

SPORT

sports.sundayobserver.lk / Tel: +94 11 2 429 225 / +94 11 2 429 228 / Fax / +94 11 2 429 227



Exalted rugby players of CR led by Kavindu de Costa hoisted by a team-mate and their supporters come together in a grand celebration

Pix by Dushmantha Mayadunne



Over-the-moon CR players with the Nippon Paint trophy



A triumphant CR coach Dushanth Lewke is hoisted by jubilant supporters

Reds conquer mighty Kandy burning bridges in Colombo fireworks

Players and a free-packed common crowd restored rugby to a people's game



Captain of the CR team Soyuru Anthony attempts to break through the Kandy SC defence

BY CALLISTUS DAVY

It was unlike any other Premier match and the final between CR and FC and Kandy SC was a kind of contest not seen in many years in the country where nothing was asked or given.

The ground at Longden Place was packed to the rafters with common people, to some a boiling cauldron on a hot afternoon and anyone who walked in was able to grab a seat even if it meant it was reserved for the Very Important.

It was a day and a match that left decision makers or the keepers of rugby wonder why does money have to kill the enthusiasm of rugby fans and the crowd that turned out in their thousands was testimony of what an open or free entrance can do to resurrect rugby that was on its death bed breathing its last and yearning for the crowds of the 70s and 80s.

Last Sunday 30 players came together to showcase that the game in the clubs can still be kept alive and kicking as the action electrified and kept spectators on the edge of their seats or hundreds more standing on their toes as photographers kept pa-



CR hooker Amith Gunasinghe hugs his wife and daughter in an emotional scene



Kandy SC fullback Srinath Sooriyabandara out-paces CR winger Gemunu Cheitiya



The packed stadium was not the kind of happy place for many of the youngest fans who were compelled to even spill over for a glimpse of the action

trolling the sidelines looking for the prized shouts and both the players and crowd obliged.

Play on the field was top shelf short of nothing and referee Raven Alexander was as cool as a cucumber and not a single untoward remark was heard against him.

To the diehard pundits the result was never a foregone conclusion

even as Kandy SC threatened to run away with the match five minutes to the end of the first half taking a 13-3 lead.

That both teams had to bounce back from demanding situations showed to what extent the pendulum swung until the very end justified by the 33-28 final score followed by fireworks lighting up the night sky.

There was no player who did not do his part and no spectator who left the venue disappointed.

Whoever says players don't need crowd motivation and that only money can do wonders, needs to have a second look.

The players at CR burnt bridges never to go back, making rugby and its followers the ultimate winners.



A tussle between CR prop Dilshan Jaya (left) and his Kandy SC counterpart Charles Praveen



A girl cheers vociferously from the crowded stands



It took more than one Kandy SC player to bring down a determined CR winger Rinesh de Silva



CR centre Chathura Seneviratne attempts to bring down Kandy SC winger Kavindu Perera