

Cricket - the way it should be played *Ananda Nalanda - 81st Battle of the Maroons*

by Varuna Ratnaweera



Next Saturday and Sunday, 6th and 7th March we will all have the pleasure of witnessing one of the best schools cricket encounters in Sri Lanka when the Battle of the Maroons, between Ananda and Nalanda, is worked out at the SSC grounds for the 81st occasion.

This is considered as one of the best, not only because these two schools have produced so many great cricketers in the past but more importantly as the event has been and continues to be worked out with great friendship and camaraderie setting an example on how this great game should be played.

The above picture of a car carrying two flags of Ananda and Nalanda was nominated the “Picture of the day” in the Daily Mirror on 7th March 2009 demonstrating - to quote from the paper carried that day – “what the country needs very much at this point in time – peace and harmony”.

We should all be thankful to Daminda Harsha Perera who had captured this photograph during the first session of the Maroons’ Battle last year. With that timely click of his camera he reminded the rest of the country what cricket should be all about, a game between two teams, not to outdo each other but to learn the lessons of good qualities it offers while fostering friendship and camaraderie across boundaries irrespective of any differences.

This is the spirit in which the Maroons Battle has been worked out over the last 80 years. It has not mattered which team won the match, or gained honours, as long as good cricket and sportsmanship was displayed on and off the field.

There have been many outstanding cricketers gifted to Sri Lanka by these two premier schools over the years and their achievements and contributions to the country are too numerous to mention. However I would only say that a significant feature that has almost gone unnoticed is that players from Ananda and Nalanda have captained Sri Lanka in all three versions of the game - Test Cricket, One Day International Cricket and T20 Cricket. Bandula Warnapura, Arjuna Ranathunga, Roshan Mahanama, Marvan Atapattu and Mahela Jayawardane doing the honours for the country.

It would be a fitting tribute to all the learned Coaches and Cricket Masters of these two institutions to say that it is their effort and hard work that have brought out not only the great cricketing skills of so many players but also the exemplary sportsmanship that they have displayed at this annual encounter, now in its 81st version.

From **Gerry Gooneratne** and **Dhanasiri Weerasinghe**, to **Jayantha Seneviratne** and **Anuruddha Polonnowita** and to the two brothers **Nelson Mendis** and **Lionel Mendis** (who moulded the junior teams of both Ananda and Nalanda) during the 70’s - to mention only a few of them, will no doubt have been proud that they were able to nurture these stars in the making in their younger days to become world class performers in later years.

The best salutation and honour that they can be afforded is to continue playing this noble game in its true spirit and sportsmanship as it has always been done, in this 81st Battle of the Maroons too and way beyond that in years to come.