rahuman Memorial Trophy and the City Football League 'A' division title.

The club did not have a coach during its herculean days as each player played in his own inimitable style and many of them were bare-footers. Another remarkable achievement of Java Lane was that several of its players were automatic choices for the City league football tournament XIs, which eventually beat the All-Burmese national side and held the famed Mohan Bagan SC, from Calcutta to an exciting 2-all draw.

Some of those gallant Java Lane stars who played for the City league sides were: T. K. Buhar, M. A. Hassan, S. D. R. Johar, T. Habib, Drahman, Sappideen, M. Bassen, T. D. A. Ramblan and the Amjah brothers.

According to the late T. K. Buhar, who was interviewed by this writer several years back, said that one of the best teams which represent-

ed Java Lane was the 1922 team, which, besides winning all the major tournaments taughts some visiting teams a lesson or two in the art of football.

The following squad represented Java Lane FC in the Premier League 2003/04 championships:

(Goal) M. A. M. Azwar, K. Sepa Ushantha. (Defence) T. N. Bagoos, S. H. M. Akram, Roshan Peiris, M. S. Samsudeen, T. H. Sudar, M. Kumaralingam, (Captain), S. D. Perera, T. Ifan Soono, Ranik de Silva (Forwards) A. Sudesh Kumara, Ramlan Bramudeen, K. Suranka, S. Wijayarajah, Kalana Gunaratne, N. M. Sabree, S. H. M. Akram, M. I. Sourajah, S. M. Lattner, A. C. M. Asshiq, M. S. Ziyaudeen, M. Nazar Hamed, M. Siffan Ariff and Mohammed Ramzi, (Coach) M. T. Azeez alias Naim (Manager) M. Premadasa (Club colours) orange, black, green and white.

At the 2002/03 Premier League championship, Java Lane FC was placed at position No. 8. From 26 matches, they had won 9, drawn 7, lost 10. Goals for 34 goals against 41 and points scored: 34.