

Official opening of the Gurutalawa Swimming Pool

The pool had been in regular use from 1950 and the filtration plant was operating from October, 1952. Nevertheless we received repeated requests to hold an official opening and so provide the occasion and opportunity for swimmers from other parts of Ceylon, to see and use the pool.

After considerable discussion we decided that the most suitable opening ceremony would take the form of a swimming gala, and a tentative programme was drawn up. This was submitted to the Ceylon Amateur Swimming Association and to the leading swimming clubs and schools. It was modified in accordance with their suggestions, and entries were called for.

Twenty four events had been included in the anticipation that some would elicit few entries and would be dropped. We were taken aback when the entries arrived and we found that all the events were fully patronized and in some the entries were such that heats became necessary. Instead of staging less than 24 events we found ourselves committed to about 36. To complete such a crowded programme without racing after dark, seemed a difficult task, and one that required careful organization.

The twelve heats were timed to start three quarters of an hour before the official opening; but even so we had to take the precaution of fitting additional lights in case the programme took longer than we hoped. Although we had chosen one of the driest months of the year, the weather showed signs of breaking well before the appointed day. We were in a quandary because no cover is available around the bath and we were most grateful to the C.D.F. for lending a tent. This was erected on the lawn beside the bath, and when the rains did come down in torrents, it proved invaluable.

In order to avoid delays in calling together the competitors for the races we improvised a public address system using a field telephone and amplifier and loud speaker. It was tested by Mr. Pegler who demonstrated its effectiveness by nearly lifting the roof off the chapel when he sang hymns in Welsh into the microphone. The results were so penetrating that we felt we had exactly what we needed.

Preparations for the housing of competitors and the seating of visitors presented considerable problems. The boys of the school were responsible for the seating arrangements, and some of them evacuated their dormitories to provide accommodation for the guests who were staying for the night.

The members of the Mt. Lavinia team arrived from Nanu Oya early in the morning and were able to enjoy a bath while it was still warm and before the sun made its final retreat behind the clouds.

The other competitors arrived a few at a time by road. The Government Film, Unit and representatives of the press took up their positions well before the beginning of the gala. By two o'clock it is clear that we were in for a very wet afternoon and dark clouds were massing from the north-east.

The arrival of the last batch of competitors at 3.00 enabled us to start the heats. Before they were over the rain was coming down in torrents. However, they were completed in good time and all was set for the opening of the bath before 3.30. The rain was so heavy that it was decided to postpone the start for five or ten minutes. We dared not wait longer for fear of ending after dark.

At 3.40 Dr. Hayman mounted the diving stage and declared the bath open. He welcomed the competitors and spectators and thanked them for the encouragement of their presence, under such disheartening conditions. He gave the bath as a present from his wife and himself to the College. He expressed a hope that it would spread the knowledge of swimming and particularly of life-saving not only among the members of the school but amongst others who were resident in the district.

He had intended to thank those who had assisted in the organization of the gala, in the design and building of the bath and in the erection of the filter plant, but out of consideration for those of the spectators who came out into the rain to listen he cut his speech short.

One newspaper reporter never emerged from the tent and having missed the speech, felt free to publish in his paper what he considered Dr. Hayman ought to have said. If any newspaper reader were surprised at the sentiments alleged to have been expressed on this occasion they will now know their real origin.

The opening of the bath was followed by a swim past of the College team and the finals of the races. A high-light of the evening was the diving display by Alan Smith, an old boy of Gurutalawa and the Ceylon Champion diver.

The races followed the usual pattern and were only notable for the promptness with which competitors responded to the announcers' call and the speed with which race followed race. The gala was scheduled to finish at 6.25, but was actually over before 5.30 in spite of the late start. Even so the Colombo competitors were shivering with cold before the final whistle of the Water Polo match brought proceedings to a close. The members of the staff who acted as officials worked with a will and although they were nearly as wet as the swimmers they stuck to their jobs to the end.

The outstanding performances were by Parker and Rangeeroft of the C.S.C. in the Breast Stroke and Free Style Races. Notable also the high standard displayed by the Mt.Lavinia Team in the Senior Boys and under Sixteen events.

The Under Fourteen events showed the marked superiority of the Hill School. The Gurutalawa team was outclassed and only won first place in one event. It was gratifying that the up-country swimmers led by J.T. Pettigrew won both the Men's Relay Races. In the Water Polo the Old Thomians defeated a strong C.S.C. team.

Mrs. Turner kindly consented to give away the certificates, and this was done in the dining hall instead of at the swimming bath owing to the weather.

The evening closed with a performance of the "Senator" by the Senior Literary Society for the entertainment of those of our visitors who stayed here for the night.