

A Tribute to Lucky Vitharana

1954 Bradby - The day a legend was born

by Quentin Israel

The 1954 Bradby season was the last time the fixture card of Trinity was limited to three school matches. They were the Bradby games, with St. Peter's thrown in between these two games. The following year, many other schools, including S. Thomas', joined the fraternity of Rugby playing schools.

Prior to the commencement of the 1954 season, the school had the misfortune to have suffered a severe epidemic of mumps, which affected mostly the boarders from whom the bulk of ruggers came, causing the school authorities to close school for a period up to three days before the first Bradby, which was scheduled to be played on the CR & FC grounds at Longden Place, Colombo.

Most boarders came from Colombo, Kurunegala, Matale and distant places like Matara and the question of billeting players with friends in Kandy, was never even considered. Furthermore, the thought of a ruggere, particularly if he was a boarder, being a carrier of the mumps virus, was always a possibility. The inevitable happened, Rugby practices came to a grinding halt.

Mr. Harry Hardy, who played the dual role of Master in Charge and Coach, tried unsuccessfully in getting a postponement from

Royal. Since the inception of the series, begun in 1945, Royal had won only twice in nine games, under Ashy Cader and Geoff Weinman.

The game over this period of time had been fought fiercely with no quarter asked and none whatsoever given, and they would be damned, notwithstanding all that rubbish and hogwash about sportsmanship, if they would allow this golden opportunity to reduce the deficit of wins, to elude them. In passing, I may add that had the roles been reversed, I feel almost certain that Trinity would have relented and acceded to a similar request.

However, in the euphoria of anticipated victory, they, alas! failed to take into reckoning "The Lucky Vitharana Factor", a legend in the embryonic stage which burst into being at the final whistle of this momentous game. Lucky Vitharana was an anachronism of his time. He was a swashbuckling buccaneer who should have been born centuries ago. He was not a Lochinvar, for romance was furthest from his mind. He was a dashing D'artangan, a musketeer from the pages of Dumas, or from the pages of the Talisman of Sir Walter Scott, a Saracen Caliph, Saladin, with mocking scorn and flashing scimitar, taunting the Crusaders.

His team was not a strong one, laden with

freshers and totally unfit for want of practice. On the third day of practice, at the end of which the team was chosen, the College Rugby authorities, comprising Mr. Hardy, Dr. Sangakkara and a few other concerned Trinitians whose names I cannot recollect and who had already, much to our chagrin and disappointment conceded defeat, asked us to sit and embarked on a homily on how to keep the margin of defeat small with a view to retaining the Bradby on the Second leg in Kandy, with a better aggregate. This was their uninspiring and repeated refrain.

Lucky was visibly angered and when there was a momentary lull in Mr. Hardy's address, Lucky interjected "Boys stay back I wish to speak to you". His voice was imperious. Mr. Hardy got the message and cut short the rest of his lamentable exhortation.

They stayed back and waited to hear Lucky, but he was deafeningly silent. The message went home and they quietly departed. Here we were crestfallen, dejected and written off as a defeated side by our own mentors, when suddenly our feeling of impending doom was transformed when lucky in a Regimental Sergeant Major's voice thundered. "over my dead body shall we lose"

The words of McCauley flashed across my mind.

"Then up spoke brave Horatius, the Captain of the Gate. To everyman upon this earth, Death cometh soon or late, And how can man die better than facing fearful odds, For the ashes of his fathers and the temple of the gods?"

I must mention that Lucky gave himself unbridled licence to use terminology which was definitely not permitted in college. That perhaps explains why though eligible to be a prefect, by virtue of being Rugby Captain, he stagnated as a monitor. For obvious reasons I cannot quote him ad verbatim and therefore the forceful punch of his speech cannot be effectively conveyed, but to record it in acceptable language, he said, "Forget what all those old cronies told you about defeat. As long as I captain this side, we shall not lose. We shall tackle them to a standstill to a degree that hurts". He said much more.

He was true to his word and led up front by example. In fact he almost succeeded in altering the structure of Lionel Almeida's face, when times with out number he violently rubbed his face on the ground, prior to jabbing him with his elbow on his ribs. Lionel will bear silent testimony to this. Lionel played as scrum-half in this game and had his baptism of fire. However, he gallantly persevered to become one of the best rugby players of his school and his country. Lucky successfully broke the link between forwards and backs, having tormented him enough. Trinity won five-nil, with David Frank scor-

ing a try off a scrum near the Royal goal line.

We thought the return match in Kandy would be a cake-walk, but it was not so. T. L. K. Mendis, the previous year's captain who played stand-off for Royal, scored a dazzling try, which was converted to give them an early lead of five-nil. Trinity reduced the lead with an unconverted try, to five-three, and the game was fast approaching its final stages with Royal fighting fiercely, for though they wishfully thought they would win the match, they were yet short of points to win the Bradby.

Lucky had other ideas. He not only wanted the Bradby but wanted a win in the second leg as well. With seconds inexorably ticking to the final blast, he performed the impossible. He carried virtually the entire Royal pack and in his ungainly gait covered a distance of almost 15 yards to collapse over the Royal goal line to give Trinity an unforgettable and glorious win. He won his Rugby Lion.

He was proud of his school and proud of the jersey he wore. He was one who was responsible, together with many others of his kind, for instilling mortal fear in the hearts of his opponents, at the sight of the red, gold and blue jersey.

Alas! This is no more, and so is he

Bradby Rugby in the mighty fifties

by Gamini Weerasinghe

The golden years of Rugby at Trinity College were the 1950's when the Bradby was won on six consecutive years. During these years, except for one tie in 1955, all the Royal matches were won from 1952 to 1957. This period also coincides with that master builder Principal Mr. Norman Walter's tenure of office. How he enlisted all the masters in College who could take practice is a wonder and no payments were made to any. As for boys, it was compulsory for all of them to be at rigger the following day. This happened to me in 1954 and thank very much for that warming up, which made me a rigger player.

During the six years the best team produced was in 1956, which is perhaps the best ever produced by Trinity. The goal line was never crossed. At the end of the season a challenge went to all schools combined to meet Trinity, which was not accepted and it was followed by a team from CRFU (Ceylon Rugby Football Union) probably the All Ceylon, which again was not accepted. The result was the first ever combined schools XV being formed. It was captained by Royalist Lionel Almeida and little wonder that there were nine Trinitians in that team which met the CRFU XV. This team consisted of eight foreigners and was captained by Malcolm Wright and also included that famous Royalist No. 8, Ashy Cader. The CRFU team barely managed to win and we state that if the Trinity team was sent we would have won for the team work. That Trinity XV produced nine All Ceylon caps and two captains. How does it compare to today?

There were no boots with aluminium studs and the faithful cobbler Brodie living down Hill Street a few yards from the municipal junction would place a circular piece of leather and drive four nails into it so that the stud will be long enough to hold. We would faithfully not only polish the boots but also give it a coating of dubbing for preservation of the leather. These studs wear off quite fast but the danger was not on slipping but the nails that would protrude any one who catches it on any part of the body. I had only seven sutures.

Having got the boots ready the next was the jersey and stockings, which we had to buy. I am grateful to Mr. Gordon Burrows for having provided them for me. It is a pride to wear a faded jersey for that denotes seniority. The shorts were long and in the same style as the ones worn to school. There was no head gear, shoulder pads or any other except for the shin guards.

The ball was a leather ball with a bladder inside and laced on one side. It can turn out to anything between oval shape to any other shape. Bogambara was very muddy at that time and at least an inch of mud sticks to the ball. It is a wonder I still cannot fathom how Lionel Almeida or Ken de Joodt kicked that ball or Franklin Jacobs dribbled it so well. One new ball was seen for a season.

In some cases the rules were hard like the 'knock ons' when the ball had to be caught in one clean catch and if fumbled even in the air it was a 'knock on' but wing forwards flankers of today had the best time. They were allowed to back and move with the ball in the scrums and breathe down the neck of the slightly built scrum halves and pounce on him like a leopard. How I enjoyed it. Unfortunately the value

of a try was only three points therefore the scores of the fifties does not compare with the scores of today.

Rigger players had to be tough. Replacements were allowed only within the first five minutes. Even if it dwindles to eight players after the first five minutes there would not be a replacement. No water was given to the players except probably at half time. One could however be sure of the slice of orange at the break. The host team had to provide for both teams.

No tickets were sold for the matches yet even the Bradby no seats were provided and the number of spectators were about 500. The Principal of Trinity was watching the Bradby standing on a bench and it is told that in the excitement he had fallen from the bench.

The food was mostly carbohydrates and beef. Beef was parboiled and was taken after practice at the expense of our parents, who I am sure would have had a very large food bill. On one occasion after a great victory we were taken to the 'thosai' boutique near the municipal junction by our Master In-charge, Mr. Bertie Dias. His challenge was that if we eat everything in the boutique he would pay for it and if not we would have to pay for it. Thanks to Odayar and your faithfully Mr. Bertie Dias had to foot the bill.

Then came the Bradby which we had been looking forward to so much. We met at the Kandy Railway Station and travelled by train. The Royal team and some old boys met us at Fort Railway Station and were transported in cars to Royal College. We were accommodated in the third story of the building opposite the present basket ball courts. There was a canteen at the ground floor. There were inviting hornets nest hanging from the gutters and our first annual task was to break these in the night which didn't bring good results to those walking in the early morning light the following day. We were treated very well by the Royalists and friendships made last to this day. How I was delighted to meet R. K. Thas, who is domiciled in England, last Saturday and also Lionel Almeida.

The first leg was played at the Race Course, which was the CH & FC grounds. These grounds were also like Bogambara after a rain. Fortunately, the weather was clear, there fore the ball was less than ten pounds (5kg) in weight. The three quarters ran well and as stated by one reporter the game would have warmed many an old heart. Yes at that time there were very small reports and hardly any photographs published in the news papers. However there was quite a complimentary report which stated "I cannot see Royal winning the return match in Kandy even if they improve beyond recognition it would be a remarkable performance if they defeat this Trinity XV." Trinity won by 3 tries and two penalties to nil. The match was refereed by Stanley Livera.

At that match that gutty player Michael de Alwis had his shoulder dislocated. He was put in plaster. There is an unwritten law which states that a player had to play in the two Bradbys to qualify for colours. Ten days after Michael was put in plaster he cut the plaster himself and came for practice and declared to Mr. Bertie Dias that he was found fit to play by the doctors. Mr. Dias not wanting to take any chances got him to tackle the heavy weights of the team with that shoulder. Michael says to this day that he remembers

that pain after each tackle and how he went through it. He played in the second Bradby and won his colours but the shoulder was dislocated again. He was put in plaster for the second time but when he was selected to play for Combined Schools XV he once again removed the plaster and once again the shoulder was dislocated. Those who have watched Rigger in the sixties will remember Michael's choric shoulder. To add to his misery he played as hooker but went on to captain All Ceylon.

The second leg was at Bogambara. The Royalists came by train and were met by us at the Kandy railway station and taken to a Trinity class room near the main hall. There they were put up. On the day of the Bradby I would take tow eggs, mixed in a glass of lime and glucose and salt. Then and directed by our skipper David Frank I kept a pillow under the neck and rested. At the time of the match, dressed in College Jersey with boots thrown across the shoulder I walked along the railway line to Bogambara for the match. The team met at Bogambara. The game itself was a very hard fought match even though we scored in the first five minutes. There was Maurice Angie of Royal who was a handful and the booming kicks to touch by Lionel Almeida. Once again Trinity won by a goal and a try. The referee was C. Bennett. In this match the other dare devil Odayar fractured his collarbone in the first half but as replacement could not be made, continued to play and fractured the other shoulder but played the full match. That is the reason why he is standing in an odd position in the rigger photograph taken after the season.

There was also the special; incident during the season when the principal of one college sent to the other principal a parcel of beer stoppers and cigarette butts. The principal of the other college did not even inquire from the Principal who sent them and punished the players. Some who were college officers were demoted and disciplinary action was taken. What was moving was the sympathy of the other school for the players who were punished. Sentiments were expressed when they met for the Combined School XV match. Such was the discipline and the friendship and love that players had between them.

Having won both matches we retained the Bradby Shield. We had to be given a treat for the season, which ended well. Atreat we did have for we were taken in an ordinary road bus to Badulla and put up at Uva College. The Old Boys of Trinity, who were in and around Badulla led by S. B. Pilapitiya were determined to tarnish our record and cross the line. They adopted a wonderful tac-tic. We had a team who were able to do justice to food. They knew our weakness. We were taken to Aanwela's for lunch. What a lay out there was. Our skipper a great disciplinarian and a leader had given the pep talk that a light lunch should be taken and to be careful of chillies and oil. Odayar was looking at the food with craving eyes and I was not far away. David seeing our plight just said lets forget about the match. Didn't we eat? We ate and ate and even got up and went a few rounds the table and sat down and ate again. This was not only to the delight of our charming host but also to the old boys who had come for the lunch for we had walked into their trap. We hobbled into Uva College, which was not far away. And fell asleep and were really drowsy. About half an hour before

the match we were taken for tea, which was equally good with lots of goodies. At this time flood gated were open and David did not have anything to say about restrictions and we again pitched into the food. But that was not the last we were immediately taken to the grounds and were asked to play. By which time the Uva team had got ready and were waiting for us. When we got on the field the greatest problem was to lift our stomachs. There was no score in the first half but we managed to score a try and

win that match too.

Three members of the team migrated to other countries while eight took to planting, which was the plum job at that time. Four obtained top mercantile posts. With such lucrative jobs none thought of going for higher studies.

Such are the memories not only of one of the greatest Rigger seasons of Trinity but lasting bonds of friendship made between the two schools. The friendships last to date.

What more than the Bradby for Royalists?



A Bradby Shield rugby encounter in progress.

Royal, the schools rugby champs, will miss the Milo President's Trophy knockout tournament, because the Sri Lanka Schools Rugby Football Association (SLSRFA) has refused to accommodate a request that their quarterfinal match be postponed by a few days. Royal had made this request as the match clashes with the second leg of the Bradby Shield encounter against Trinity. There have been allegations that the SLSRFA has been unfair to Royal.

Going by statements issues to the media, Royal don't seem to be too upset about having been forced to give up the trophy they won last year without even touching the oval shaped ball. Some people are surprised. Some newspapers found the issue important enough to give the story much prominence. As an old Royalist and a keen follower of rugby football, I find the whole issue quite amusing.

A colleague informed me about Royal's non-participation using a tone complemented by facial expressions that expressed a two-word sentiment: "big news". Most non Royalists fail to understand one thing about how Royalists view the rugby calendar. For Royal, a successful season is one where the

Bradby Shield is annexed. Of course, it would be nice to win all the other matches, become league champs and knock-out champs. All these triumphs, however, are mere sub-plots to the main story line: beating Trinity. There have been countless occasions where Royal has withdrawn from the knock-out tournament. Nothing is more easy for Royal than letting go of such things. Most non-Royalists will not and indeed cannot understand. Trinitians most definitely will, for they see the Bradby in much the same way. "But this is a prestigious tournament!" my colleague insists. "What is more prestigious for Royal's rugby than the Bradby?" is my answer and I believe many Royalists would agree.

My friend doesn't give up. "But it is the President's Trophy. Isn't keeping away an insult to the president?"

"Presidents have come and gone, they will continue to come and go. The Bradby remains," is my response.

So good luck to those who are taking part in the President's Trophy. Have fun. We have other business to take care of. Sorry.

An Old Royalist