



139th Battle of the Blues

THOMIANS

favoured but expect a close game



INDIKA WELAGEDARA

The 139th Battle of the Blues three-day contest between Royal College and S. Thomias' College Mount Lavinia will unfold with the usual comradeship at the SSC grounds with the Thomians holding a slight edge over their opponents due to their recent purple patch leading up to today's encounter.

This match is played for the prestigious D. S. Senanayake Memorial Shield. Incidentally, D. S. Senanayake, who became the first Prime Minister of independent Ceylon, donned the Thomian cap in 1901 and 1902. This shield was first presented in 1928. If a match is drawn then the school already holding the shield retains it. Royal College are the current holders of the shield after winning the 137th Battle of the Blues in 2016, and drawing the 138th Battle of the Blues the following year.

Three days of exciting cricket can be expected from these two major schools with Royal trying hard to turn tables on the Thomians and retain the shield which they won in 2016 under the captaincy of Geeshath Panditharatne.

Of the 138 matches played so far Royal leads the tally with 33 wins while the Thomians have won on 34 occasions and 69 matches have ended in draws.

The Thomians last won the Battle of the Blues under the leadership of Ashan Peiris in 2007. They are led this year by all-rounder Delton Peiris and have registered six outright wins this season and are unbeaten.

"We are going into this game as favourites and along with my team mates we will

play positive cricket to bring the shield back to Mount Lavinia which has eluded us for the past 11 years," said Thomian captain Peiris.

Veteran cricket coach Dinesh Kumarasinghe handling the Thomians this year said, "We have a balanced team and done well to secure six outright wins and remain unbeaten. But when it comes to a Royal-Thomian, it's a totally different game since it's played over three days. Unfortunately we could not win the game last year due to bad weather. This time we are going out in a positive manner to create a win for the college."

Highest run getter for the Mount Lavinia boys right hander cum middle order batsmen Maneesha Rupasinghe has scored nearly 700 runs this season. Top order batsmen right hander Manthila Wijeratne (former St. Sebastian College, Moratuwa cricketer), has also shown great form scoring over 600 runs with some impressive knocks while wicket-keeper and left hand top order batsman Sithara Hapulinna, has aggregated nearly 600 runs among the others. S. Thomias' will also look to right-hander Kishan Munasinghe together with left hander Dulith Gunaratne both of whom have scored over 400 runs and right hander Shalin De Mel nearly 400 runs.

Spinners Shannon Fernando together with Delton Peiris have been lethal throughout the season taking over 125 wickets between them along with Sri Lanka under 19 player Kalana Perera, Thevin Eriyagama and Pavith Ratnayake (the trio having taken close to 85 wickets) are expected to bowl the Thomians to victory. Royal who had a mixed season

recording six outright wins and one outright loss will be led by top order batsmen Pasindu Sooriyabandara.

"The big match is a totally different game to other matches which you play. We are going into this match as the underdogs, so together with all my team mates we are hoping to play good cricket and try our best to keep the trophy at Reid Avenue, where I was part of that match winning team of 2016 scoring a debut century" said Sooriyabandara.

Royal coach Thilina Kandambay was confident of his team performances. "We have a very young side and we go out as underdogs. We have won six games outright this year due to us having a balanced side.

The team is willing to give of their best in this big game," Kandambay said. Royal could boast of many bowlers who have performed extraordinarily this season, as their bowling department also has clicked very well as a team with left-arm spinner Manula Perera heading the honours list with over 85 wickets.

Both Right arm medium paceman Lahiru Madusanka and Bimal Wijesekara too have enjoyed a good time with the ball capturing nearly 35 wickets. There is also plenty of variety in the Royal spin department with Kamil Mishara the off spinner capturing 50 plus wickets together with left-arm chinaman of Gayan Dissanayake, who has over 25 wickets under his belt.

The pillars of the Royal batting are Sooriyabandara who leads the batting as the highest run scorer for them this season with 1200 runs, vice captain and left hander

Kavindu Madarasinghe (who is also the wicket keeper) and Kamil Mishara both having scored close to 750 runs.

The other top scorers are Tharindu Senaratne close to 700 runs along with the two

openers right hander Bhagya Dissanayake and left hander Gayan Dissanayake both scoring over 600 runs.

They will be expected to make their contributions to bolster the Royal scoreboard.



Thomian captain Delton Peiris and Royal skipper Pasindu Sooriyabandara with the D. S. Senanayake Memorial Shield for which the two schools will contest for.