

My Years at St John's College

By

Preman Rajadurai

I still can recall vividly my first day at St Johns. It was the year 1964 and I joined in year 1 i.e Form one. The first teacher I met was, my revered teacher and principal Mr C.E Anandarajan, my late father took me with him on my first day and left me in the hands of a caring and dedicated teacher. I was fortunate when I joined College my two older brothers Bala and Raju were already there and my eldest sister Chitra was only a stone throw away at our sister college at Chundikuli Girls College. Thus began my life at St Johns which was long and fruitful.

As I go down memory lane, I can remember we had forty two students in our class and we had a handsome geography teacher who was just out of the university, whom we admired and sometimes were terrified in Mr Tulin Ratnam. Some of my contemporaries who are with us in Melbourne are Albert Anandarajan, Dr Sivakadachcham, Kingsbury Alagaretanam and all doing well in their chosen fields in life. St Johns not only - taught us how to play the game but also to play according to the rules. I believe the aim of education is churning out not only academics but men and women of character and quality. I think St Johns has produced men of such quality in every walk of life, be it education, politics or business.

While we were in the middle School we were watching with excitement and admiration of our senior students for their excellence in sports and in the academic field. The names of M. Theivendra P. Kanagadurai were household names in the Jaffna district, where ever they played there were crowds to watch them, it is important to note that they not only excelled in sports but they were truly great sportsmen in true sense. The latter part of the sixties was dominated by Johnnians be it in the field of education; sports or community activities. The 1965 cricket team led by P. Kanagadurai was unbeaten and beat Royal College, Colombo and also inflicted an humiliating defeat by an innings and 238 runs on the Batticaloa school boys at the Batticaloa esplanade which I had the privilege to watch. In athletics, football and basketball again Johnnians proved their supremacy. My eldest brother Bala Rajadurai was given the opportunity to open for St Johns in that year and proved himself to be a solid opening batsmen and my other brother Raju Rajadurai proved himself to be a successful pace bowler in the second XI, their instant success flowed into my sporting life at St Johns. The 1966 cricket team won all its matches beating Nalanda College Colombo captained by Lalith Kaluperuma but losing to St Sylvesters Kandy by one run. Once even St Johns dominated in athletics and in other sports notably

C. Ambihaipalan represented the Jaffna Schools in hockey and W. Guhanandan dominated the Table Tennis scene in Jaffna. In the administrative scene 1966 saw the sad parting of Mr A.W. Rajasekaram one of our finest principals, I can still remember how he broke down during his farewell address.

1967 was a year of transition for St Johns, the legendary Mr K. Pooranampillai a former teacher and Principal from Hartley College Pt Pedro took over the reins of the college. This change at college was welcome for us at home, since the language of discipline was the same at school and at home, as my Late father was an old boy of Hartley college and subsequently he and my mother both taught under Mr Pooranampillai. The cricket team of 1967 was again in a record breaking season

C. Sooriakumar the captain was one of the finest batsmen produced by St Johns. He finally went on to play in the Sara Trophy Tournament for the Tamil Union with great success. St Johns again dominated in other fields of sports, the football team led by S.M. Mootatamby was unbeaten winning all its seven matches and breaking the myth that St Patricks are unbeatable

at football. When thinking of Mootatamby the memories of the 1968 St Johns / St Patricks Cricket match comes rushing back. That was my first year in the college Second XI, the pride of playing and winning for St Johns was uppermost in our young minds. When St Johns had just twenty seven runs on the board six wickets down was most humiliating but Mootatamby and young D.S. Mills came on to the field and proved that Johnnians never die. I think that was one of the finest moments for St Johns. That day will also be remembered by me as that was my first meeting with the distinguished, Sri Lanka / Bloomfield Cricketer and All varsity Tennis Captain Dr C. Balakrishnan.

1968 was the first year I played for St Johns in the Second XI captained by C. Sivakumar. I was fortunate my Brother was the coach, though I was trained by them to be an opening batsman, he was very nervous of my performance. My first opportunity came in the first match of the season against Jaffna College at Bicknell Memorial Ground, my cricketing career for St Johns took off to a flying start with a personal score of fifty two runs and an opening partnership of ninety runs with T. Balajothy. The team included R.J. Selavanayagam better known as "dokter", he was a player of tremendous ability, he went on to play for the Browns Group of Companies in the Mercantile tournaments. However Selvanayagam went further and Captained BRC with great success in the P. Saravanamuthu tournaments and in that year BRC were runner up in the tournament. In 1960 the First XI cricket team registered its historic loss against Hartley College Point Pedro under the captaincy of M. Surendra, that year was a bad year for St Johns at cricket. However the second XI under the able guidance of spin ace Alfred Ratnam brother of Tulin Ratnam had an unbeaten record, in which again I opened batting along with T. Balajothy. One of the highlights of the second XI season, was again an opening partnership between me and Balajothy which reaped one hundred and twenty three runs in which my contribution was eighty eight. During third year Jaffna Central discovered Curtley Ambrose of Jaffna, Central speedster K.W. Premachandran. He was a thorn in the Johnnian batting line in the years to come. In 1968 however Johnnians dominated the soccer, basketball and athletics scene. During the latter part of 1969 we lost one of our best loved and revered Principal, Mr A.W. Rajasekaram who guided the school during the most difficult period of modern St Johns.

The face of Jaffna and St Johns began somewhat to change in the beginning of the seventies. By this time I had become a prefect and began to participate in the life of St Johns, even after the school bells had gone. The achievements of old boys in the many spheres of Sri Lankan life was an inspiration to me and also there was a change of government in Colombo. The United Front government had come to power with one of our old boys Mr Maithripala Senanayake as Minister of Irrigation Power and Highways and Leader of the House of Representatives and other Johnnians who made their mark were Mr Paul Lewis was appointed Chairman and Managing Director of Singer International Ltd Ceylon, he was a senior Chartered Accountant and his success was a great source of inspiration to me when I decided on my own career options and Mr H.L.D. Selvaretnam was appointed a Deputy Governor of The Central Bank the same year.

The newly formed government opted for mediocrity and archaic based standardisation of raw marks obtained at the GCE advanced level. This put a lot of pressure on us as students and we had to spend more effort on our books this seriously affected our participation in sports and other activities of the school. The 1970 cricket team led by M. Theivendran had to bear the brunt of this brutal social change and despondency in Jaffna, the members of the cricket team had to fiercely compete in the academic and sporting life of the college. This was my first year of First XI cricket, though we didn't fare well during the season, St Johns discovered great cricketers of the future like T. Thevapalan who was a brilliant wicket keeper he went on to captain St Johns, N.S. Alexander a brilliant allrounder and N. Naveenan a versatile sportsman. Our Class of 1972 had eight members of the college cricket team and eight members of the college prefect body. The big match in 1970 was again a pointer to the Johnnian fighting spirit. The first seven wickets fell for a mere thirty odd runs then, the indomitable Thevapalan and W. Raveendran batted brilliantly to save the match. During the early seventies in addition to S.K. Mahalingam we had among us a very dedicated lovable cricket coach on the horizon in Mr K.S.E. Xavier. He was a brilliant fast bowler having played for Badulla C.C in the Daily News Cricket Tournament. If one of us were late for cricket practice, we had to face Mr Xavier at

practice. More or less I was the victim of this unwritten rule as I had to come for cricket practice from Nallur, however it developed my batting skills. 1971 /1972 were years of building up the future Johnian cricketers ,after the stars of the sixties.

In **1971** a new award known as the Johnian Eagle was introduced to honour the performances of Johnians who represented the national team in any sport and this singular honour went to S. Antonipillai who represented the Sri Lankan Youth Soccer Team in Bangkok.

S Antonipillai was a brilliant Centre Half who Played for St Anthony's in the Jaffna District football Tournaments, and he was also made the Senior Prefect of the College in 1971. National honours also went to my dear friend the Late Chandi Veerasingham. He won six titles in the Jaffna district Badminton tournament and also represented Sri Lanka against the visiting Chinese badminton team. In the class rooms in the advanced level classes Mr Pooranampillai introduced a new subject known as Current affairs during which he discusses the many happenings in the world scene, this stimulated me and most of my class mates and led us into reading magazines like Newsweek, Time and Bulletin. He always exhorts to us that education should make us aware of the world and the environment we live, Mr Pooranampillai well equipped us to face the real world

After the arrival of Mr K. Pooranampilla we also saw the introduction of serious third XI cricket into the sports curriculum of the college. Mr J.R Gnanapiragasm who was brilliant cricketer of the 1930's and Mr Manuelpillai a former teacher of Hartley College of Point Pedro , took over the task of building the future cricketers of St Johns. On the academic side the unfairness of the university selection process had an impact on our university entrance results. Many of our classmates left for the United Kingdom to continue their studies, and many more took up new opportunities and ultimately rose to the highest in their profession. In this regard I would like to mention S.M Jebanathan who joined the Sri Lankan Merchant Navy and rose to the position of Captain and passed out as a naval engineer. In the true Johnian spirit obstacles were mere opportunities and most of my classmates made it ,through the turbulent seventies in Jaffna.

The **1972** cricket team had an unbeaten season and I was fortunate to be a member of that side ,which had a dedicated band of cricketers, who even now in their forty's are still playing cricket and at competitive level. Thevapalan, Sri Ramaretnam, N. Naveenan, N.S Alexander and T.Manoharan just to mention a few of them. 1972/73 was my last year at college and by the grace of god I was made the Senior Prefect of the College. During the year St Johns lost a true blue Johnian ,who kept St Johns, a Non Fee levying private school, in Mr J.C Handy manager of the welfare board. In the GCE advanced level exam of 1972 only fifteen students entered the University, the impact of standardisation began to have an effect on our results. Many of my friends left the country to pursue higher studies in England and India and many went into the Chartered accounting profession, which by then had become very popular with the maths students.

In February **1973** I left the portals of a great Anglican school St Johns , which built in me a set of values which I carried through in the real world. I am grateful to god and my parents for having given me the privilege to study in one of the great school of our times.