

Red, Gold And Blue

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A proud moment- Tarinda Ratwatte, Captain of the Trinity College rugby team holding the Bradby shield

The roar of the crowd was thundering as Trinity won the Bradby Shield for the fourth consecutive year. Leading the team to victory was a “young gentleman”, Tarinda Ratwatte, a third generation ruggerite, who has lived and breathed the game since his tender years...

Words Udeshi Amarasinghe **Photographs** Indu Bandara and Amila Alahakoon

“Rugby has always been a part of me and my family because my grandfather, father and uncles all played for Trinity,” says Tarinda. Moving to Kandy when he was ten years old had been hard, but the passion to play for a school that inspired him and a game that he was passionate about compelled him to make this decision. “It was my choice, my parents did not want me to leave Colombo, but I wanted to go and join the Trinity family.”

Tarinda was soon selected to the under-12 rugby team at Trinity and from there he was unstoppable. "I became the under-14 rugby captain and we became the all-Island champions in 2008. Trinity won this championship after 32 years. We were also the Central Province champion that year," remembers Tarinda with pride.

However, Tarinda was not selected to the first 15 in 2011 though two of his batch mates were. Showing maturity beyond his years, Tarinda had not been discouraged, but resolved to do better next time. His first match as a member of the first 15 team was for the Bradby second leg where Trinity won 40 – 5. This was a historic match where the four year winning streak for the school began. Thereon Tarinda continued to be on the starting 15. "As a fresher, it was a wonderful team to be a part of because we were like one family. My team captain Murad Ramzeen and Vice Captain Rehan Weerakoon were very welcoming. Actually the entire team was. It is because we work as a family that the Trinity team has been successful in the last couple of years. This culture was introduced by our coach Neil Foote who revolutionised the atmosphere in Trinity," says Tarinda.

Tarinda was announced the Captain of the Trinity Lions for 2014, just before the school term ended last year. This was a pivotal and exhilarating moment for him, as he was following in the footsteps of his father. With his Vice Captain Anuradha Karunatilake at his side, the Trinitians forged forward to win all the matches except for one defeat in the league.

Becoming the runner-up at the Seven-a-Side tournament where Isipathana won the championship had only motivated the team to do better. "When the odds are against us and the pressure is high, we really come together as a team. One match that I will never forget is the one against Kingswood where they scored during the 78th minute to take the lead and we had only a couple of minutes to recover. We came back strong and won the game 24-27 in the 82nd minute," he elaborated. The semi finals of the President's Trophy had been a tough one where the Trinitians held the Royal side with 14 players for 28 minutes and the last 17 minutes with only 13 players. Though Tarinda and his team lost the match, he says what was important was "how we played". "Everything about Trinity is rugby and for those of us who play, it is about wearing the red, gold and blue jersey proudly. It was really sad for me to take the jersey off for the very last time after the match against Royal."

The Bradby victory was definitely the crowning glory for the captain, who had been on the winning side for four consecutive years. The format of the rugby season had been changed this year where the Bradby was held in the middle of the season.

With 15,000 supporters cheering them on, the power from the crowd propelled them forward to a grand victory. “I am very proud to be a part of and to be able to contribute to the memories and the history of the school. I will remember for the rest of my life the moment I received the Bradby shield, walking up to my team onstage and lifting it up to the crowd. It was the most exhilarating and unforgettable moment,” reflected Tarinda nostalgically.

Being the Head Boy and also the rugby captain, Tarinda is an all-rounder. Much responsibility lies on his young shoulders, which he bears with dignity. “If the mind wants something badly, then the body will follow. What rugby has taught me is how to achieve a balance between physical hardness, mental hardness and true sportsmanship. Usually I get home after training around eight in the night and by the time I change and eat, it is around ten. I want to sleep, but since I am doing my A’Levels this year, I have to study. As most of my classes are in Colombo, I have to travel back and forth every week. It is hard work.”

Time to have fun? “Always,” he says but as the rugby captain and head boy, he understands that there is a limit to everything. Family has been the strong foundation that has given Tarinda the strength, courage and ability to be level headed, which is quite rare in youngsters today. Hailing from a family of Trinity ruggerites, the spirit of the game is entrenched in who he is. Dennis Ratwatte, Tarinda’s grandfather played for Trinity during 1947-1950 and was a coloursman. But his idol is his dad, Ashan Ratwatte, who played for Trinity in 1980-1983 and captained the team in 1983. He was awarded the prestigious Lion. This made them the second father-son duo to captain Trinity in history and the only ones to win the Bradby shield in their respective years. “My dad is a legend, everyone talks about him. I really admire and always try to be like him though it is very difficult. I am fortunate to be a fly half and not scrum half as my father, as this would have been too much of pressure for me. His friends tease him saying that he is the great scrum half that produced a better half,” says Tarinda with great pride. “My father’s elder brother and younger brother also played rugger for Trinity and they played alongside my father during his time (Roshan ‘81&82 and Dilakshan in ‘83). My father’s elder brother was awarded the Lion as well. Then, my grandfather’s brothers and their children have also played for Trinity. So every era there has been a Ratwatte on the team. My family is all about Trinity and rugger,” says Tarinda with a smile.

With his parents showing him the right way in life, Tarinda says that they have given him and his sister a wide exposure since their childhood. “The love and drive

from my parents and the affection from my grandparents are the reasons why I can walk with my head held high.” His elder sister’s support has also been a great strength to Tarinda.

“My childhood dream was to go to New Zealand and play in one of the teams of the Super 15. Time will tell whether that will happen. Last year my vice captain and I were selected to represent the country and we were the only Trinitians to tour that year. We played the Asian B division in Taipei against Singapore and Thailand and we emerged as the champions in that division.” With the conclusion of the school rugby season, Tarinda captained the Upcountry Reds in the recent top 50 schoolboys game held at Carlton Grounds, which was played to select the national youth side for 2014. It is his hope that he will be selected to represent national youth this year too.

“Rugby is my life and I hope that I will be able to continue to play,” says Tarinda Ratwatte, who indeed is a simple and modest gentleman who will no doubt keep his alma mater’s flag flying high.

