

# Down the memory lane

By  
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Where do I begin? Probably I will start with my joining St. John's at grade 5. We were living in that peaceful village called Uduvil and I was at Uduvil Girls' College till grade four. We chose to live at Uduvil as my mother was teaching at the Girls' College. My late father Mr. C.E. Anandarajan used to drive in his Hillman car CN 1796 from Uduvil to St. John's. I have heard some of his past students refer to his car as an automatic car as it changed gear whenever it fell into a ditch on the road. When I was finishing at Uduvil at grade four it was obvious where I would go. St. John's was my destiny.

I joined St. John's at grade five under the Principalship of Mr. K. Pooranampillai. KP or Bond as he was respectfully referred to was a personality and figure to be reckoned with. My late father did not want me to go into Grade 5A class which had the best of students. He was keen that I be admitted to Grade 5 C, because according to him that class had the best teacher. Guess who? Mr. V. Thuraiamy. Thuraiamy master was my first class teacher at St. John's. It was here that we as students learnt to play Cricket, and football in the classroom. Thuraiamy master made learning fun. He would divide the class into two and have competitions on what we have studied previously. The scoring would be according to the season. During cricket the score will be runs, and during football it will be goals. St. John's was also famous for another type of cricket 'Book cricket'. This is what we played when we got bored in class or during short intervals.

I have very fond memories of St. John's. My family moved into the school campus as my father was appointed as Senior Boarding House Master. Our house was next to the Evarts Baby hostel. Our long time neighbors were the Panchalingams. Being inside the school campus my life became very much intertwined with that of the boarders. I went to studies with them and whenever they went for a movie I also would join them. The hostel days were great days of fun.

An interesting incident that happened when we living next to the Evarts is worth recalling. Just opposite the hostel on Old Park road stood a street light (lamp post) which lit the area close to the Old Park and Main Street junction. This street light bulb was continuously being broken by mischief makers. Probably they threw stones to break it. Every time the bulb was replaced the next week it will be gone. One day my father decided to catch the culprits. So one evening he waited with two or three boys from the Flemming hostel hiding behind the wall, when some boys passing by got down from the bicycle and started throwing stones at the light. At once jumped the able bodied boys along with my father over the wall and started whacking them left and right. The mischief makers were taken unaware and ran for their lives leaving behind their tuition notes. From the exercise books it was found that some of them were from Stanley College. The boys were reported the next day

to the Principal at Stanley. From then on there light burnt without any interruption except when there was a power failure.

If I start writing about the memories I can go on and on. I can reflect on my younger days at the College, my O/L and A/L days, my life as a son of a staff member and lastly as a son of a Principal.

But here I would like to confine my reflections to the field of games and sports during the Pooranampillai era. It is not so much what we achieved in victories but the spirit in which we played the game which stands imprinted in my mind. The assemblies were great times and opportunities to nurture the Johnian minds. The talks and more importantly the Principal's address to the students at every assembly brought to us that we were not merely there to play and study. It was a place where we learnt our values.

Before every Big match the Principal would address the students and tell them what was an acceptable behaviour. Sportsmanship was uppermost in the agenda. One of KP's famous words and sound advice to the students was "Cheer good play." A few matches stand out as outstanding in terms of sportsmanship.

The first one that comes to mind is the cricket match against Hartley. I am not good at facts and figures, whether we won or lost. Burt Hartley was batting. A batsman from the Bungalow end had hit a delivery and they were crossing for a run when the non striker tumbled over his boot lace and did a somersault in the middle of the pitch. The fielder who had gathered the ball only had to throw the ball to the wicket keeper to run him out. But instead he along with others ran to help the batsman get up. After having made sure that he was okay the match continued. (Soon after the match I asked my father why they did not want to run the batsman out. My father's reply was that one should not capitalise on another's misfortune. ) At the next assembly the whole team was highly commended by the Principal for the sportsmanship that they displayed. I do not know whether we won or lost. But this I know that the match was played with true sportsmanship.

Another match that I remember was against Jaffna College on the SJC grounds. The captain of the team was given out for 'caught behind'. He turned to the SJC captain who the wicket keeper T.Thevapalan and complained that it was off his pad and not his bat. Thevapalan with great sportsmanship asked him to bat on.

I watch international cricket and other sports. But where do I ask that we see such sportsmanship displayed. Is it out of fashion? Or have games and sports become so competitive that such sportsmanship has no place? Has the economics and fame of sports robbed it of its core value?

Praise St. John your patron saint,  
And lest in deed or word you taint,  
Your Alma Mater's ancient name,  
Johnians! Always play the game.

As this has to go to press I will stop now. More later.