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# Sunday Observer

Sunday, September 29, 2019

*Schoolgirl  
Cricketer of  
the Year 2019*

**Umesha  
Thimeshani**

*Devapathiraja College,  
Rathgama*

*Schoolboy Cricketer  
of the Year 2019*

**Kamil Mishara**

*Royal College, Colombo*

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# EDITORIAL

It was a night to remember and savor with one of the legends of Sri Lankan cricket, Aravinda de Silva, rewarding tomorrow's star at the 41st edition of the Observer-Mobitel Schoolboy Cricketer of the Year 2019 at the Grand Ballroom of Hilton Colombo, last weekend.

From humble beginnings at Nawarangahala in 1978/79 to the posh Grand Ballroom of the Hilton Colombo, the contest has gone from strength to strength via BMICH and Galadari Hotel. Year by year, the show has improved in every aspect to become the best in rewarding the champion of champions from schools.

Even with the initial sponsor Hali-borango to Bata Shoe Company and current sponsor SLT Mobitel, the quality and standards of the contest has improved every year since Sri Lanka's first school cricket awards show.

It has become the showpiece of Sri Lanka school cricket that has given birth to legendary cricketers from world champions to Asia Cup winners, man of the series winners at ICC World Cup tournaments, highest wicket taker in Test cricket, Chief ICC Match Referee and the best umpire in the ICC elite panel. In addition, the Mega Show has produced several other Sri Lankan captains, a record number of double centuries in Tests, most number of players in a world champion team, and the list goes on.

There was a packed house at the Hilton Grand Ballroom to enjoy the glamour and enthusiasm of the Mother of all Shows, producing hundreds of top cricketers as a feeding centre for the Sri Lanka national team.

The presence of former Sri Lanka captain Aravinda de Silva as the chief guest added more colour to the event with his charming wife Anushka. The established energetic couple of compères Clifford Richards and Sonali Perera were able to keep the show glittering and going with their expertise.

Most importantly, the sponsor of the show SLT Mobitel once again played an important role for the 12th consecutive year, enabling the Sunday Observer and its publisher Lake House to stage yet another successful show. Chairman of Sri Lanka Telecom and SLT Mobitel Kumarasinghe Sirisena and CEO of SLT Mobitel Nalin Perera have always played leading roles in making this show a resounding success. Lake House Chairman Krishantha Cooray too has contributed towards the success with his expertise and innovative ideas.

Kamil Mishara of Royal College, Co-

lombo was adjudged the Observer-Mobitel Schoolboy Cricketer 2019 while Umesha Themeshani of Devapathiraja College, Rathgama was named as the first Observer-Mobitel Schoolgirl Cricketer 2019 at the glamorous night which had plenty of entertainment including star performer Lahiru Perera of Rambari fame.

The Observer-Mobitel Schoolboy Cricketer of the Year has remained the most sought after and looked forward to event in local schools calendar and there is a general belief that winning this award would inspire the winners to have a tilt at making it to the Sri Lanka national team in double quick time.

There are plenty of genuine reasons to have such a common belief as from the very first winner Ranjan Madugalle, the Observer Schoolboy Cricketers have produced many individuals who have gone on to represent the country.

For example, Sri Lanka's first Test half centurion Arjuna Ranatunga made it to the Sri Lanka team as a schoolboy.

Madugalle who scored the second fifty ever in Tests, also in the inaugural match against England in February 1982, made another first. Madugalle, still being a schoolboy in his final year at Royal College, made it to Sri Lanka's ICC World Cup team in 1979 in the pre-Test era.

Even Sri Lanka's world champion team in 1996, which beat Australia by seven wickets in the final at Lahore, had no less than seven players, including the captain Ranatunga, who had won the Observer Schoolboy Cricketer of the Year award. Even when it came to captaincy, six top former Sri Lanka captains produced have been winners at the Observer Cricketer of the Year show.

This year's selections were made by a special panel headed by Sri Lanka Under-19 head coach and former Sri Lanka captain Hashan Tillekaratne. He was backed by the ex-co of the Sri Lanka Schools Cricket Association (SLSCA) and members of the umpires association. Hence, we had the blessings of Sri Lanka Cricket and SLSCA as well as umpires.

These are some of the memorable happenings among many that would tell how the Observer Schoolboy Cricketer of the Year contest has been associated with Sri Lankan cricket history. The event has been the feeder pool for the national team, providing an ideal opportunity for the next generation of cricketers once they graduate from the Observer Schoolboy Cricketer of the Year 'cricketing university'.

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# Cricket has taught me more than what I've learnt in a classroom – Aravinda

By Sa'adi Thawfeeq

**T**here is a common saying that "all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy" and, in this aspect, former Sri Lanka cricket captain and legendary cricketer Aravinda de Silva has followed this proverb to the very letter.

"When I started, as a young little boy like you'll, one thing I really enjoyed was playing cricket, more so playing sports. Like any other child, I didn't enjoy studies very much, which I keep telling my wife all the time. When my children want to enjoy sports, she says studies are more important, and that's one thing I don't agree with her, but she keeps pressing me not to keep advising the children in that manner," said De Silva at the 41st Observer-Mobitel School Cricketer Awards presentation at Hilton Colombo where



he was the chief guest.

"But there is a reason for me to say it. The reason being that, for me to achieve what I have achieved today, the sport of cricket

has taught me so much in life and also taught me more than what I've learnt in a classroom."

Rolling back the years when he was a child, De Silva said, "I remember going back home after school and the first thing I would want is to meet my friends and either go and play cricket, rugby, soccer, tennis, badminton or whatever sport we could get together and play on that particular day.

"My life carried on like that. My mother always pushed me to do my studies and my father was one person who always let me do enjoyed. There came a time where I had to take some serious decisions. Why I want to tell you the story is because you need to understand that the fame you see is not the reality of life.

"When I continued my sport and there was a decision to be made when I had to sit for my 'A' levels. I was playing cricket for my school and then suddenly I got picked to the national side to tour England. There was a decision I had to make, whether to go to



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England or whether I am going to stay and do my 'A' levels. I remember my father and mother having a big argument over this. My mother wanted me to stay back and do my 'A' levels and my father came up to me and asked 'Son, what do you like to do?' My obvious answer was to be on that tour to England and that was something I was always dreamt of and when that opportunity came I told him that this is what I wanted to do.

"Without any hesitation I remember what he told me. He said, 'Son, you've got a roof over your head, so you don't have to worry. You go ahead and do what you really enjoy doing.' That was the beginning and I told my father that I would come back and seriously focus and continue my studies. I went on that tour and it was quite a successful one for me. I played my first test match at Lord's as the 'baby' of the team - I was only 17 years of age. I came back and told my father that I will fulfill the promise I made to him before I left," De Silva said.

Recollecting his thoughts, De Silva said, "Though we had practices on a regular basis, I told my father that I would attend some classes after practices and then look forward to the exam. The whole year went ahead, I used to finish practices and go for my classes at about 8.30-9 and finish at about 10.30-11 in the night and I got to the stage where the exam was around the corner.

"Unlike nowadays, the tours were staggered over three months before you get another tour so I had some time to do my studies. When I was just about to sit for my 'A' levels, the Cricket Board announced another tour of Australia and, unfortunately or fortunately, I don't know, I was picked to tour again. It was a crucial time and I had to decide whether

**"That particular day I realized the kind of effort and the sacrifice you would have to make to achieve what he (Viv Richards) has achieved all through his career. We see only a part of it on television and we think it comes very easy for him because he is naturally talented and the way he goes out there and faces any bowler without any fear. He's been very successful over a period of time"**

to do my 'A' levels or to go on that tour. The same situation arose at home with my father and mother, but unfortunately my mother had to be let down again and I decided to go on that tour which actually turned the corner for me," he said.

Meeting his childhood hero West Indian great Viv Richards on a flight from Melbourne to Sydney taught De Silva that nothing comes easy in life.

"That particular day I realized the kind of effort and the sacrifice you would have to make to achieve what he has achieved all

through his career. We see only a part of it on television and we think it comes very easy for him because he is naturally talented and the way he goes out there and faces any bowler without any fear. He's been very successful over a period of time," said De Silva.

"In my career, I realized that, unless you put in that amount of hard work off the field and learn from people and discipline myself to be successful, you will never be able to achieve what you want to achieve in the long term. It's like a sustainable business, you

can have a flash in the pan, have a good couple of years, but to be sustainable you've got to be disciplined and structured.

"Today, what I have learnt from this game of cricket is something amazing. I run an organization with about 1300 people and I deploy most of the learning which I have acquired through my crick- eting career, on how to be successful."

**"In my career, I realized that, unless you put in that amount of hard work off the field and learn from people and discipline myself to be successful, you will never be able to achieve what you want to achieve in the long term"**



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# Royal's prized catch fulfills date with destiny

By Allaam Ousman

**R**oyalist Kamil Mishara is determined to bring the World Cup to Sri Lanka after being crowned the Schoolboy Cricketer of the Year.

The 18-year-old dashing left hand batsman joins a galaxy

of stars such as Ranjan Madugalle, Arjuna Ranatunga, Roshan Mahanama and Asanka Gurusinghe who have won the plum, receiving the prestigious award from none other than Sri Lanka cricket legend Aravinda de Silva who was the chief guest at school cricket's most anticipated event.

"I am very happy to receive the award. It is something I have been dreaming of since I started playing school cricket as a young boy," said Mishara who also received the National award for Best Batsman.

"My ambition is to represent the Sri Lanka national team as soon as possible and bring back the World Cup to our country," said the lanky teenager who has already made his mark for the Sri Lanka Under 19 team.

Rajapakse Vidana Pathiranalage Kamil Mishara had a phenomenal season reeling off centuries against both local and international opposition, including a monumental double century against Ananda College. His record highest individual score for Royal of 250 runs came off 274



balls including 32 fours and 5 sixes.

He also cracked two centuries against the visiting Australia Under 19 team, albeit in a losing cause, and was the most consistent batsman during an ODI series at home against Pakistan Under 19 notching three half centuries and also leading the side in the final two matches. He was also Man of the Series during the Bangladesh tour.

So he is not only a run-machine letting the bat do the talking most of the time but is also being groomed for leadership, having captained Team Colombo to victory in the Under 19 Super Provincial Tournament.

His hunger to score runs began at an early age when he started playing cricket at Mahanama Vidyalaya, Panadura with his first coach being former Sri Lanka captain Dinesh Chandimal. Having talent is one thing but to perform is different. He made his entry into school

cricket by scoring 1,000 runs in his maiden season at Under 13 level.

He continued to accumulate runs with a consistency unmatched to catch the eye of not only Sri Lanka's junior selectors but also Royal College, Colombo which he joined in 2017 when Thilina Kandamby was coach. His life changed and a promising career blossomed thereafter.

"After joining Royal, I got an opportunity to showcase my skills further. It changed my life. I am thankful to old boys of Royal for supporting me a lot and encouraging me. I also improved my technique," said Mishara who came under the wing of former Royal and Sri Lanka opening batsman Jehan Mubarak, also a southpaw. He also remembers with gratitude the advice and support he got from Sri Lanka greats like Hashan Tillakaratne, Chaminda Vaas and Upul Chandana, in addition to Farveez Maharoof and Prasanna Jayawardena at various stages of his career.

"They gave me a helping hand and were always encouraging me," said Mishara whose idol was Sri Lanka legend Mahela Jayawardena. "From my small days I like him and presently I follow Virat Kohli."

**"My ambition is to represent the Sri Lanka national team as soon as possible and bring back the World Cup to our country"**

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# Lion-hearted all-rounder from Rathgama

By Allaam Ousman

**A**ll-rounder Umesha Thimeshani of Devapathiraja College, Rathgama is aiming for the skies after becoming the inaugural recipient of Schoolgirl Cricketer of the Year 2019 award at the 41st Observer-Mobitel School Cricketer Awards ceremony which took place on September 20 at a gala ceremony at Hilton Colombo.

Captain of the champion girls team Devapathiraja College this season, the 18-year-old hard-hitting batswoman and off-spin bowler represents the future of Sri Lanka women's cricket.

Umesha has already gained national recognition being selected to represent Sri Lanka for their series against South Africa earlier this year, being the youngest member of the squad. She made her Women's Twenty20 International cricket debut for Sri Lanka against South Africa Women on February 1, 2019 and her Women's One Day International cricket debut for Sri Lanka, also against South Africa Women, on February 11, 2019.

"I am very happy to get an award. This is the first time I got an award like this. It is a very happy

day for me to become the first ever Schoolgirl Cricketer of the Year," said Umesha.

Having also bagged the Best Batswoman runner-up award, Umesha is dreaming of more glory.

"My ambition is to bring the World Cup to Sri Lanka," said the teenage cricket star whose love for the sport knows no bounds.

She got hooked onto the game while watching it on television before venturing out to play softball cricket with boys in her neighbourhood.

"I first watched matches on TV. Thereafter, I used to play cricket on the road in front of our house. Then I started playing softball cricket with my friends in the neighbourhood. I got a liking to the game after that," said Umesha, who raised her hand when Nishantha Kumara, a school teacher of Devapathiraja, signed up girls who were inter-

ested in playing cricket to form a school team.

"When Nishantha Sir selected a side, I grabbed the opportunity to play for my school. I have been playing leather ball cricket since 2014," said Umesha. And the rest is history as she became a vital cog in Devapathiraja's dominance in schoolgirl cricket leading them to become champions.

Nishantha described her as a hard-hitting batsman who can go a long way.

Ranjan Lasath and Mahesh Sandaruwan have moulded the uncut gem Umesha into a fine cricketer. She is passionate about the game and has an air of confidence unlike ordinary players.

Umesha Thimeshani is destined to go places in the world of cricket inspired by the Observer-Mobi-

tel Schoolgirl Cricketer of the Year 2019 award.

"I must thank the organizers for conducting an event like this and more importantly recognizing the talents of schoolgirls playing cricket," said Umesha, the lion-hearted cricketer from down south hailing from Rathgama in Galle.

**"I must thank the organizers for conducting an event like this and more importantly recognizing the talents of schoolgirls playing cricket"**



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# Sports star with pedigree as a cricketer

By Allaam Ousman

**A**ntonian Theeksha Gunasinghe is a talented rugby player but he is determined to pursue his cricket career inspired after bagging the Most Popular Schoolboy Cricketer of the Year 2019 award.

The 19-year-old left-handed wicket keeper/batsman from St. Anthony's College, Katugastota was elated after receiving this prestigious award in addition to being Best Batsman (Division II) runner-up.

"I have not won any personal award earlier. I got the Best Batsman runner-up this year. That was unexpected. That was my first personal award. This (Most Popular Schoolboy Cricketer of the Year) is the biggest award in my career," said the diminutive cricketer who has pedigree as a sports star coming from a cricketing family.

"I'm coming from a cricketing background. My grandfather Sena Kalpage played for Nalanda. My two uncles Ruwan and Nuwan Kalpage both played at the top level. My elder brother Nimesha Gunasinghe captained St. Anthony's in 2014 and plays for Nondescripts Cricket Club," said Theeksha proudly.

But having the pedigree is one thing and achieving excellence on the field is different. He seems to have the Midas touch in the field of sports.

"I was about 10 years old when I started playing cricket for St. Anthony's. I represented all age groups from under 13 and also captained all College junior teams," said Theeksha who captained St. Anthony's in his final season leading from the front by scoring 1,100 runs.

"My best performance was against St. Joseph's College, Colombo for the Murali-Vaas Trophy which were able to win outright after 27 years. I scored 142 and we won by an innings. That was the standout performance for me," said Theeksha who achieved his goal of seeing the Antonians gain promotion to Division I.

"That was my main focus because we were playing in Division II for about four years. Our main focus was promotion of College to Division I. Luckily I was able to lead my team to that goal after being runners-up this season," he said.

"I am extremely happy and grateful to everyone who voted for me starting from my family. They put in a lot of effort. They made a huge contribution and then my school as well. As soon as they saw my name in the newspaper, the Principal, Vice Principal and teachers, they all got together and organized a huge campaign within the school to make sure I get votes, day in and day out. I also want to thank all my friends, well wishers and old boys from different parts of the world," said Theeksha who also excelled in the field of rugby playing as scrum half and fly half.

"I captained all junior College rugby teams. I was in the 15 which was selected for the Youth Commonwealth Games in 2017 in Bahamas. I did not tour because I was a stand-by. So I got National schools rugby colours but my main focus was cricket at school," said Theeksha who has been part of national development squads.

Among his idols is the 40th Observer-Mobitel Schoolboy Cricketer of the Year 2018 Hasitha Boyagoda of Trinity. "My favourite player is Virat Kohli. I love his aggression. Then Kumar Sangakkara and my own brother Nimesha and Hasitha who was from a rival school Trinity but we played together and against each other. He is one of my heroes too," said Theeksha who is a bright student academically as well, awaiting his A/L results before deciding his future.

"If I get a chance to play cricket for a club or call-up for a squad or overseas, I'll consider the opportunity. My current focus is studies," said Theeksha, a level-headed cricketer who is not carried away by success.



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# Going down memory lane

By Dinesh Weerawansa

**D**ynamic Kamil Mishara became only the fourth Royalist to be crowned Observer-Mobitel Schoolboy Cricketer of the Year in the 41-year-old cherished history of Sri Lanka's oldest school cricket awards competition.

Besides Ranjan Madugalle (1978-79), the former Royal, NCC and Sri Lanka captain turned present ICC Chief Match Referee, the other Royalists to win the Observer Schoolboy Cricketer of the Year main award are Test player Roshan Jurangpathy (1986) and Sri Lanka poolist Bhanuka Rajapakse (2010 and 2011). Nevertheless, the only Royalist to win the coveted title twice was Rajapakse.

Apart from Royal's four occasions of crowning glory, the only other school which had produced a greater number of Observer Schoolboy Cricketers of the Year main award winners are from Ananda.

Starting from the second ever to win the title after Madugalle in 1980, Arjuna Ranatunga, Ananda has produced seven Observer Schoolboy Cricketer of the Year main award winners.

Besides Sri Lanka's World Cup winning captain Ranatunga who won twice in 1980 and 1982, the other Anandians to become Observer Schoolboy Cricketers of the Year are his brother and Sri Lanka player Sanjeewa Ranatunga (1988), former Sri Lanka captain Marvan Atapattu (1990), Sri Lanka Test player Thilan Samaraweera (1994 and 1995), Sri Lanka player Muthumudalige Pushpakumara (1999), Malith Gunathillake (2007) and former Sri Lanka captain Dinesh Chandimal (2009).

Winning the Observer-Mobitel Schoolboy Cricketer of the Year is a once in a lifetime experience for any cricketer. How come that honour is experienced twice? Yes, there are only a selected lot who have been very fortunate to experience that honour of being champion of the champions.



**Ranjan Madugalle receives the Schoolboy Cricketer of the Year award from Edwin Tillekeratne, the Deputy Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Sports in 1979**

**W**inning the Observer-Mobitel Schoolboy Cricketer of the Year is a once in a lifetime experience for any cricketer.

In the four decade long proud history of Observer-Mobitel Schoolboy Cricketer of the Year, six cricketers, including the great Arjuna Ranatunga, have accomplished that feat.

Two Anandians and one each from Royal, Nalanda, St. Peter's and Richmond have enjoyed that rare honour of winning the Observer Schoolboy Cricketer of the Year on two occasions each.

Ranatunga (1980 and 1982, Ananda), Roshan Mahanama (1983 and 1984, Nalanda), Thilan Samaraweera (1994 and 1995, Ananda), Lahiru Peiris (2004 and 2005, St. Peter's), Bhanuka Rajapakse (2010 and 2011, Royal) and Charith Asalanka (2015 and 2016, Richmond) are the extraordinary schoolboy cricketers to win the Mega Award twice each in their cherished history of Observer-Mobitel Schoolboy Cricketer of the Year.

Sri Lanka's World Cup winning captain Ranatunga was the first to win the Observer Schoolboy Cricketer of the Year coveted title twice in 1980 and 1982 while he finished Runner up to Rohan Buultjens in 1981. Besides Ranatunga, all the other five winners achieved their doubles in successive years.

The last of that list of champion of the champions list was Charith Asalanka of Richmond College, Galle who won the Observer-Mobitel Cricketer of the Year award in 2015 as well as in 2016.

What is more significant in Asalanka's great feat was that he was the one and only schoolboy cricketer from Richmond to win the Observer-Mobitel Schoolboy Cricketer of the Year title in the 40-year-old history of the event.

The only brothers to win the Mega Award are Ranatunga brothers Arjuna and Sanjeewa. Arjuna won the main title in 1980 and

1982 and his younger brother Sanjeewa in 1988.

In the same year, Sanath Jayasuriya of St. Servatius College, Matara won the Observer Schoolboy Cricketer of the Year outstation title.

The prestigious show has not only produced elite cricketers but subsequently top officials serving the ICC. Madugalle who took to Match Refereeing after his retirement now holds the senior most position in the ICC as its Chief Match Referee.

One of the proudest moments of the show was to see Muttiah Muralitharan becoming the Observer Schoolboy Cricketer of the Year in 1991. Arguably the best spinner that the world has ever produced, Muralitharan has captured the most number of wickets in Test cricket - 800!

The Mega Show has also produced the best Sri Lankan captains the country has ever had including Captain Cool Ranatunga. The other Observer Schoolboy Cricketer of the Year champions to become Sri Lanka captains are Roshan Mahanama (ODI only), Marvan Atapattu, Sanath Jayasuriya and Dinesh Chandimal.

Former Sri Lanka captain Roshan Mahanama (1983 and 1984 winner) also served as an ICC Match Referee. Observer Schoolboy Cricketer in 1989 Kumar Dharmasena who took to umpiring is now the most sought after ICC elite panel umpire.

He was on duty at the ICC World Cup final this year too after being adjudged the best ICC elite panel umpire at this year's ICC awards.

Hence, the contribution made by Observer-Mobitel Schoolboy Cricketer of the Year in promoting and popularizing the game is immense.

Although a couple of schools cricket awards show have emerged of late and even copied our past winners as theirs to show artificial credibility, the Observer-Mobitel Schoolboy Cricketer of the Year will remain as the Mother of All Shows.

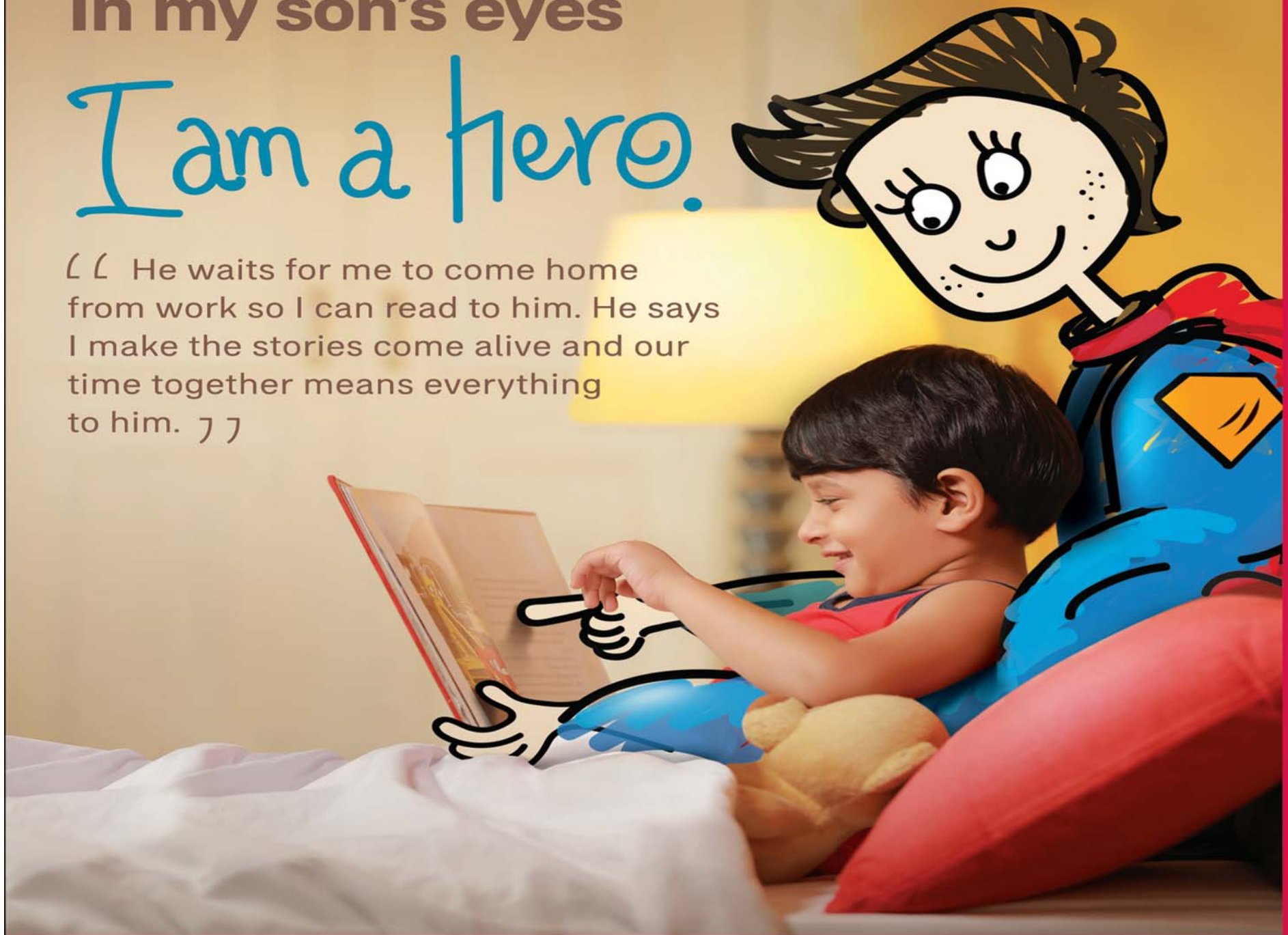




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By Sa'adi Thawfeeq

**T**he national women's cricket team, unlike the men's, did not have a feeder system because there was no cricket played at the grassroots levels. Men's cricket thrives even today because of the strong school system that provides the base for everything above it.

Thus, when former president of Sri Lanka Cricket Thilanga Sumathipala invited Apsari Tillakaratne to become the convenor of women's cricket in 2016, she leapt at the idea.

"My job was to promote women's cricket from the schools to encourage them to start cricket and to make a national pathway. We didn't have a pathway for women's cricket in each and every district unlike men's cricket," Apsari explained.

"I got together with cricket coaches and associations and we created teams and we introduced a district and provincial tournament for under 23 girls in 2017. We also introduced schools to play big matches. Just to encourage other schools to play we selected the main schools and started playing big matches.

"The first year, my target was ten big matches and we did that, and in 2018 we also played ten. This year, we couldn't play the matches despite so many new schools coming into the fray because my contract was not renewed," Apsari said.

Explaining how they got the schools interested to take to playing cricket Apsari said, "We funded the big matches and gave each school Rs. 100,000. We got coaches to support them and to give them the knowledge. We gave them equipment, umpires and scorers through Sri Lanka Cricket.

"When we selected the schools, it was mostly on the principals' enthusiasm and interest. Some schools gave 100 percent and within the school they prepared themselves for the matches.

"My focus mainly was in the outstations. There are so many good talented players they don't have enough support. Colombo girls have everything. We just played a few big schools like An-



(Pic: Gayan Pushpika)

# Apsari pioneered cricket for schoolgirls



school level. There is a lot of talent but we have to give them the support. They are playing without proper equipment and proper facilities."

Apsari said that she focussed mainly on the outstations because those were the areas that talent was in abundance and needed encouragement.

"In Colombo, parents don't encourage their children to play cricket. They want them to study and get a degree. Only at school level they will play and only a few will take up cricket after school. But in the outstations it's not like that. I realised that when I visited them. In some areas, they didn't even know we had a national women's cricket team. That awareness we had to create, that if you keep on playing cricket you will be able to represent your country," said Apsari.

ula, Ratnavale and Visakha but our main target was to promote schools outside Colombo.

"In Vavuniya after the war according to the people there, it was the first time girls started to play cricket in the northern part after we created this district and pro-

vincial tournament for girls. There were 13 girls who were without their parents lost during the war and wanted to play cricket.

"We played a big match for the first time in their history. They were really happy and it was a big event for them playing cricket at





**“In Colombo, parents don’t encourage their children to play cricket. They want them to study and get a degree. Only at school level they will play and only a few will take up cricket after school. But in the outstations it’s not like that. I realised that when I visited them. In some areas, they didn’t even know we had a national women’s cricket team.”**

“After they saw these big matches, many schools started to play cricket. The interest in schools was piqued by the big matches and a lot of the girls wanted to play. School principals started to call and inquire from me what kind of help we would give them. Some principals were telling me that the girls were pestering them to play big matches,” she said.

Apsari revealed that the parents had so much trust in her that they handed over their children to her and during her three years not a single incident took place.

Commenting on the introduction of awards to schoolgirls at the Observer-Mobitel School Cricketer awards, Apsari said, “It is a very good encouragement and I hope these girls will take this opportunity and even the Principals will look into their future and continue the cricket. There is a lot of talent but the only thing is we have to monitor them, guide them and provide them the facilities.”



# Janadi takes home double award

By Pranavesh Sivakumar

**H**aving been recognized as Best Batswoman and Best All-Rounder at the 41st Observer-Mobitel School Cricket of the Year Awards, Janadi Anali is coming to terms with the excitement.

Hailing from Anula Vidyalaya, Nugegoda, Anali said, “I’m elated. My parents lent a big hand, throughout. So did my school, especially the principal, teachers such as Miss Champika, and fellow students. My aim is to progress further.”

With two trophies in her arms, Janadi said, “I have dedicated and sacrificed myself to the game.” In a determined tone she asserted, “I will never stop, but only continue. My hope is to represent Sri Lanka.”

Speaking of the double award, Janadi remarked, “The award is very precious and valuable. It will come in handy, moving forward. I’m taking home the results of what I laboured for.”

Having made her alma-mater proud, she has already drawn plans of her future. “My next target is the national team. When you are engaged in this type of game, it is an inspiration. When others look at it, they also become interested, inspired and seek to improve their game,” she said.



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# Engineering her passion for excellence in cricket

By Allaam Ousman

**A**ll-rounder Sithmi Hirasha of Anula Vidyalaya, Nugegoda became the inaugural winner of the Most Popular Schoolgirl Cricketer of the Year 2019 award.

"I think I got this award because of my talent. I am very happy and proud of myself," said 19-year-old Sithmi who bagged a Best Bowler award last year after snaring 22 wickets with her off breaks.

The eldest in a family of four, she has a level-headed personality balancing her pursuit of cricket as a career alongside her education.

"I want to become an engineer," said Sithmi confidently as she awaits her A/L results. "I did my best in the exam."

Asked about her ambitions in cricket, she said, "My goal is to play for the national team. I played badminton earlier but now I only like cricket. I started playing cricket when I was 12 years and have been continuing to play since."

Captain of Anula Vidyalaya team for two seasons, she has the potential to

**"I want to become an engineer," said Sithmi confidently as she awaits her A/L results. "I did my best in the exam." Asked about her ambitions in cricket, she said, "My goal is to play for the national team. I played badminton earlier but now I only like cricket. I started playing cricket when I was 12 years and have been continuing to play since."**

blossom into a fine all-rounder with more exposure. Sahan Deshapriya was her first coach while she is under the wing of Dinesh Weerasinghe now.

Sithmi hails from a cricketing family. Her father Jayantha Navanandana played cricket while her brother Isara Kanchana is playing for President's College, Kotte at present.

She reiterated her ambition to play for the Sri Lanka national team as she refocuses her career goals following her triumph at the 41st Observer-Mobitel School Cricketer Awards.

"I want to play for the national team and also to become an engineer," said Sithmi who seems to have the self confidence and pedigree to showcase her skills and talents in both fields.



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# Award is of immense value to me - Sanjaya

By Pranavesh Sivakumar

**R**ohan Sanjaya of Tissa Maha Vidyalaya, Kalutara, was jubilant as he is when he takes a wicket when he was awarded Best Bowler. Speaking of the award, he said, "I'm excited and elated. This award is immense value to me," said Sanjaya.

He credited the award to a team effort. "Especially as a bowler, you can't win such an award without the support on the field."

Sanjaya said that he has achieved most of his goals and his next target is to perform

**"Especially as a bowler, you can't win such an award without the support on the field."**

well in the Under 19 matches and then break into the national circuit.

His award-winning performance comprises claiming a hat-trick, bowling his school to a 34-run win over Holy Cross College, Kalutara.

Sanjaya said his confidence has soared after winning the award and that he would make use of it to further his cricket career.



# Sadamini credits success to hardwork

By Pranavesh Sivakumar

**N**ilaksha Sadamini of Devapathiraja College, Galle was awarded Best Bowler at the 41st Observer-Mobitel School Cricketer of the Year Awards. When asked how this recognition

**"I received immense support from my parents, along with the two trainers. Mahesh sir helped me the most to reach this position."**

made her feel, she said, "Nervous. This award is very valuable to my cricketing future."

She credited her success to all the hard-work and training she had gone through. "I received immense support from my parents, along with the two trainers. Mahesh sir helped me the most to reach this position."

Her ultimate goal is to represent the national team.

"I need to attend practice day in and day out, batting and bowling," she said.

Offering advice to fellow school-girl cricketers, she said "Practice and compete well."



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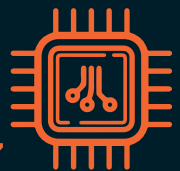
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# Most wins registered by S. Thomas'



By TB Rahaman

**S** Thomas' College Mount Lavinia, better known as the school by the sea, emerged as the Best School team for boys. They richly deserved this title for the way they evolved results during the last school cricket season. They finished

with seven outright victories to their credit with the well balanced team they possess.

They were selected by members of the selection panel comprising officials with tremendous experience in the game and who watch the games closely.

This is the second year in succession that they have been selected as the top school team

in the country.

To begin with, S. Thomas' beat arch rivals Royal after a lapse of 12 years in their annual big match. They had a well balanced team led by Sithara Hapuhinda, said coach Dinesh Weerasinghe.

The College team also won the all-island one day championship and can repeat this per-

formance next season too. This is because they will retain eight of their experienced players next year. They have a well balanced side with six players who played most of the matches last season. In all they possess more than eleven players with much experience and exposure.

They will also have Shalin de Mel who took seven catches in

their match against Royal. Kavindu de Silva and Rodrigo can also match up to a high standard when the demand is needed.

Thomians also have two players who were selected for the Under 19 national team. They are Kavindu de Silva and Rodrigo who are expected to be there next season as well. Then there is the versatile Kalana

Perera who represented the Sri Lanka Emerging team recently. He is such a useful player that the Thomians will be able to restrict their opponents next season as well.

They possess such a good all round team that they can outplay any opponent next year. They are good in all three departments of the game.

"The cricket structure at the College is really good and even the Under 17 team is in the semi-final in the all island tournament," added coach Weerasinghe.

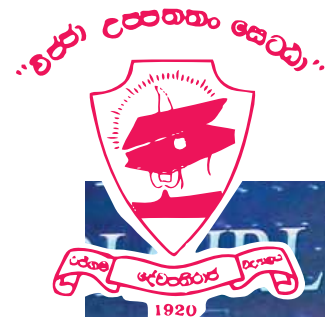
The team will be captained by Eriyagama next season. They hope to maintain the high standard that they had maintained for the past six to seven years. They receive support from the

cricket advisory committee comprising of old boys. They also have their Old Thomian's Cricket Club where the boys can play with and be exposed to competitive cricket at a high level.

Their grounds at Mount Lavinia was not that smooth in the outfield as seen many years ago. But today they have done it up

well and is considered one of the best grounds in the country. They have 21 turf pitches around the ground. There are practice pitches, indoor nets, physiotherapy rooms and gymnasium that even the Cricket Board does not have, observed Weerasinghe.

They have two grounds with one being small where junior games are played.



# Devapathiraja produce quality women players



By TB Rahaman

**D**evapathiraja Vidyalaya from Ambalangoda was adjudged as the best all round team among the girls teams and they deserve to be so. They have produced the best girl players in the country who have gone on to represent the country's

women's team.

Currently, they are also a leading cricket playing school among the girls teams. They are coached by Mahesh Sandarun who is impressed with the dedication and progress made by the girls. He says that already there are two girls in the national women's team that is now on tour in Australia and had gone to

South Africa on a previous tour.

Despite the facilities not being too good, the players buy their shoes and clothing with their own money and enjoy playing the game. There is very little support from Sri Lanka Cricket or the Sri Lanka Schools Cricket Association. They have to play about a dozen matches per season and all of them en-

joy playing as it will bear fruit for them.

During the past four years, the players from Devapathiraja have made a good impact in the game. Their players are followed to be picked and groomed further to represent the national team.

Devapathiraja girls began by playing softball cricket in 2011

and after having watched the Women's World Cup matches being played in Galle, they switched to hard ball. Once they began playing hard ball cricket, national team players like Chamari Attapattu and Sashikala Siriwardena would go to their school and play with their players.

The innocent parents did

not know how far their daughters would go in this game. Amazingly, they have attained so much that their players are now lined up to be picked for the national squad.

Former principals Bandula Jayasinghe and Lalith Samarasinghe have extended their fullest support to maintain the team. This is because the school has

won four championship titles between 2013 to 2018.

Kavishan Dilhari was the captain then and thereafter Umesha Thimeshani, who was selected as the Observer-Mobitel Schoolgirl Cricketer of the Year, and Sachini Nisansala have made a name for themselves. About seven of them are already in the national develop-

ment squad and in line to play for the national team.

The Foundation of Goodness headed by Kushil Gunasekera has extended their support generously.

The Seenigama Ladies team comprising mostly of the girls from Devapathiraja have a promising future. They only need more support so that

they can pursue a career in cricket and make their dreams come true.

The school has a grounds in Rathgama which is used by their cricket teams, both boys and girls as this is a mixed school. They hope and pray that they will be able to reach higher standards in the game that can be of benefit for the country as well.





# Best Fielder Nipun praises organizers for recognising grass root talent

By Bernard Perera

St. Joseph Vaz College's Nipun Dananjaya Perera who received the Best Fielder award praised the Observer-Mobitel School Cricketer Award organizers for appreciating the up and coming cricketers from grass root level. "This is an encouragement for all budding young cricketers to come up with their best to achieve higher levels in cricket to win these awards," Nipuna said.

"I won this award with the help of my coach Tharanga Liyana Pathirana who really guided me to achieve great heights in cricket," he said.

In addition Nipun said that his parents, two sisters and relatives were behind him whenever possible to support him during his cricketer career.

"It is my duty to thank all who supported me," said Nipun.

St. Joseph Vaz College Princi-



pal Rev. Fr. Priyanjeeva Guneratne paid a glowing tribute to Nipun for bringing honor to his school through cricket.

Nipun started his cricketing career at Damissara MMV, Nattandiya at the age of nine years with present coach Pathirana.

From the beginning, Nipun showed that he is an active player

with talent. When the coach was transferred to St. Joseph Vaz College he ensured that Nipun too came with him because he knew this boy had the talent to reach greater heights.

From the day of his first appearance for his new school in the Under 13 age group, he cracked an unbeaten double century to sur-

prise all onlookers who were present to witness the match.

Nipun has played nine out of 14 matches last season and scored 696 runs. As a right arm leg break bowler, he captured 37 wickets. This courageous youngster is one cricketer who is prepared to face any challenges and play according to the situation that prevails on the field.

Nipun's high class performance in school cricket has helped him enter the Sri Lanka Premier League tournament representing the Sinhalese Sports Club.

All his success has also paved the way for him to be in the Under 19 national squad and he has made eight tours with the national team. He captained the Under 19 national team last year and this year too he is tipped to take over the leadership. The Sri Lanka Under 19 national squad is undergoing practices in Colombo in preparation for the Bangladesh tour.

## Royal College the Best Behaved Team

**T**his award was introduced to the Observer Mobitel School Cricketer of the Year in 2009 on a suggestion made by ICC Match Referee and former Sri Lanka captain Ranjan Madugalle who was the winner of the inaugural Observer Schoolboy Cricketer of the Year title in 1978.

The game of cricket is called a gentleman's sport because it embodies a high standard of values and sportsmanship and it is fitting that while we recognize talent on the pitch we also recognize values such as good conduct, fair play and sportsmanship that go hand in hand with the game.



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# Navod Paranavithana awarded Best All-Rounder

By Bernard Perera

**W**ith 679 runs, 36 wickets and 12 catches, Navod Dinusri Paranavithana easily carried away the Best All-Rounder award at the Observer-Mobitel School Cricketer Awards ceremony.

"I am happy to receive an award of this caliber which encourages me to go further in the sport," said Navod speaking to Sunday Observer soon after receiving his award.

"The presentation of the Observer-Mobitel School Cricketer Awards for budding cricketers in the country has to be appreciated by all cricket loving fans as this gives all young cricketers a target to reach the highest level of the game," he said.

Navod said that he received great support from his parents, two brothers and all cricket loving fans from the Galle district which gave him

extra strength to continue in the game.

He also thanked his former coach Anil Rideegammanagedera who took great pains to correct his batting and for him to attain greater heights. The present coach who has taken over from Anil too is very keen in promoting Mahinda College cricket to reach the top in the coming season.

Navod said that he passed his O Levels last December and qualified for the A Levels.

"Though I played cricket. I managed to plan the timing for my education. Even now, I have a big task in dividing my studies and cricket. I will plan it in a way so that neither my studies nor my cricket gets affected. My parents too are helping me," said Navod.

Currently Navod who is a member of the Sri Lanka Under 19 squad that is undergoing residential training preparing for the series against Bangladesh.

## AWARD WINNERS



Best Behaved Team - Royal College



Most Popular Schoolboy Runner-Up - Royal's Pasindu Sooriyabandara



Division I Best Bowler - K.V. Kalana Perera of S. Thomas' College, Mount Lavinia



Division II Best Fielder - Akash Lochana of Gamini National School, Bentota



Division III Best All Rounder - K.A. Kalana M. Wickramasinghe of Seethawaka MMV, Avissawella



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# Wadduwa Central Girls make big impact

By TB Rahaman

**T**he girls of Wadduwa Central College only began playing cricket two years ago and have been so impressive this season that they were adjudged as the Best Up and Coming Girls Cricket Team.

This mixed school has a boys cricket team who began playing in the school cricket scene in the late eighties. The girls were encouraged to take to cricket after seeing the boys play and moreover due to the recognition and prominence given to women's cricket in Sri Lanka.

Their coach has been Dhanushka Ranmuthu from the start and he is doing such a good job that some of their players have gone on to be selected into the Under 19 and Under 23 national pools. In fact, eight of their players are in the Under 19 pool in preparation for the Women's World Cup tournament to be held next year.

Wadduwa Central girls team is the first school to play a big match in the Kalutara District. Their player to shine in that match was Navodya Nipuni who was unbeat-

**T**he team plays between 10 to 15 matches a season. This is ample for them to make an impression to the authorities of the Schools Cricket Association who are responsible in selecting squads to national pools.

en on 94 runs. This is a big adjustment for a young team that began playing cricket only two years ago.

After this match Wadduwa Central had three players in the Under 23 provincial women's team.

All these achievements are despite the facilities not being of very high standard. Even their clothing are provided by well wishers and some parents. Though they have a large grounds of their own, it is located in a hole. It gets waterlogged even after one hour of rain as there is no underground or otherwise drainage system.

The team plays between 10 to 15 matches a season. This is ample for them to make an impression to the authorities of the Schools Cricket Association who are responsible in selecting squads to national pools.



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*The 41st Observer-Mobitel School Cricketer of the Year awards which took place at Colombo Hilton on September 20 is captured in all its colour and glamour.*



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**Best Schools team Western Province - St. Sebastian's College, Moratuwa**



**Best Schools team Uva Province – Bandarawela MMV, Bandarawela**

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**Best National School Team Runner-up - Thurstan College, Colombo**



**Best School Team North Western Province Runner-up - St. Anne's College Kurunegala**



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