

Heard in the Mustang Tent: Royal-Thomian Cricket Match

By Tassie Seneviratne

With the 139th Battle of the Blues the Mustangs Tent celebrated its centenary in grand style. Fabulous souvenirs and sumptuous food that would have satiated even Epicurus, was galore. The organising committee deserves a big 'thank you' for the fantabulous arrangements.

The celebrations started off with a breakfast followed by a group photograph. Principal of Royal College and Warden, St. Thomas' College adorned the occasion.

The oldest as well as the most senior member of the Mustang Tent, Retired Air Force Commander, Air Chief Marshall Paddy Mendis, on behalf of the Mustangs, presented a specially minted Gold Coin for the toss.

The very familiar and unflinching presence of Mustang happy Ranil Wickremasinghe, this time gracing the occasion as the Prime Minister despite the uneasy load on his head, also adorned the celebrations.

Lawyers' Law: With Paddy Mendis being an old Thomian, the Mustangs Committee nominated the Oldest Mustang from Royal Collage, attorney I.S. de Silva, to propose the toast. Young as he is, still looking very much in his cabbage days, the argument is that his father had paid for his Mustang membership when he was only ten years old, to be enrolled when he comes of age. In the circumstances, his claim of seniority as a Mustang member is counted not from the day he was enrolled, but from the day his enrolment was paid for – typical Lawyer's Law!!

However, gifted with a good gab he did the honours very creditably, to be audible in the deafening din that prevailed in the name of music all around the grounds.

Rumblings: Rumblings were also heard regarding a young Deputy Minister being seated for the photograph in the front row reserved for guests of honour and Senior Mustangs, while a Senior Mustang of the caliber of Michael Tissera who had done Mustangs, Cricket and the country proud, was not accommodated in front row. Michael ofcourse humble as usual, stood in a back row. Surely, politicians - (Ministers and Deputy Ministers) are a dime a dozen. But there is only one Michael Tissera, quipped a Mustang.

What and who is a Mustang: I asked this question from many of my Mustang colleagues and strangely they had not given their mind to it although it is contained in the history of the Mustangs, and is of interest. The Oxford English Dictionary defines it as a wild, unruly and master-less horse. Now why did the founders of the Mustang Tent name it so? Obviously to take the liberty for some horseplay in their old age for those who choose to do so. Only elders are qualified to enroll in the Mustangs Tent. In their wisdom, the Mustangs 'caged' themselves from intrusion by youngsters and ladies not for their own protection or other selfish reasons, but to insulate youngsters and ladies from their unruly horseplay, just once a year, and then back to serious and responsible business for yet another year.

Amidst the keen rivalry, banter and jibes, there is unflinching camaraderie among the Mustangs. Another significant feature is that, with the liberty for horseplay, the Mustangs are mindful of others and apply self-restraint to ensure that no harm or inconvenience is caused to others.

I remember how I with late N.O.M (Michael) de Silva, as school boys from the School by the Sea, approaching the Mustang Tent where oldies holding high positions were dancing and singing, curious to hear what was sung and spoken in the 'caged' tent. The sound of music was so loud that it drowned the voices and only those who sang could hear the words. Brilliant wisdom gained over the years!

Cricket: This article will not be complete without comments on the cricket itself. The first two days were quite boring with low scoring and the batsmen seemingly concerned only with not losing.

The match however became lively on the 3rd day after the Thomians declared their 2nd innings having scored 227 quick runs and taken six Royal wickets. The Thomians were bowling their hearts out for victory and Royalists were struggling to save the match. I heard some Old Royalists seated behind me suggesting that they appeal for bad light. (All in good humour of course).

The Royalists however, saved the match with some 'Thomian grit' infused in them. It was a fitting Royal-Thomian finish for which both teams deserve applause. (The writer is a Mustang counting over 30 years)

