



Centre Gayan Weeraratne in full control against CR & FC at Nittawela



Kandy lock Senaka Bandara is challenged by CR & FC's fullback Reza Mubarak (15) and lock Ishan Noor

# Kandy worthy rugby champs nine times in a row

By Hafiz Marikar

Kandy Sports Club ruggerites became the kings of local rugby this year too creating a unique record by winning the League on nine straight occasions, and 13 times in 16 years from 1994. This makes their sponsor Singer Sri Lanka, committee, members of the club and their supporters very happy.

The President Malath Fernando is backed up by a superb set of committee members such as: Vice Presidents, Hemantha Yatawara and H. Marikar; General Secretary, Mahesh Weerasinghe; Treasurer, Ranil de Saram; Committee: Lesley de Soysa, Priyantha Ekanayake, Maurice Joachim, Lasantha Wijasuriya, Mahinda Dias, Malik Saheed, CPP Raj, Nimal Gunasekara, Ranjith Gunaratne, Sujewa Liyanage, Tikiri Banda, Chamli Rajakarama, Janaka Pathirane, and General Manager, Iswan Omar. It was great to see that whenever there was a need the committee was there to give the necessary fillip to the team. They were all happy for the whole Kandy town because the club, with the tremendous support of their fans, has fulfilled their wishes and achieved the success they were hoping for in style.

It is said that August is always a welcome month in this historic hill capital of Kandy because the much sought-after monsoon sets in bidding farewell to the prevailing heat. The city is gradually transformed into luscious green setting a picturesque environment for the traditional Esala Perahera. The traditional Perahera festival 2009 celebrations had an added dimension in Kandy with their favourite club winning the coveted Caltex League plum for the ninth time in a row. The Mayor of Kandy LB Aluwihare, an ardent supporter of the club, wished their success in the rest of their tournaments too.

The League trophy was presented soon after the CR & RC game which was the last of the League tournament matches where Kandy SC had the better of the game on Saturday, August 8. And the Cup came from the hands of Kishu Gomes the big boss of Caltex and CEO of SLRFU Interim Committee Lasitha Gunarathne.

Well into the night on this day, the entire sporting fraternity of Kandy celebrated, with scant regard to traffic or the laws. Motorists' deafening horns blared to show their support, Kandy's pub owners brushed aside the law to quench the thirst of the proud



The victorious Kandy Sports Club team after winning the league title with manager Kapila Silva (L) and rugby chairman Lasantha Wijesuriya

rugger fans and some returned home in the early hours of the next day in high spirits.

"This season too we faced a tough challenge and achieved a giant win in the League," exclaimed Kandy Sports Club's Coach, Johan Taylor after his team's superb performance. "This is my third year and I have given my best. All the players contributed their utmost and I couldn't ask for more. I am very happy about the way they rallied round and I am expecting an even better effort from them in the Clifford Cup knockout." Taylor stands out as the model of a dedicated coach. With his experience he was able to get things done and when a coach is dedicated so will it be with the players he guides. Taylor, a teetotaler, knows how to look after his players and is also able to discipline them.

It was the dedication of the players, the discipline they followed right throughout the League season and the backing they got from the able committee members that really made the Kandy Sports Club rugby team a formidable force, said the kingpin of the club Malik Samarawickrema analyzing the team's prowess in the League. Malik a former Royal College, CR & FC and Sri Lanka Presidents XV scrum half has given his fullest backing to the club and was extremely satisfied and happy with the success the talented Kandy Sports

Club ruggerites have achieved and the fact that the players have now won the admiration of even their one-time critics. Malik a great follower of the game didn't wish to single out any particular player but had some encouraging words for those like Fazil Marija, Saliya Kumara, Gayan Weeraratne, Sajith Saranga, Dilip Selvam, Sanjeewa Jayasinghe and Sean Wijesinghe.

Lasantha Wijesuriya the Rugby Chairman said that Pradeep Liyanage led his side well and got the fullest backing from the players, everyone in the squad did well whenever they got the opportunity. Lasantha said they played to a plan, and they did what was wanted of them. This season Pradeep Liyanage and his team proved that it was not the winning or losing that matters but how one played the game. Team Manager, Kapila Silva said that the team's intelligent tackling, the well-judged moves of their playmaker Fazil Marija and the united team effort from all the players was what brought them the victories and the cup for the 9th time this season.

Of course there was President Malath Fernando and his able committee who was behind the team at all times and in all matters at every game to give the players a pat on

their backs for their great performances during the league season. And not forgetting the past President, Dr. Sarath Kapuwatha who was a tower of strength to the club and team. Malath, no doubt, is grateful to his able committee for giving him the best of support.

The General Secretary, Mahesh Weerasinghe a man who really knows to keep things in order, said that he was happy that under his period as secretary they won the league for the 9th time. "It was a great show by the players, out of the 12 games they won 11, and lost only to Navy SC by a single point. Our boys scored 475 points in their matches and conceded only 113 points to their opponents," he said.

For bringing such great credit to this century-old club which has a cherished history in the rugby field, a big thank you goes to the players, its committee, members and supporters. It is talent, dedication, discipline and of course teamwork which were the basic ingredients that contributed towards the success of the team. Like in any successful organisation there has been a great degree of planning going into Kandy SC rugby. The club committee members stated that the secret of their success was: "People who plan better are more successful in achieving their objectives." Every year, this club starts preparing well ahead by identifying the players, coach and management. Bringing a team together up to the point they are ready to compete on the field involves a load of planning, administrative work and coaching. From there the players take over.

The Kandy Sports Club ruggerites who have dominated club rugby ended the league well under the captaincy of centre-three-quarter Pradeep Liyanage. The pride of the Kandy SC forwards

were Kishore Jehan a first class prop, Eranga Swarnathilleke a solid prop forward, Aravinda Udangamuwa hooker and also was a fine loose player, Anuranga Walpola the finest hooker in the club had to rest from a few games due to injury but did well whenever he played. Rasun Yasaisuru too gave his best. The towering second rowers Senaka Bandara proved outstanding in loose play same as Zafeer Jhan and Buddhika Thalagampola. The fast-breaking flankers Sean Wijesinghe a dedicated player; Dilip Selvam always hounds the loose ball and is solid in defence and finally the last and the best of them all was their number 8 Pathanian Sajith Saranga who could match

up to the best of the forwards in any club and the man who destroyed many a club side with his power play. The way the Kandy SC forwards played will be a good example for some clubs to take a few lessons from for the coming knockout matches.

Kandy winger Sanjeewa Jayasinghe is stalled by his opposite number



## FINAL LEAGUE STANDINGS

TEAMS	P	W	L	PF	PA	TP
KANDY	12	11	1	475	113	50
CR&FC	12	9	3	371	121	40
NAVY	12	8	4	227	155	35
ARMY	12	7	5	204	251	28
CH&FC	12	5	7	275	233	23
SLAF	12	2	10	113	247	9.5

Tabulated as: P-played, W-won, L-lost, PF- points for, PA-points against, TP-total points

Scrum half Saliya Kumara was outstanding and can fit into any given position in the back line, and he did a good job with his boot in long and goal kicks. Prasad Chaturanga was also excellent in the same position with his booming up-and-under kicks. Fly half Fazil Marija was the best in this position he helped the club to win most of the matches with his good thinking, knowledge of the game and his role as play-maker. The centres skipper Pradeep Liyanage and

Gayan Weeraratne gave their best whenever they were in action.

The country's fastest running ruggerite Sanjeewa Jayasinghe with his years of experience did his best with tremendous bursts of speed down the line. Also making fine contributions were Sameera Silva who enjoyed a good season and Mohamed Sheriff. Former captain Radhika Hettiarachchi playing at No. 15 did a grand job. A big hand should go to the team boy Kumar and measurer Bobby Sanjeewa.

The ruggerites had the build, fitness, knowledge and they knew who they were playing and what they were doing and played with purpose. Kandy's sporting fraternity old and young should be proud of their club's achievements in the field of rugby.

So, Kandy has now become the kings of the game of rugby and hope to continue their reign in the future.

Pix by Rukshan Abeywan-sha and Sabry Abuthahir

## Bisthamin, this championship is for you

By M Naushad Amit

The team manager of Kandy Sports Club, Kapila Silva said the ninth league title win in the recently concluded Caltex Division 1 rugby tournament will be dedicated to Imran Bisthamin, who eventually had to witness some of the matches on TV on a hospital bed. "The whole team really missed him on the field. He was a potential captain for Kandy SC and a great leader. During the five seasons he played as a No.8, he excelled in the key role of pack leader. His absence was badly felt this season," Silva told *The Nation*.

Bisthamin is said to be a strong front division player who linked well with the key three-quarters of Kandy SC. "This was a great combination where Bisthamin merged along with scrum half Saliya Kumara and stand-off Fazil Marija. These three players have turned a few vital matches in Kandy's favour. Had Imran (Bisthamin) been here with us this season we would have definitely performed much better," he said.

The players of Kandy SC were in a disastrous position psychologically after their dear friend and team-mate went through a tragic misfortune. They had felt it badly when the pre-season training commenced before the league tournament began. "Whenever we commence training or whenever we went out for a match, it became a habit for all the players including officials to make it a point to remember Imran. He is a great team player and that was missed very badly this year. We had one thing in mind this season and that was to win all our matches for our dear friend and team-mate Imran Bisthamin. We had the perfect replacement for Imran in Sajith Saranga who is still a teenager and

with more exposure he could become a player like Imran in the near future. But Imran is one of a kind. We rarely come across players of this nature. But most of all he is a very good friend. That's why all of us made it a point to win the league for the ninth time and dedicate the win to our dear friend Imran," added Silva who played along with Bisthamin for four seasons.

Bisthamin who met with this most unfortunate accident in November last year was in a coma for nearly three months. He survived with the help of a life supporting unit until then and later recovered very slowly to stand on his own without a support and to recognize his close relatives and friends. But the medics who attended on Bisthamin were uncertain of a primary recovery from the coma state and called it a miracle to have him back. One of the doctors who treated Bisthamin said, "His body possesses the strength to recover, if a similar accident had happened to a normal patient this would have been much more critical. It's a surprise that Bisthamin has progressed to recover successfully up to this condition during a period of nine months."

Kapila Silva who played as a lock and a flanker for Kandy SC for eight seasons from the year 2000 took over as the manager of the winning outfit last year. "I had made the decision to retire when I reach 30. When I turned 30 there was an opening for the manager's position in the team. Since I played with the team for eight years I thought that would be the best way to continue rugby. But in Imran's case he has more years of rugby ahead of him and if by chance he could recover sufficiently to make a return to the game, all of us will be thankful to the great God for a miracle," added Silva.



Imran Bisthamin



Prop-forward Eranga Swarnathilleke scores a try against the 'Red Shirts'