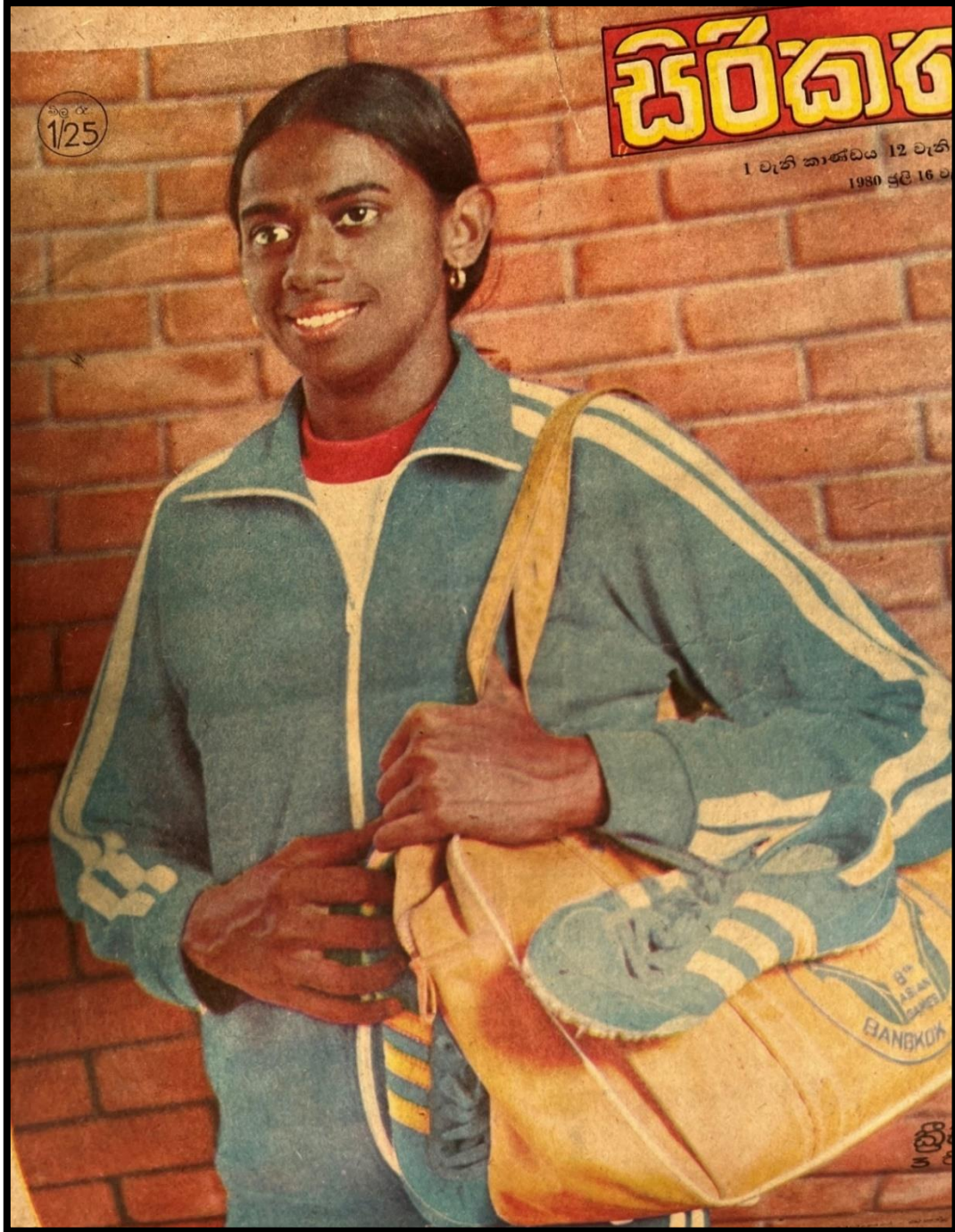


SPRINT QUEEN - K.G. BADRA GUNAWARDENA

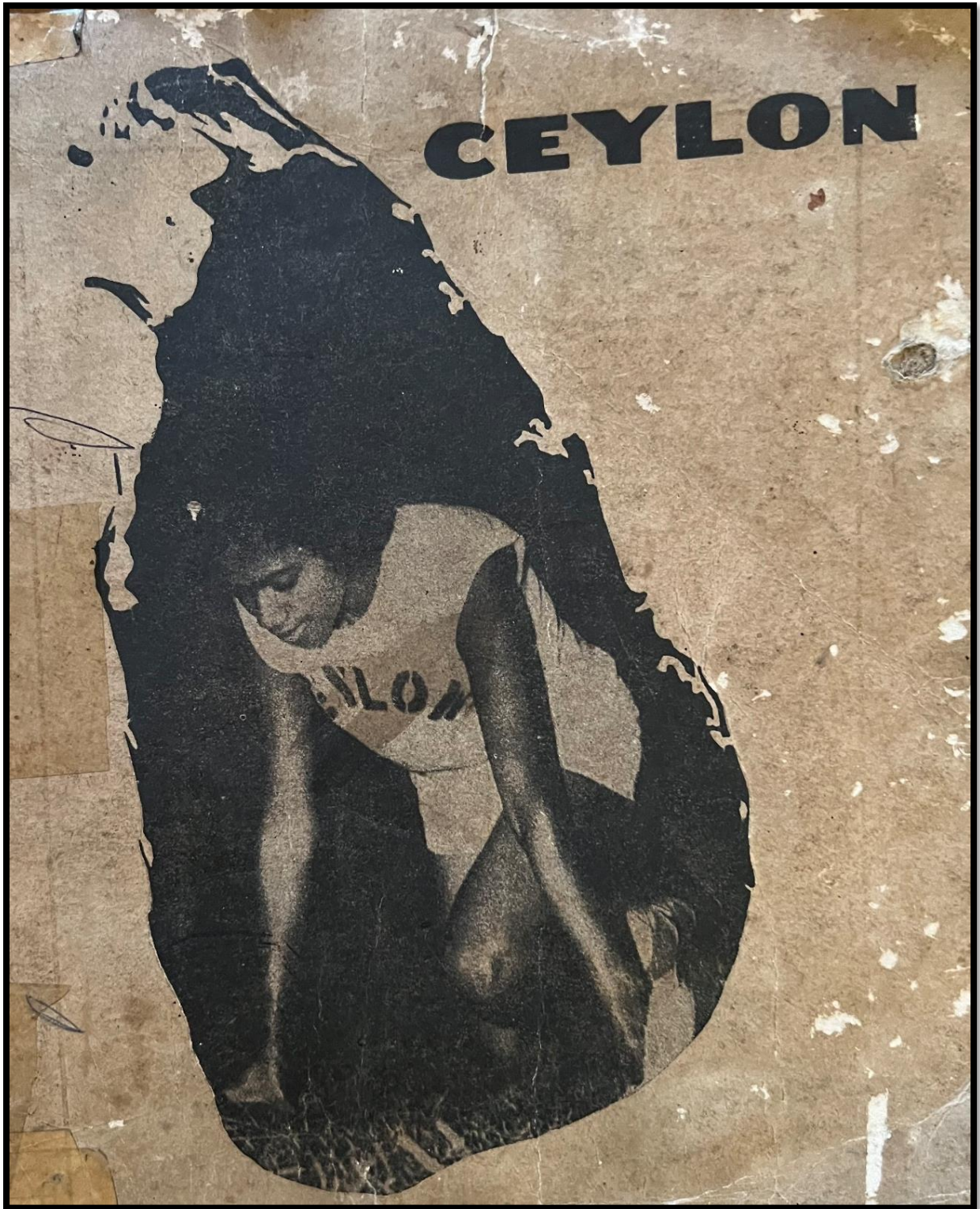
‘The Little Bullet’

“One doesn’t have to be your own child to stretch a helping hand for them to come up in life,” - Badra



A Trailblazer in Women’s Sprinting & An Inspiration for Aspiring Athletes!

(Compiled by Ravi Rudra to mark Badra’s 75th Birthday on 17th Jan 2025)



To hold three Sri Lanka National Sprinting Records, in the 100, 200, and 400 metre events, as well as keep the 100 and 200 metre national records for almost twenty years, are extraordinary feats. These are the Sprint achievements of Kahanda Gamage Badra – better known as ‘KG BADRA’.



Her story, filled with speed, resilience, and sheer determination, resonates with many aspiring athletes, especially those yearning to carve their own path in the world of female sprinting.

Early Life

“**Kahanda Gamage Badra** was born on January 17, 1950 in Madawalamulla, Galle, to K.G. Francis Appuhamy, a leading businessman who was known as ‘King of Galle’ and Ciciliana Munasinghe as the youngest of five children – three sons and two daughters.

Her family home was situated on a hilltop, a few kilometres outside the town centre. Badra had her first primary education at Sangamitta Balika Maha Vidyalaya, Galle and entered Buddhist Ladies College, Colombo in Grade Six.

Badra reminiscences having great fun with her cousins, who were around her age and lived in a house at the base of the hill. Whenever she had time to play, she would run down the hill to her cousins' home, returning home via the alternate route of a hundred or so steps alongside the road. It so happened that the primary school that she attended was also on a hill, and just as she did during playtime at home, she would joyfully run up and down the hill on her way to and from school.

"I was a Tom boy," laughs Badra recalling her mischievous and splendid childhood. It was in this carefree manner that Badra unknowingly entered into athletics training at an early stage.

From this simple beginning it seemed almost a natural progression for her to enter the running events at her primary school sports meets. She ran enthusiastically each year, winning enough certificates and trophies as "Miss K.G. Badra" to draw attention of many spectators.



Badra was, however, exposed to life's tragedies when as a nine-year-old girl she lost her twelve-year-old-brother, to whom she was very close. In 1960, not long after this traumatic time for her family, her parents sent Badra and her other siblings to Colombo for their education.

They chose Buddhist Ladies' College (BLC) for their two daughters, ten year-old Badra and her older sister Sumana who was eight years senior.

Badra feels fortunate that she was not alone at the boarding school, for Sumana was like a surrogate mother to her – she was always there to turn to and made it easier for Badra to adjust to hostel life. Indeed, observes Badra, “even now, she still mothers me”!

Discovering Herself

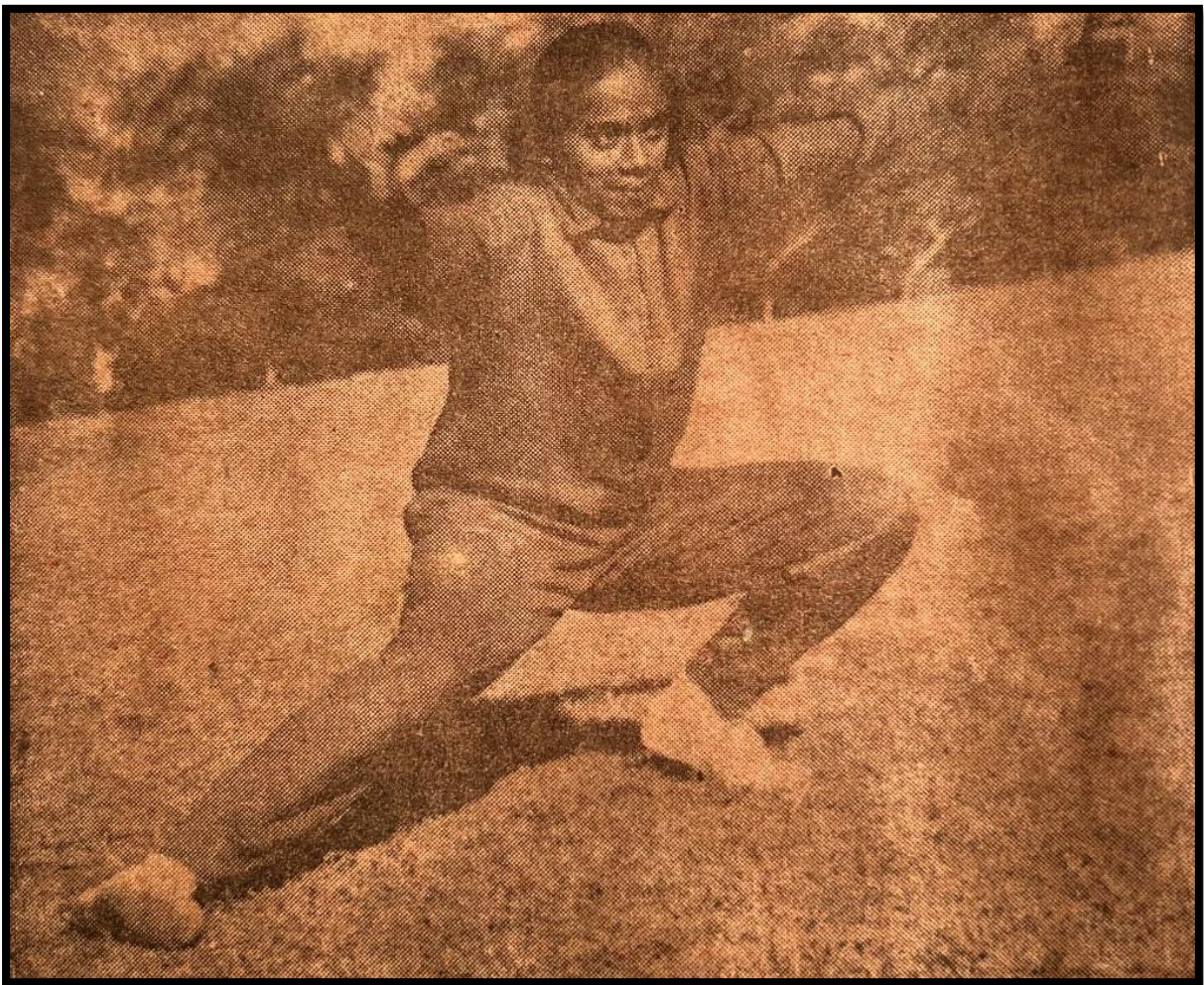


None of Badra's family members were known to have had notable sporting inclinations. Even so, Badra always seemed naturally sports-minded and at BLC she took an active interest in netball and athletics.

However, it was in the latter that she excelled. While representing her house in the sports meet during her first year at school, she won every event in which she participated.

The then sports teacher at BLC, Mrs Mallika de Silva, quickly spotted Badra's prodigious talent and took a keen interest in furthering her athletic development.

"It was Mrs. Mallika de Silva, Games Mistress of Buddhist Ladies College, who made me concentrate on athletics. The encouragement given by her has helped me to achieve a large measure of success".



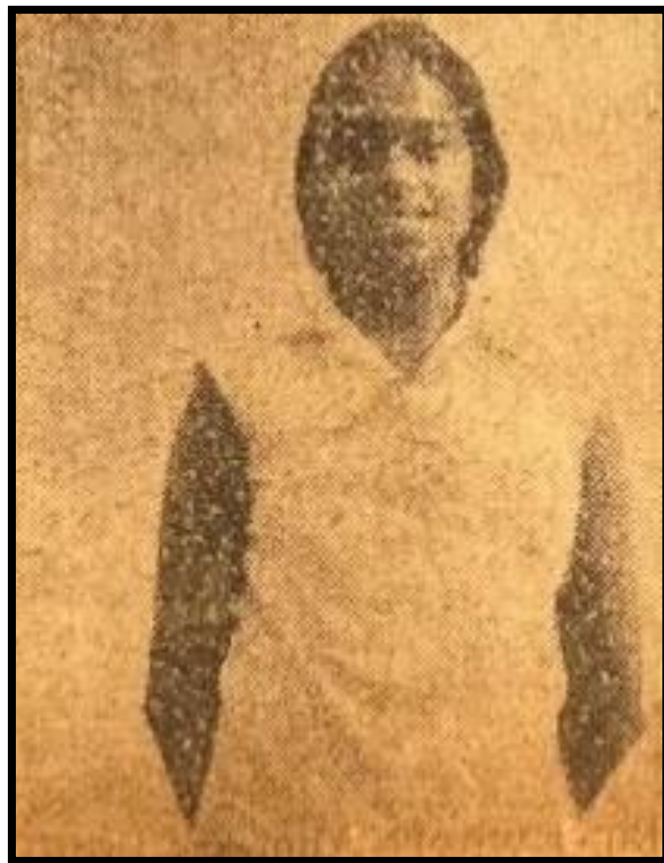
Due to the lack of on-site sporting facilities at BLC, students were taken to the nearby Victoria Park (now the Viharamahadevi Park) to train. Badra looked forward to those sessions not only because she enjoyed the training, but also because it provided her a welcome escape from the confines of the hostel.

Although a mischievous schoolgirl, she was also a popular student who showed natural leadership qualities, becoming a School Prefect, the Games Captain and Netball Captain.

The active girl soon found out that her future lay on the sports track when she started becoming the athletic Champ at school meets as well as in the District level and then Island wide.

In 1965, she represented Yasodhara House and won the Challenge Cup for the Best Athlete in the under-16 age group. That year Badra qualified for the All-Island Schools Athletics Championships to compete in the Under-16 sprints in the 100 and 200 meters.

The following year (1966) Badra became the Senior Champion at the inter-house track and field meet at Buddhist Ladies College.

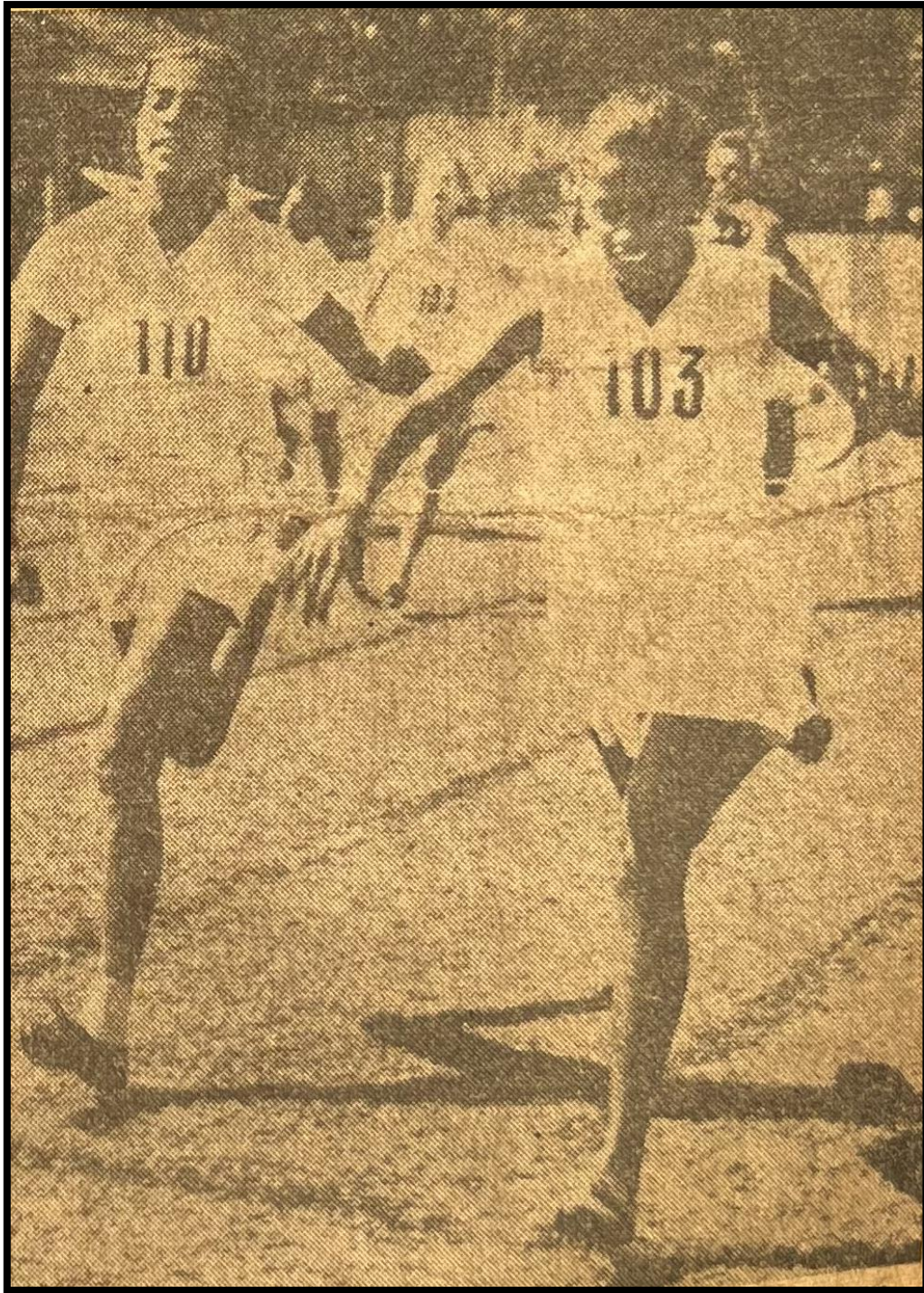


Her achievements made her participate in the Colombo District Schools' Athletic Championships and later in the All-Island Maha Vidyalayas and Madhya Maha Vidyalayas athletics meet held at Anuradhapura.



Above: Buddhist Ladies College Sprinter K.G. Badra who completed a fine double at the Western Province Girls Schools Athletics Meet. She won the 100 metres in 13.3 seconds and the 200 metres in 28.5 seconds.

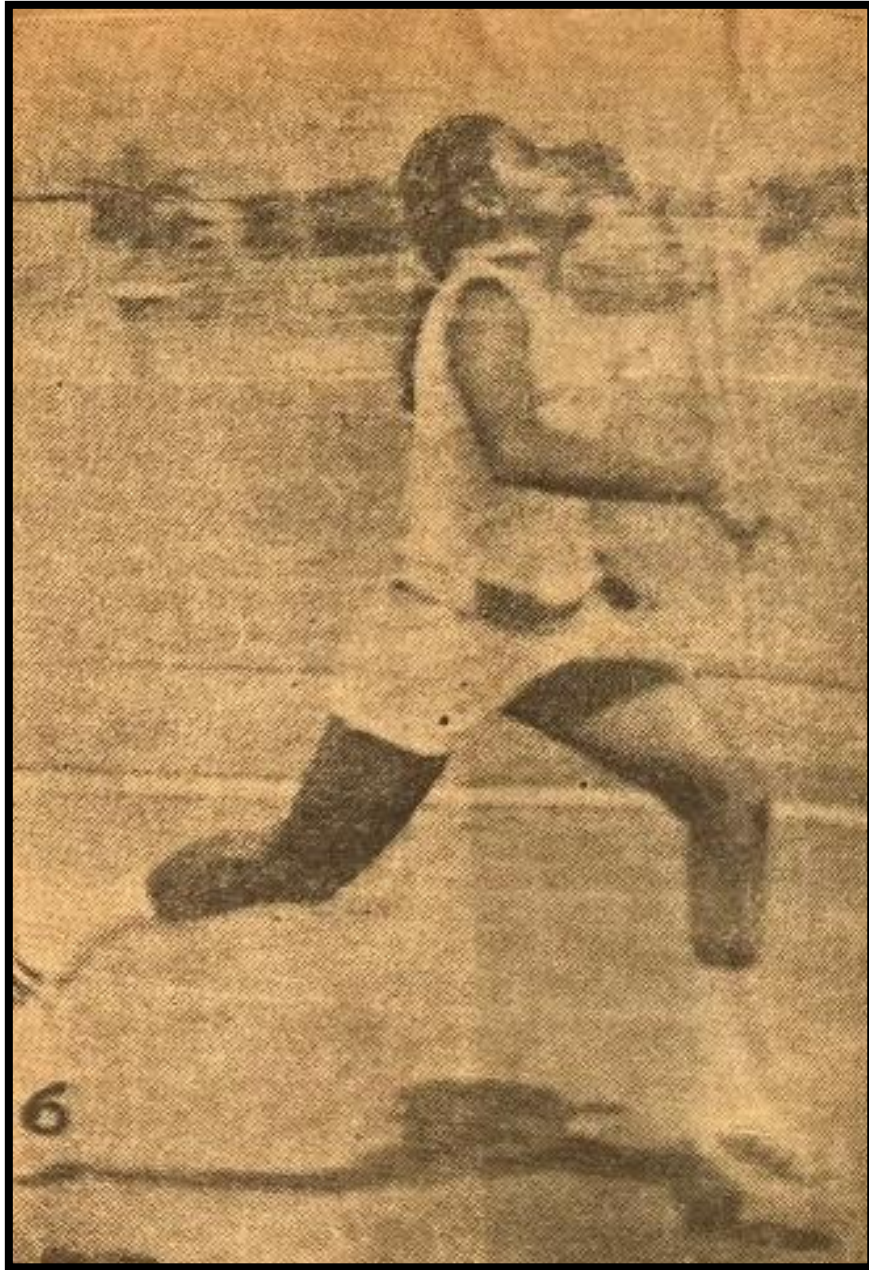
Accompanied by Mrs Mallika de Silva, she enthusiastically made the journey to the competition venue in Anuradhapura to prove herself at the inter-school level, and produced to win the 200-metre event. Her success marked a moment of realisation for Badra, when she felt she **'discovered herself'** and her real ability to run fast.



Buddhist Ladies College runner K.G. Badra (No 103) just gets ahead of Kanthi Ranabahu (No 110) in the 200 metres – Under 17 Final at the Women's Open Athletic Championships.

Science was her favourite subject which she successfully did for her O/Ls. After completing the GCE O-Level examination Badra entered Holy Family Convent (HFC) Bambalapitiya in 1968, where she believed there were better sporting facilities and a stronger athletics team than at BLC.

“I eventually gave up my higher studies, but entered Holy Family Convent to follow a Home Science course. The backup I got from there to enhance my sports skills was immense. Since then I have been with sports,” she smiles.



Miss Trixy Jayasuriya, Sports Mistress-in-Charge of Holy Family Convent (HFC), Bambalapitiya, who recognised Badra’s sports skills opened the gates at HFC for her. Badra was fortunate that her family allowed her to make her own choices, rather than pressuring her to choose academics over sports or vice versa.

Whilst at HFC, Badra rapidly gained a reputation as a new star of the track, with impressive performances in sprints at inter-school meets and open championships, enabling her to collect “Best Performance Trophies” on numerous occasions.

Holy Family Convent
win all the team trophies

K. G. BADRA, despite running against a head wind, set two new Ceylon records.

gamitla BMV):
 1. 100 yds (Under 17): 1. D. S. Perera (GSC Kotahena) 25 ft 0 1/2 ins. New record.
 Record 2. Ashanti Samarasinghe (GSC Kotahena) 3. Sheringa Bongsu (Presbyterian GSC).
 Discus Throw (Open): 1. Ramani Weeraratne (CT & FC) 112 ft 7 1/2 ins. 2. Petronella Warnakula (CT & FC) 3. Ranjani Perera (CT & FC).
 200 m (Under 15): 1. Rozelle Bowen (HFC Bpitiya) 28.1 secs.
 2. G. de Alwis (Ave Maria)



**Badra
 excels
 at HFC
 meet**



One of the highlights during her HFC days was the 1968 All-Island Interschool Athletics Championships where she won the 100 and 200 metres double and the Under-19, 4x100 metre relay as a member of the HFC team.

Not only was Badra triumphant on the track that year, but the HFC netball team of which she was a member – playing wing defence – also won the All-Island (Senior) Netball Trophy.

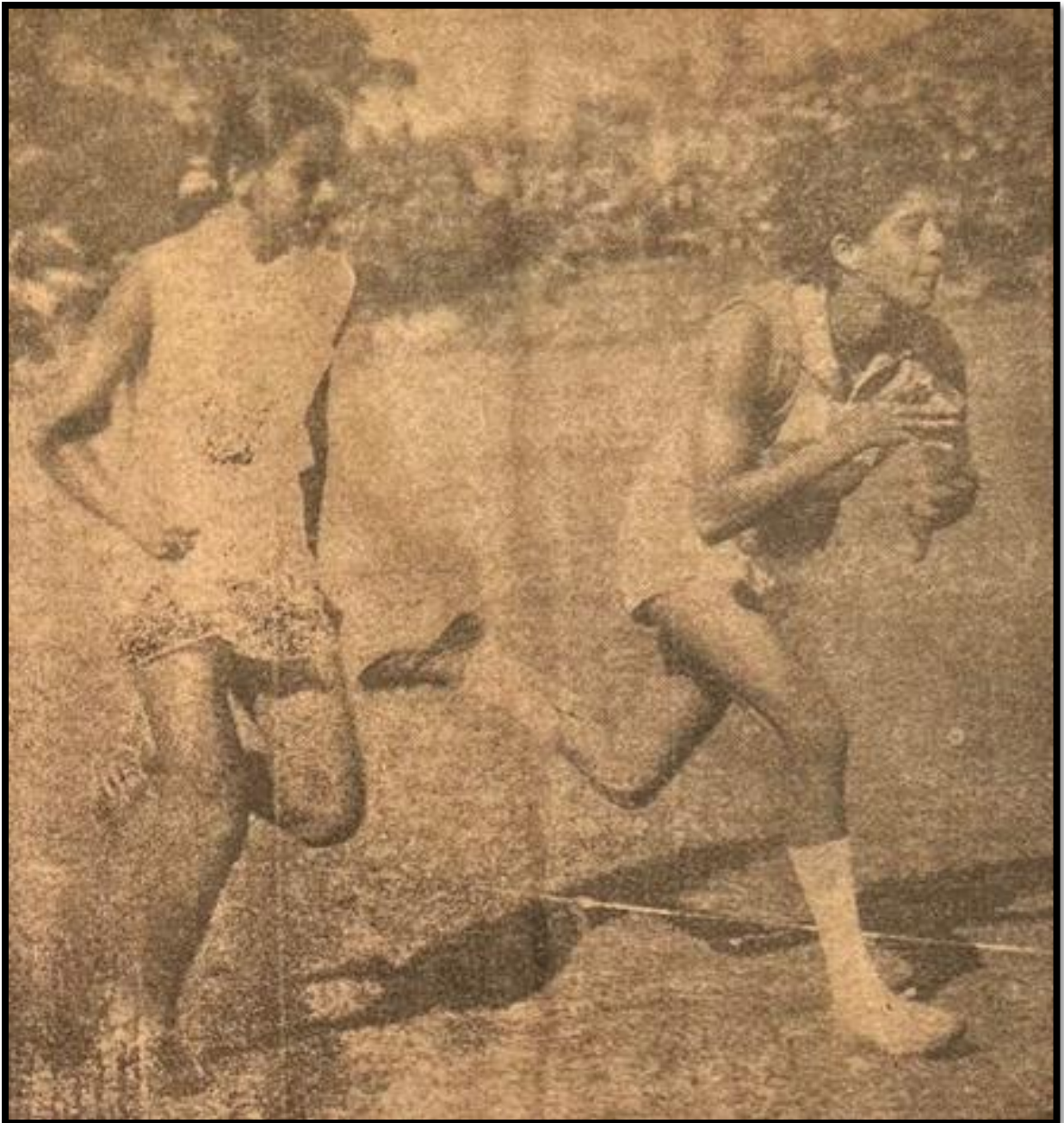


1968: Badra (extreme right) with the Holy Family Convent Netball team which emerged as Champions. Sixth from the right, in a sari, is Ms. Trixie Jayasuriya who had a major influence in Badra's remarkable achievements that year.



Badra (closest to camera) seen in action during a dual meet in Balangoda.

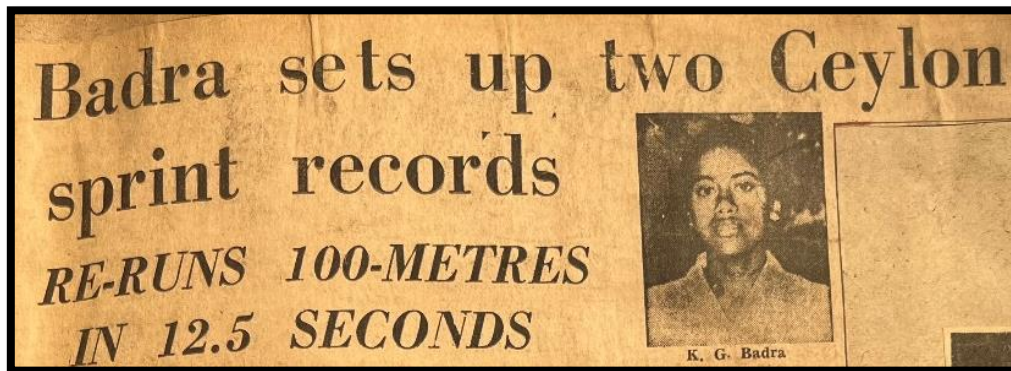
Winning Debut for CT & FC



Anchor lapper for CT and FC, Priyanthi Gunasekera receiving the baton from her younger teammate K.G. Badra in the women's 4x100 metres relay as they head towards victory at the CAAA's invitation meet at St. Peter's College. Priyanthi also won three individual events – 100m, 200m & 80-metres hurdles.

Meteoric Rise

**Badra Clocks 12.5s for the 100 Metres &
25.5s for the 200 Metres**



It was thus hardly surprising that Badra was amongst the chosen few included in the National Athletics Squad in 1968.

It was an important milestone for the young schoolgirl, opening the door for her to represent Sri Lanka Internationally – a challenge she eagerly awaited.

Sriya and Badra set new Ceylon marks at B'caloa

That international opportunity presented itself soon enough, when Badra was selected to compete in the 1968 Thailand National Championships in Bangkok.

However, she had to overcome some initial obstacles, including the decision of the Ceylon Amateur Athletic Association (AAA) not to fund her, on the grounds that she was still in school.



Perturbed by the prospect of Badra's non-inclusion in the team, the then Minister of Education – Dr W. Dahanayake, who also hailed from Galle – spoke to her father about the possibility of funding her.

Not wanting her daughter to miss a great opportunity, he decided to pay for Badra's passage to Bangkok, paving the way for her to proceed to Thailand.

‘18 YEAR-OLD LITTLE BULLET!

“Wins Two Golds At The Thailand AAA Open Meet”



Even with minimal training at the national level, Badra earned two gold medals, and equalled the Thai National 100-metres record with a time of 12.4 seconds. It was her best time ever and even she was amazed at what she accomplished.

“It was 1968 and I had just set two new Sri Lankan records for the 100m and 200m at selection round for the Thailand Open Games. Barely out of my teens, the ‘**little bullet**’, I heard someone call me!



SURPRISE VICTOR – Ceylonese Schoolgirl K.G. Badra surprised everyone with her terrific bursts of speed to snatch a sprint double in excellent times. She is seen here winning the 200 metres, comfortably, from Busbong Yimploy, SEAP Games winner and record holder. Badra also won the 100 metres equalling the Thailand National Record.

Silver Linings

“My first international event and I was ecstatic at the prospect of representing my country. I was already imagining the roar of the crowd at the games, the wind through my hair as I raced.....and then.....a cruel jolt of reality. They were short of money. Despite my spectacular timing I was the last on the list and was to be left behind. It was a disappointment I couldn't come to terms with.

But I believe that most clouds have silver linings. My father paid out of his own money to aid this journey I had begun and I came back with two GOLD medals. I sure did my father proud.”



Upon her victorious return home, as the only athlete in the Sri Lanka team to win ‘double gold’, Badra was warmly received at the airport by Dr Dahanayake himself, joined by Badra's parents. HFC teachers, students and other well-wishers.

Dec 1968 – Golds at Thai Open Championship



Ms. K.G. Badra and Ms. Irene de Silva, who won three golds and one silver medal at the Thailand National Athletics Championships held in Bangkok in December 1968, were received by Home Affairs Minister Dr. Wijayananda Dahanayake at the Katunayake Airport.

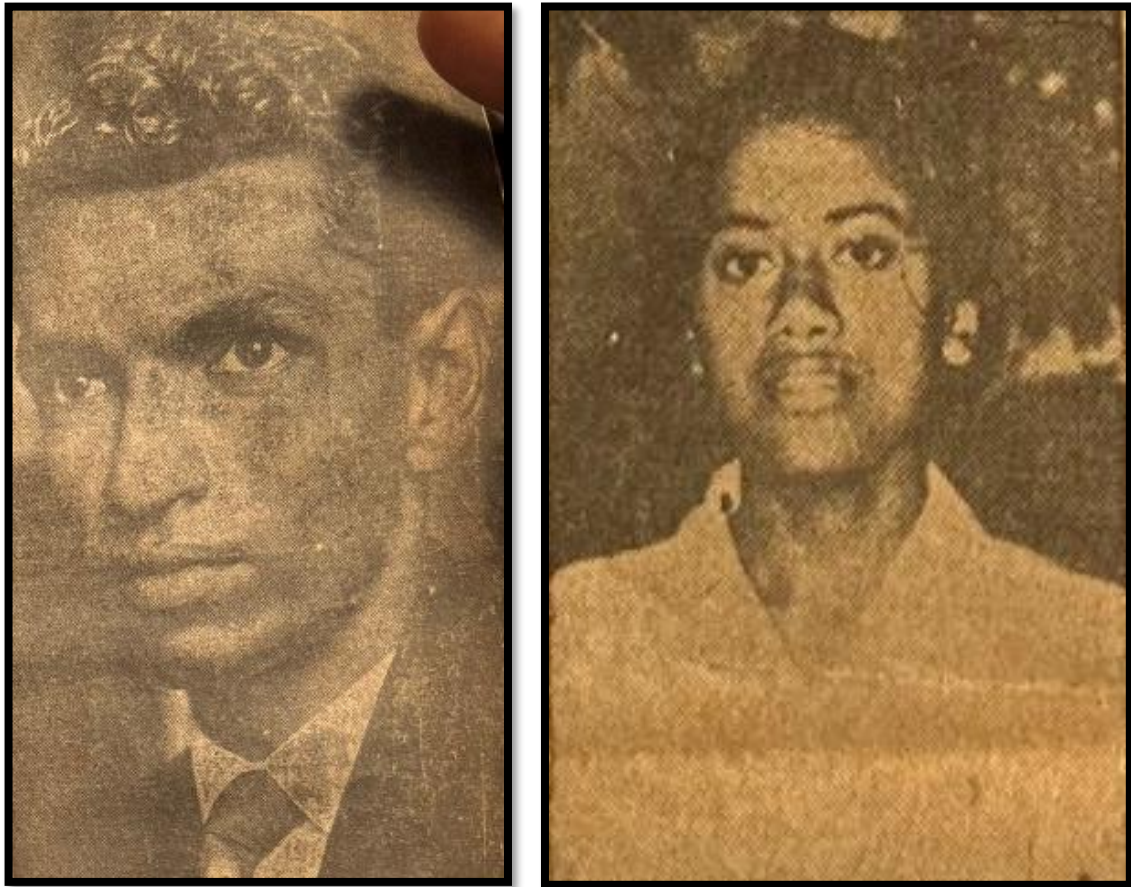


“Four of Ceylon’s squad of six athletes who bagged seven golds, three silver and one bronze at the Thai Open Track and Field Athletic Championships held in Bangkok. Above, Mr. Julian Grero, President of the Ceylon AAA is seen garlanding S.L.B. Rosa on their arrival at Katunayake Airport. Gold medallists, Sunil Gunawardena is at the extreme left & W. Wimaladasa 3rd from left. Rosa broke the 10,000 metres South East Asian Peninsula (SEAP) Games record with a time of 32m 37.6s.

The most outstanding feature of the games was schoolgirl sensation, KG Badra of Holy Family Convent, Bambalapitiya, winning two golds in the 100m (12.4s) & 200m (26.2s) for women in record times for the meet. In the process she also bettered Nirmala Dissanayake’s 100m Ceylon record by 0.3s and equalled Nirmala’s Ceylon record for the 200m.

In Sunil Gunawardena, who won Gold in the 200m (21.6s) and Badra we have two potential Asian Games medal winners. It’s 1969 now and it’s not too late to start training them for the next year’s Asian Games. With methodical training and foreign competition they are certain to go places.” Not long after her return from Thailand, Badra was crowned ‘Most Popular Sportswoman of the Year’ 1968.

‘The Sportsman & Sportswoman of the Year 1968’



IT'S ROSA & BADRA

Twenty-Four-Year-Old **S.L.B. ROSA**, of the Ceylon Transport Board was chosen ‘**Sportsman of the Year 1968**’ by a special panel appointed by the Sports Editor, Times of Ceylon. Schoolgirl, while **K.G. Badra**, of Holy Family Convent, Bambalapitiya was chosen ‘**Sportswoman of the Year 1968**’.

Both, Rosa and Badra won two ‘golds’ each at the recent Thailand Athletics Championships held in Bangkok. Rosa bettered the South East Asia Peninsula records in the two events he won - the 5,000 and 10,000 metres.

Badra triumphed in the 100 and 200 metres – equalling the Thailand record in the former event in a time of 12.4 seconds. Her time was identical to the runner-up in the 1966 Asian Games held on the same track in Bangkok.



The panel, who selected the 'Sportsman & Sportswoman of the Year 1968' at the meeting held at the BRC pavilion on January 6th, 1969.

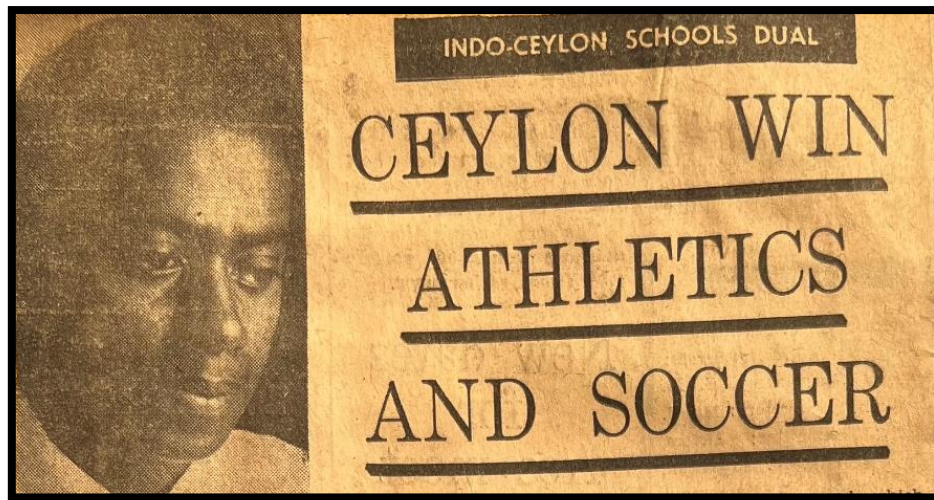
(Left to right): Mr. Ramsay Ziegelaar – Sports Editor, Mr. P. Julian Grero, Maj. Gen. B.R. Heyn, Mrs Irene de Soysa, Dr. H.S.R. Goonewardena - Director of Sports, Major Basil Henricus and Mr. P. Sivalingam.

COLIN COWDREY speaking at the presentation of the 'Sportsman & Sportswoman of the Year 1968' awards held on 26th Jan 1969 at the Sugathadasa Indoor Stadium, Grandpass.



Left: Colin Cowdrey, skipper of the MCC Team now in Ceylon, who was the chief guest at the Sports Awards of the Year held at the Sugathadasa Indoor Stadium, speaks to S.L.B. Rosa before presenting him with the 'Sportsman of the Year' trophy.

Right: Mr. Mallory Wijesinghe, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Ceylon Cold Stores, presenting the 'Sportswomen of the Year' trophy to K.G. Badra of Holy Family Convent, Bambalapitiya.



INDO- CEYLON SCHOOLS DUAL – MADRAS, FEB 1969

CEYLON'S crack schoolgirl sprinter **K.G. Badra** made amends for her defeat in the 200 metres by the Mysore girl Nirmala Uthiah when she outran her in the short sprint on the second day of the Indo-Ceylon School's Contest to win the 100 metres in 12.4 seconds.

Injured before the contest started, the Holy Family Convent, Bambalapitiya, student was off to a great start and won in a time of 12.4 seconds, which is her personal best to date. It was 3/10ths of a second faster than the Ceylon Record of 12.7 seconds to the credit of Lorraine Ratnam.

(*Lorraine Ratnam improved on her Ceylon record for the 100 metres when she clocked 12.61s in Jakarta, Indonesia at the 4th Asian Games. She also set a national record for the 80 metres hurdles in 12.27s at the same Games).

The Ceylon Schools Girls Relay Team too won comfortably to set a new Indian Schools mark in their 4x100m relay. The Holy Family Convent quartet of **Pauline Clogston, Manori Wijeratne, skipper Melanie White and K.G. Badra** returned a winning time of 50.2 seconds which is 2/5ths a second faster than the Ace AC's Ceylon Record of 50.6 seconds.

The Boys team, minus crack sprinter Faiz Ismail of Isipathana MMV who did not participate in the contest, won in a fine time of 43.2 seconds which was a superb effort.



(L-R): K.G. Badra, Pauline Clogstoun and skipper Melanie White

The Girls' 80 metre hurdles saw **Priyanthi Gunasekera** unwrap a burst of speed in the run to the tape to edge the Indian girl into second place and win in 13.0 seconds.

In the absence of Faiz Ismail it was left to Kuliypitiya lad, **N.G. Wimaladasa**, to produce the thrills in the boy's 100 metres. Up against the very promising young Sikh, Ajaib Singh who had won the 200 metres on the first day, none gave Wimaladasa any chance whatsoever.

But the 16-year-old Wimaladasa led most of the race until the Indian caught him up and lunged forward to edge him into second place in an extremely tight finish at the tape – both were timed at 11.2 seconds. Ceylon's Lawrence de Silva finished third in this race.

Ceylon Schools won two more track golds on the second day when **W.I. Fernando** took the long jump and **O. Nayagam** the 800 metres.

INDO-CEYLON SCHOOLS ATHLETIC CONTEST POINTS

OVERALL: CEYLON 112; INDIA 109.

BOYS: INDIA 71: CEYLON 62.

GIRLS: CEYLON 50: INDIA 38.

MEDAL TABLE

BOYS	Gold	Silver	Bronze
India	12	7	1
Ceylon	4	10	12
GIRLS	Gold	Silver	Bronze
Ceylon	6	3	6
India	3	6	2

Mother Welcomes Champion Athlete



K.G. Badra - Champion Athlete at the Indo-Ceylon Athletics Schools Sports Meet held in Madras, is warmly received by her Mother Mrs. Ciciliana Munasinghe on her arrival at the Fort Railway Station on 21st February, 1969.

1969 – SINGAPORE AMATEUR ATHLETICS CHAMPIONSHIPS



CEYLON'S contingent comprising of (L-R) **W. Wimaladasa**, **K.G. Badra**, **S.L.B. Rosa** and **Ranjit Weerasena** about to leave to participate at the Singapore Amateur Athletics Championships.

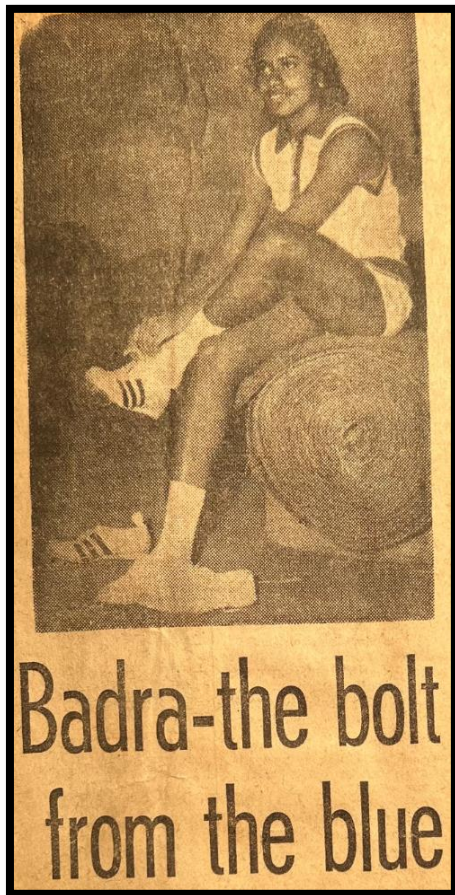
Rosa, Badra bag 'golds'

CEYLON'S long-distance runner, **LUCIEN ROSA** proved himself unbeatable at the Singapore Amateur Athletics Championships by winning the 5,000 and 10,000 metres double. Having won the 10,000-metre on the first day with a record time of 31 minutes 21.8 seconds, he clocked 14 minutes 33.6 seconds to win the 5,000-metre event on the second day – unchallenged over the last 300 metres. Schoolgirl **K.G. BADRA** won Gold for Ceylon by clocking 25.8 seconds in the women's 200 metres final.

Ceylon finish up with Six Golds

CEYLON won three more Gold medals to take their tally to SIX at the Singapore Open Athletics Championships concluded at the Farren Park Centre. **Ranjit Weerasena** won a Gold in the Discus event with a throw of 124 ft. 9 ins., while **W. Wimaladasa** won the 400 metres in 48.4 sec, to repeat his last year's performance of breaking the 49-sec barrier.

Schoolgirl K.G. Badra making her debut on the 'Bitumen' track, completed a brilliant sprint double when she took the 100 metres in 12.9 secs, having won the 200-metres the previous day in 25.8 secs to better her own Ceylon mark of 26.0 secs.



It's many moons now since Lorraine Ratnam bade adieu to the track, but following her trail we have in our midst a bright new track 'queen' by the name of K.G. Badra.

Outstanding sporting personalities in this country have been few and far between and when 'comets' like Badra appear it's bound to raise eye brows.

In fact that's what has been happening ever since Badra, that bundle of energy, caught the eye way back in 1966, as a wisp of a girl running for Buddhist Ladies College, in the CAA Junior Championships....

....Before this she was an unknown quantity, running around in circuit

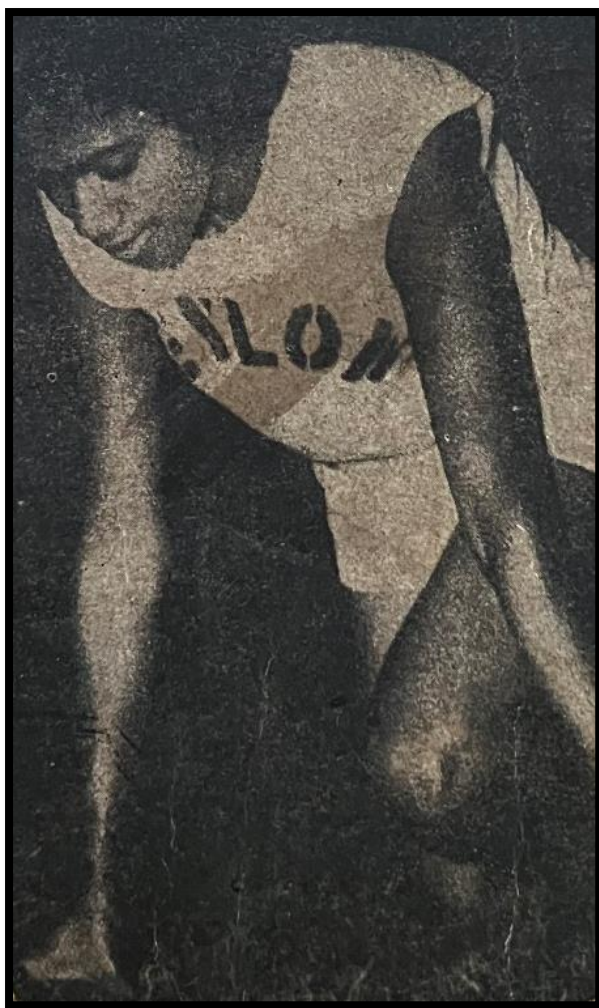
meets in distant Galle, while carrying books to Sangamitta Balika Maha Vidyalaya.

Two years later, having switched schools to Holy Family Convent, Bambalapitiya, she came under the guidance of Ms. Trixi Jayasuriya and since then incredible things have started happening.....

XIX Annual C. Prasannakumar Memorial Athletics Meet

Bangalore, May 1969

Speedy Badra snaps C.P.M. and Ceylon 200 m. records



Striding out comfortably round the curve in the fourth lane in the 200 metres, 19 year-old schoolgirl K.G. Badra sprinted all out down the straight, her long plait slightly lifting off her back on this hot and sunny Friday afternoon. And when she split the tape she had not only recorded her best timing of **25.7** seconds, but she also bettered the Meet and Ceylon National records.

Badra was competing on the opening day of the XIX Annual Athletics Meet of the C. Prasannakumar Memorial Athletics Club at the Sree Kanteerava Stadium, representing the Ceylonese Track & Field Club.

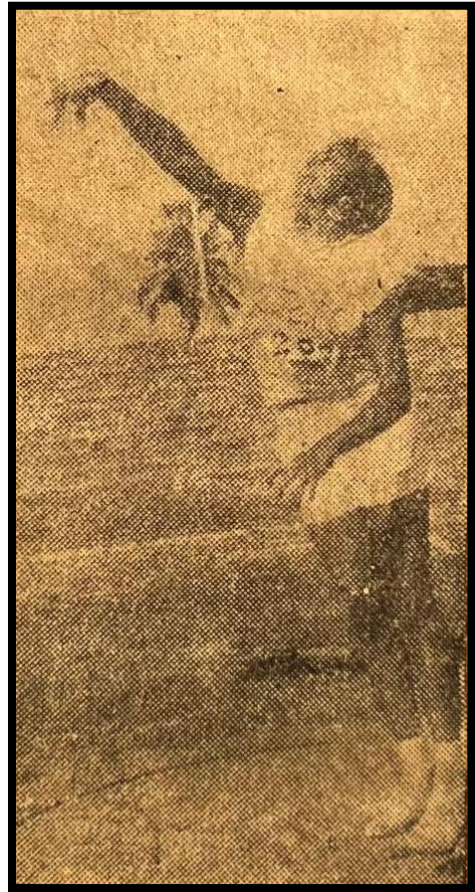
While her previous best timing was 26.0 seconds, established on Indian soil as well when she competed in the Indo-Ceylon Schools Meet at Madras, Badra's timing bettered the C.P.M. Meet record of 26.6 secs and the Ceylon National record of 26.1 secs which stands jointly in the name of Nirmala Dissanayake and Priyanthi Gunasekera – both representing Ladies College, Colombo – set on 24th June 1962 and 04th April 1968 respectively.

Badra also won the women's 100m comfortably in a new record of **12.1** seconds – improving the previous meet record by 0.4 sec. (*This time run by Badra was better than the existing Ceylon national record of 12.7 sec, set by Ace AC's Lorraine Ratnam on 1st July 1962 in Colombo).

The CT & FC Girls from Lanka set yet another record when their quartet comprising of Suranganie de Silva, Pauline Clogstoun, Irene de Silva & K.G. Badra clocked **51.3** seconds to improve the Meet record by 0.5 sec.



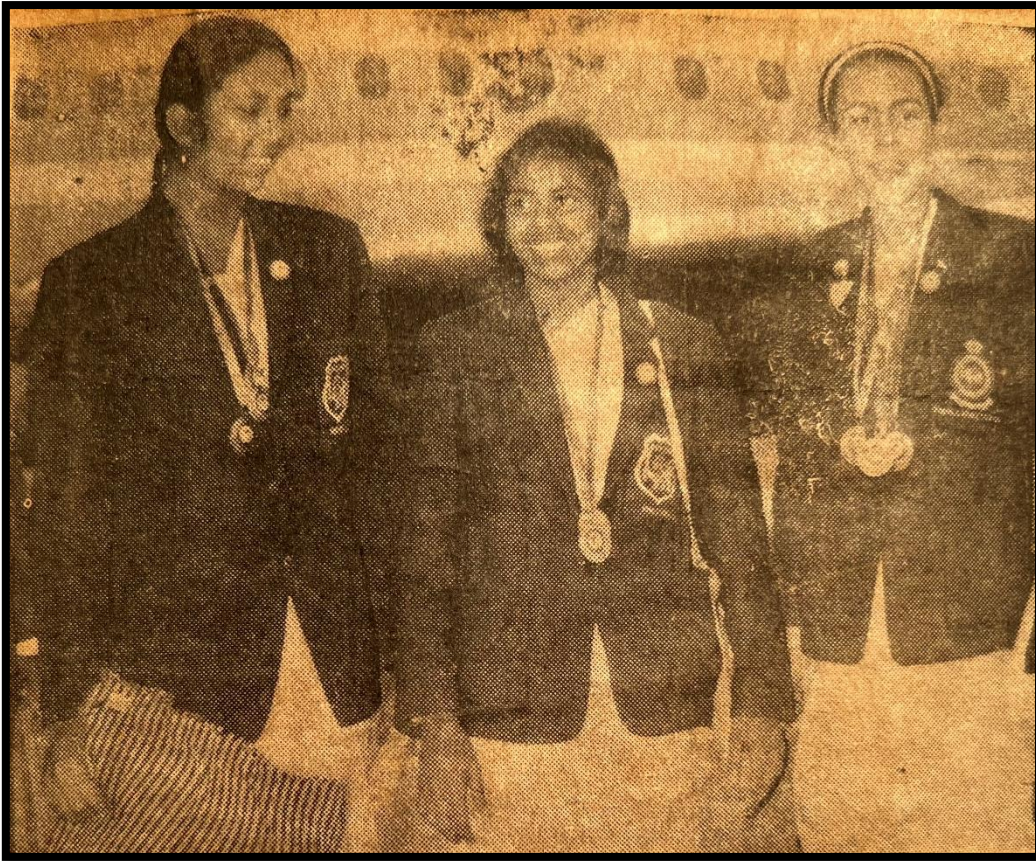
CT&FC Women's 4x100m Relay Quartet (L-R): Suranganie de Silva, Pauline Clogstoun, Irene de Silva & K.G. Badra.



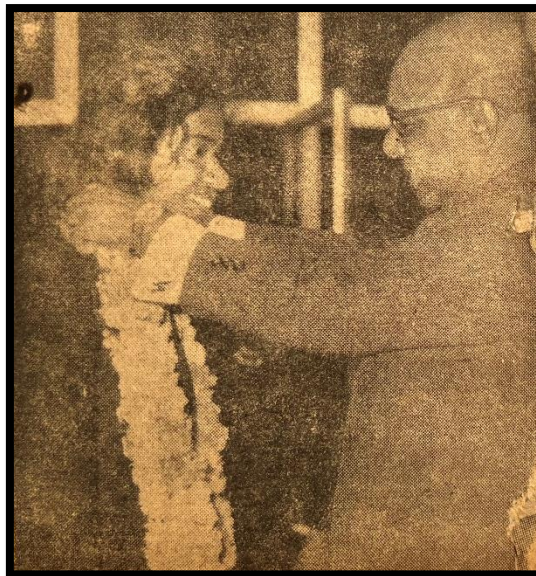
(L): K.G. Badra & (R): Ramani Weeraratne

Ceylon's K.G. Badra emerged as the new Indian Women's 200-metre champion with a time of 25.8 seconds at the **All-India Nationals** held at Ajmer, Rajasthan. She was also part of a three-member Ceylon Women's team, along with Pauline Clogstoun and Ramani Weeraratne, that won the Women's Championships trophy. Pauline Clogstoun did well in both the long jump (2nd) and the high jump 3rd).

Over 200 athletes from all over India and six athletes from Ceylon took part in the Indian Championships.



The Ceylon Women's Team which took part in the 1969 Indian National Athletics Meet on their return to the Island. K.G. Badra (centre) won two Gold Medals for her performance in the 100 & 200 metres. She is seen here surrounded by Ramani Weeraratne (left) and Pauline Clogstoun (right) on arrival at Katunayake Airport.



K.G. Badra who met with great success at the All-India Athletic Championships being garlanded by Mr. Julian Grero, the President of CAAA, at the Katunayake Airport.

Sportswoman of the Year 1969

Badra excelled in the 100m, 200m and 400m and was the All Island Champion in 1969 in all three events.

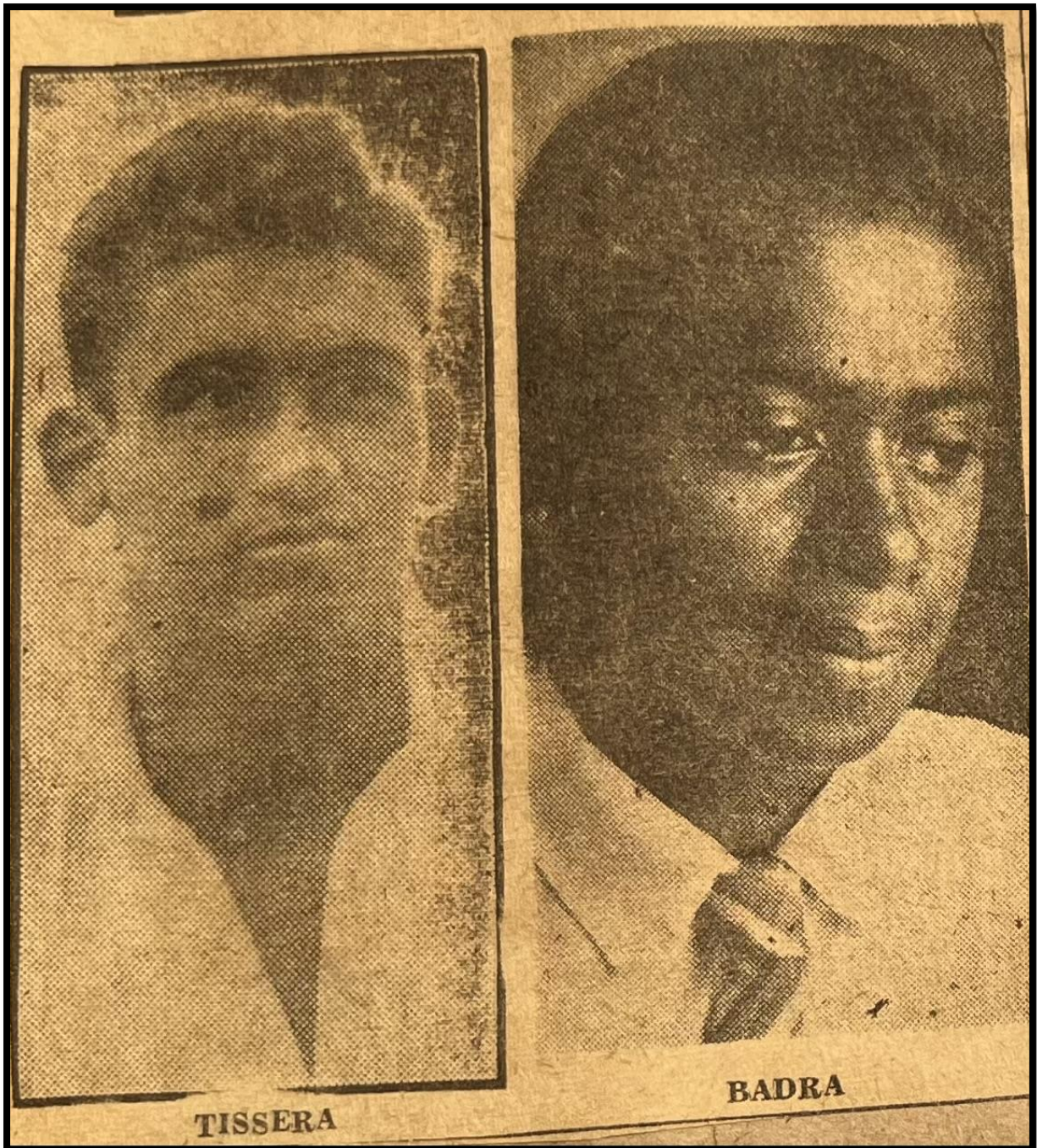


The general public who acknowledged Badra as a bright young star by voting her, at the age of just 18, as the **Most Popular Sportswoman of the Year for 1968** gave her the same accolade the following year - **Most Popular Sportswoman of the Year for 1969**.

She was also given for the second successive year, another prestigious award - **Sportswoman Of The Year 1969**.

The Award was made on 29th January 1970 at the Sugathadasa Indoor Stadium, by the Chief Guest, Mr. V.A. Sugathadasa, Minister of Nationalised Services and Sports, in front of an unprecedented crowd of over 12,000 sports fans who packed every nook and corner.

1969 Sportsman & Sportswoman of the Year



TISSERA

BADRA

MOST POPULAR SPORTSMAN OF 1969		
1.	MICHAEL TISSERA	25,648
2.	M. G. M. S. ZURFICK	15,141
3.	STANLEY FERNANDO	4,785
4.	S. L. B. ROSA	2,604
5.	JEFF RATNAM	1,815
6.	M. J. M. LAFIR	1,548
MOST POPULAR SPORTSWOMAN OF 1969		
1.	K. G. BADRA	23,041
2.	P. CLOGSTONE	8,535
3.	B. BANDARA	8,433
4.	S. BONGSO	6,165
5.	S. DE ABREW	2,940
6.	T. SALVADORE	1,972

Michael Tissera who led Ceylon XI to victory against the MCC in a 60-Over match was chosen as '**Sportsman of the Year 1969**' by a special panel in the contest organised by 'The Times of Ceylon' and sponsored by the Ceylon Cold Stores Ltd.

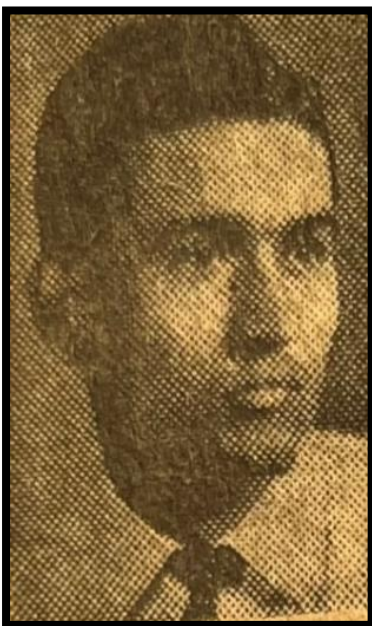
Miss KG Badra, one of Asia's best woman sprinters who won the 100m and 200m in Singapore, India and Ceylon by clocking new marks was once again chosen as '**Sportswoman of the Year 1969**'.

The panel that chose the winners consisted of Major-General B.R. Heyn, Col. F.C. de Saram, Dr. H.S.R. Goonewardena, Director of Sports, Mr P. Julian Grero, Mr. P. Sivalingam and Mr. Ramsay Ziegelaar, Sports Editor.

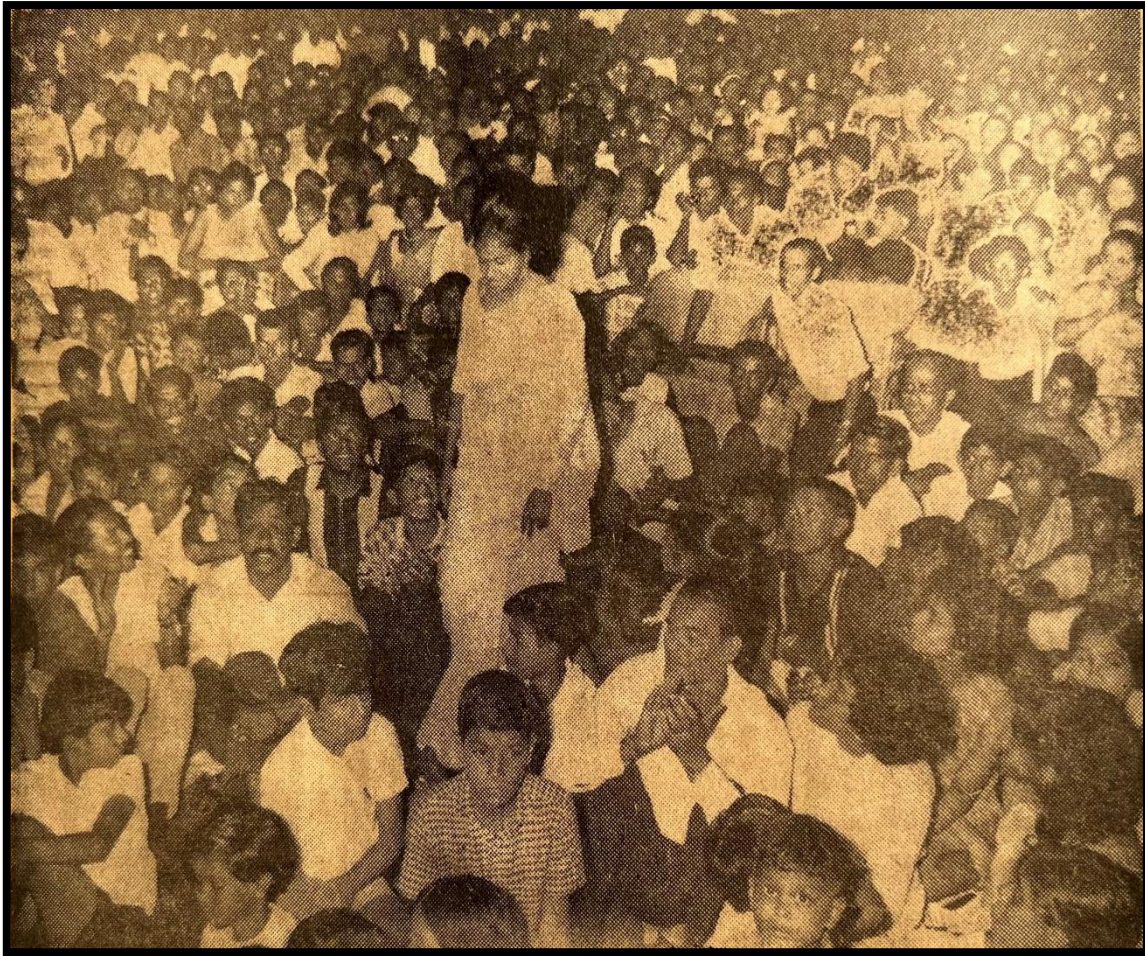
DAY TO REMEMBER!

It was a day to remember last night at the presentation of the most coveted 'Elephant House' Awards to the '**Sportsman & Sportswoman of the Year 1969**' at the Sugathadasa Indoor Stadium before an unprecedented crowd of over 12,000 sports fans who packed every nook and corner.

Never before has such a crowd been accommodated at the Stadium and every one of them thoroughly enjoyed themselves with such a fabulous line-up of Musical wizards – the Spitfires with Dalrene and Desmond, the Moonstones, the Holy Family Convent Junior Band and M.S. Fernando with the Junior Rythmers – each having an unique style and presentation of their own to keep the crowds swaying, jiving and tapping their feet.



In the absence of the ever admired Ceylon cricket captain, **Michael Tissera** (left), who was away in Kandy, leading his club NCC in an important Sara trophy cricket match, his wife Mrs. Junette Tissera accepted both his awards - 'Most Popular Sportsman & The Sportsman of the Year 1969'.



K.G. Badra, who was chosen as the 'Most Popular Sportswoman' and the "Sportswoman of the Year" walking up to receive her awards.



Mr. H.W. Amarasuriya, Deputy Chairman, 'Times of Ceylon', presenting the 'Most Popular Sportswoman of the Year' award to K.G. Badra.



K.G. Badra receiving her 'Sportswoman of the Year', award from Minister of Sports, Hon. Mr. V.A. Sugathadasa.

BADRA HAS NO EQUAL IN CEYLON

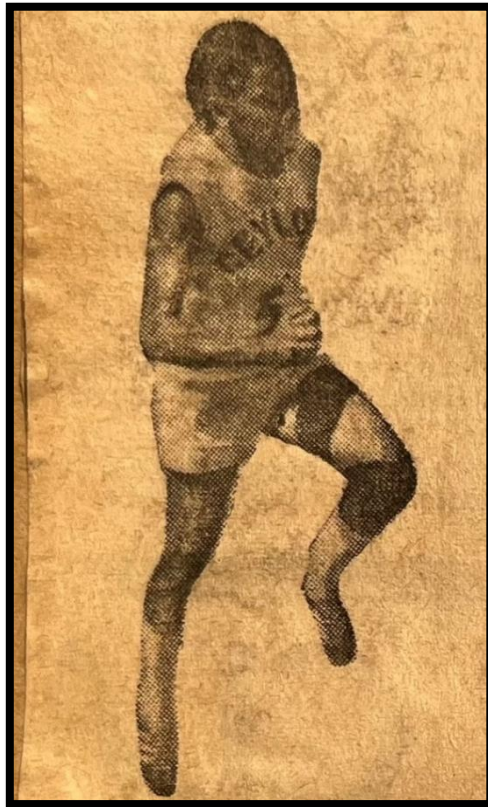
“K.G. BADRA has no equal in this country! Her attainments in the domain of athletics here and abroad are outstanding. The paucity of competition for her in Ceylon, an imperative factor in sport, has not substantially helped her to achieve greater marks. But despite this she reigns supreme and it would be exceedingly difficult for any to topple her. The Flying 20-year-old Queen of the Ceylon track, Kahanda Gamage Badra, who smashed the Ceylon record in the 100 and 200 metres events in **12.2** secs and **25.7** secs respectively at the Women’s Open Athletic Championships will proceed to Germany soon after the Ceylon Athletic National Championships to undergo specialised training and follow classes in athletics coaching.

Sports Scholarship to Germany

Badra’s alma mater Sangamitta Vidyalaya invited her as a VIP guest to the school sports meet – a meet in which she herself had competed not so long ago as a primary school student. As it happened, **Dr W. Dahanayake** (below) was also invited as a VIP guest to that meet.



Once again Dr. Dahanayake was instrumental in facilitating an opportunity for Badra's progress; this time, by speaking to the Director of the Ministry of Sports, Dr H.S.R. Goonewardene – who was present as the Chief Guest – and persuading him to consider Badra for training overseas.



**Badra off to
West Germany**

This led to a tremendous opportunity for Badra, an offer of a sports scholarship to Germany, fully funded by the German government – testimony to the now national recognition of her talent and prowess.

It seems that this offer sealed her fate; Badra decided to pursue amateur athletics on a full-time basis, a major step forward and a decision she made with great support from her family.

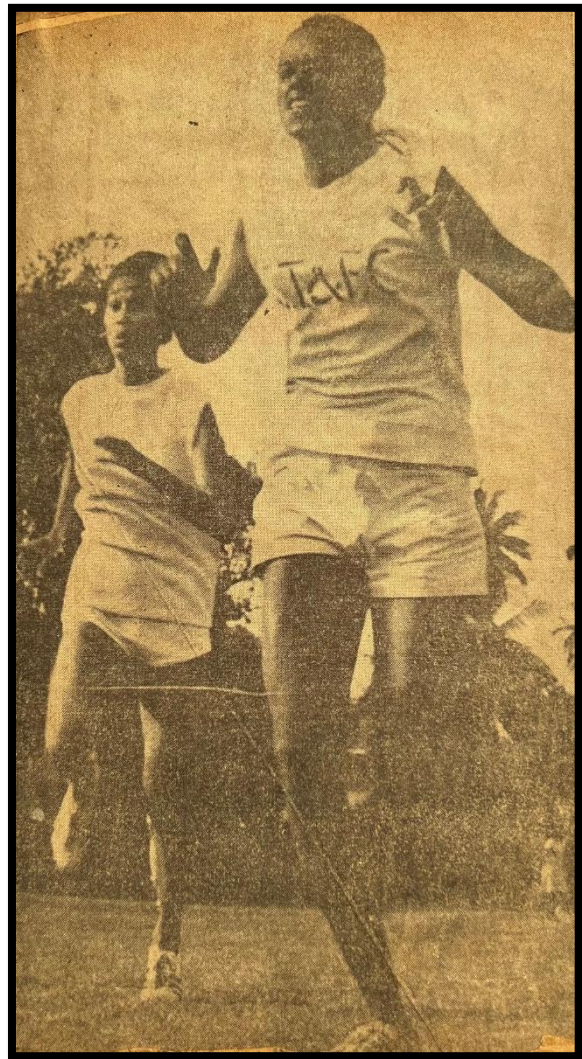
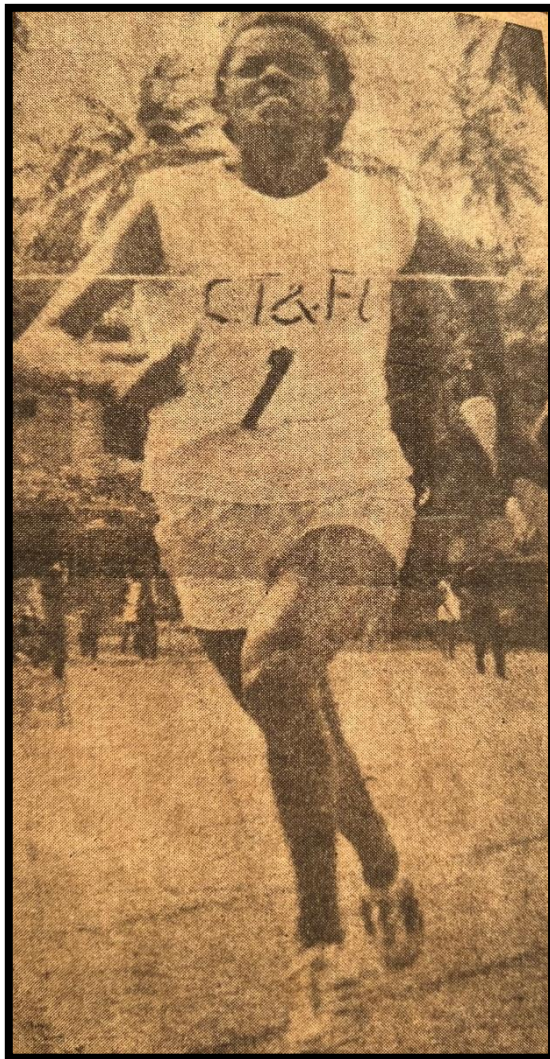
One of her older brothers, K.G. Karunasena, was Badra's constant mentor and guide, ardently encouraging her throughout her career even though he himself was not a sportsman.

QUEEN OF THE TRACK

BADRA BREEZES THRO TO TWO NEW RECORDS

At the 1969 Ceylon Track and Field Club (CT & FC) Open Championships, prior to her departure to Germany, Badra stamped her name into Sri Lanka sporting history by shattering the 100-metre National Record previously held by Lorraine Ratnam with a timing of **12.2** seconds.

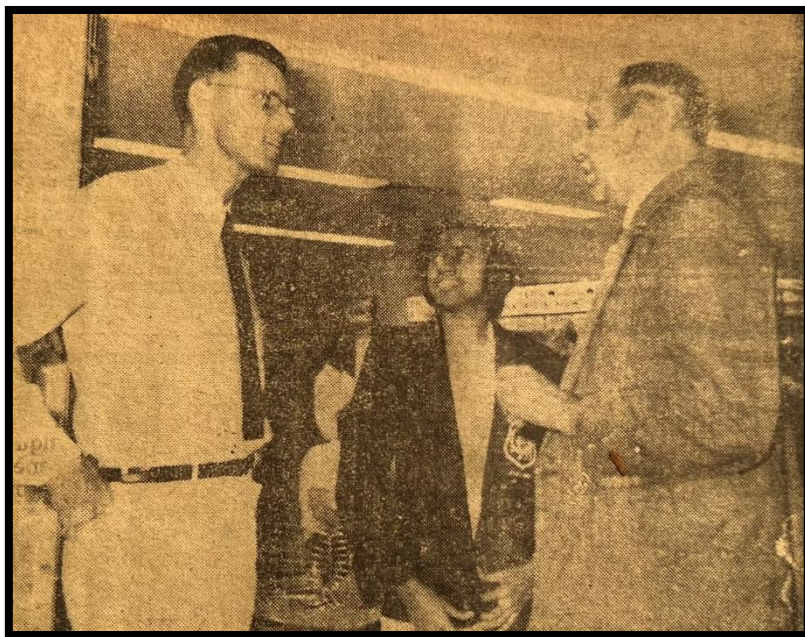
In 1970, she did it again, this time in the 200 metres when she bettered Priyanthi Gunasekera's record with a timing of **25.7** seconds.





26 March 1970: K.G. Badra is off the starting blocks in the 100 metres (Open) at the Government Services Meet held at Police Park,

Badra left for West Germany in April 1970 to commence a rigorous three-month training course at the Sports University in Cologne (now the German Sport University Cologne).



K.G. Badra, at Katunayake Airport, just before flying out to do a course on specialised coaching in West Germany. The Director of Sports, Dr. H.S.R. Gunawardena also left for West Germany on the same flight to visit leading Sports Institutions there. Both are seen talking to Mr. R. Newman of the West German Embassy.

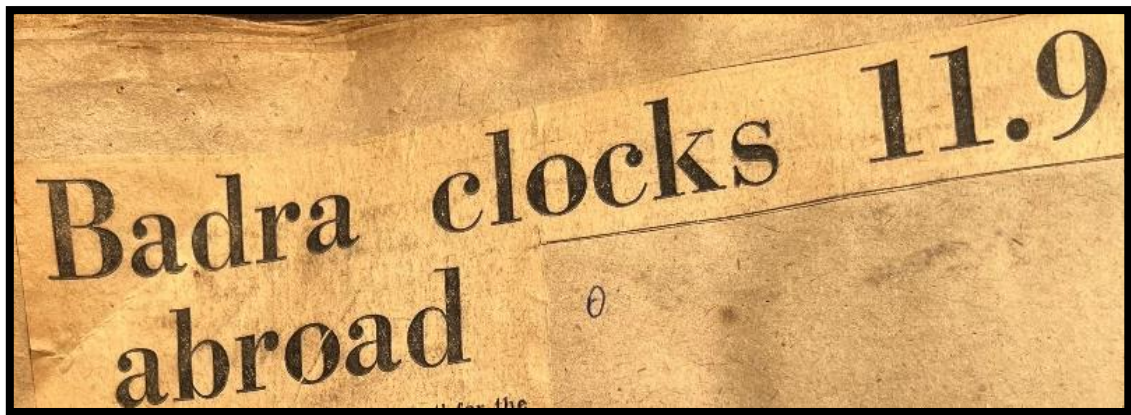
The facilities in Cologne were superb and presented a rare opportunity for Badra's progress. Moreover, it was a revealing and maturing experience for young Badra.

The territory was unfamiliar and she felt lonely and nervous, especially having to deal with language and cultural differences. She candidly discloses how taken aback she was when asked to go out on dates, a practice alien to her own upbringing. She is very thankful to a South African lady instructor who became her confidante and guided her throughout her stay.

While in Germany, Badra continued to improve, and better her own Sri Lankan 100-metre record, clocking **11.9** seconds at the 1970 Cologne City meet and becoming the first Sri Lankan woman to break the 12-second mark. It was a personal best, and it impressed the Sri Lankan authorities.



Badra training in Cologne, West Germany



“Badra, who is undergoing training at the famous West German Sport Schule at Cologne, clocked **11.9** seconds in the 100 metres a few days after her arrival in Germany.

Things, however, did not go off well for Badra at the start of her training. The cold climatic conditions proved too much for her and she was confined to bed for five days with a high temperature. But, she picked up after that and on just her fourth appearance on the track she returned a superb time of 11.9 seconds for the 100 metres. Her German coach expects her to lower this timing further.

Badra is expected back in Ceylon next month and will continue her training for the 1970 Asian Games.

Originally, it was intended to keep her there for a longer period, but her coach indicated it would not be advisable, as she was preparing for a meet to be held in the tropics and having trained in cold conditions she may find the heat too much to bear.

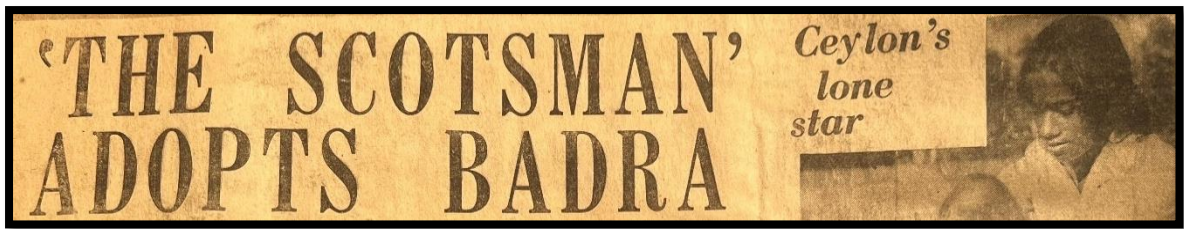
The coach has also mentioned that Badra’s arm movements did not synchronise with the speed of her legs and that he was concentrating on correcting this defect. He expects once this action is rectified she would return even better timings in 100 and 200 metre events.”

Based on her fine performances in Germany, Badra was selected to compete in the 100-metre event at the **Commonwealth Games** in Edinburgh, Scotland that same year (1970), thus gaining the distinction of becoming Sri Lanka’s first female representative at any Commonwealth Games.

CEYLON'S LONE COMPETITOR AT THE 9th BRITISH COMMONWEALTH GAMES



Miss Kahanda Gamage Badra, Ceylon's sole representative at the IX Commonwealth Games, is escorted by two pipers of the 52nd Lowland Volunteers after her arrival at Turnhouse Airport, Edinburgh, Scotland.



“THE SCOTSMAN”, the well-known Scottish Daily Newspaper has officially ‘adopted’ K.G. Badra – Ceylon’s lone competitor at the Commonwealth Games opened in Edinburgh, Scotland. She is to be taken on sightseeing and shopping trips by a representative of the Newspaper.



A Game of Firsts

A record amount of 1383 athletes and 42 nations lined up in the Scottish capital city at the Meadowbank Stadium, in what was a Games of many firsts. It was the first to use metric distances as well being the first to use electronic photo-finish technology. Edinburgh-1970 was also the first games that Queen Elizabeth II attended since becoming Head of the Commonwealth.



STANDING OVATION FOR 'TINY' BADRA



The slight figure of Miss Kahanda Gamage Badra, Ceylon's sole representative and so bestowed with the additional honour of carrying the national flag – a proud and momentous experience for her.



“CEYLON’S lone representative at the Ninth British Commonwealth Games, mini-sized K.G. Badra (all 5 foot 1 inch), received a standing ovation when she passed the saluting base during the team’s march-past at the newly built Meadowbank Stadium in Edinburgh, Scotland.



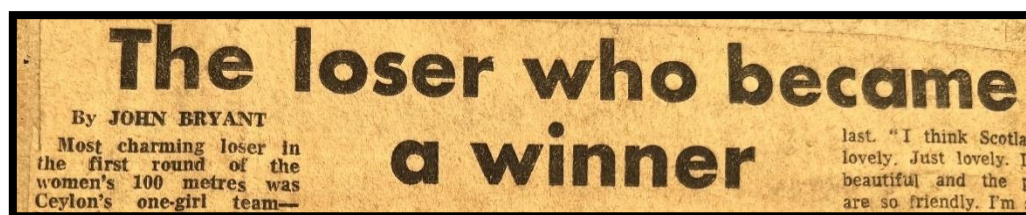
Attired in a blue sari and navy blue blazer with the Ceylon crest and a gold lion emblem she majestically carried the Ceylon flag and dipped it gracefully as she passed the chief guest, the Duke of Edinburgh.

The ceremony was a pageant of colour and the brilliant shades worn by the women competitors added splendour and was undoubtedly a most colourful ceremony.



Soon after the march-past, the Duke of Edinburgh read the Queen's message, flown all the way from Canada, to formally declare the Games open. Later the scene was set with eight Scottish pipe bands, three military bands, two hundred and fifty dancers and a fly past of RAF planes. Scotland, who have planned this five million pound event for the past four years, proclaimed its message everywhere.

One of the Television commentators praised the elegance of Badra's attire and commented that she was the tiniest sprinter among the competitors and she had won several gold medals all over Asia...Unfortunately, Badra was not able to produce her best form to proceed beyond the heats.



"Most charming loser in the first round of the women's 100 metres was Ceylon's one-girl team – Miss Kahanda Badra.

Miss Badra, an attractive 20-year-old, failed to qualify for the second round after being drawn in one of the toughest heats in the 100-metres. While Australian Rae Boyle (11.41s), the Commonwealth record holder, and Scotland's Helen Golden (11.47s) battled it out for the first, the

slightly built Ceylon girl was running her heart out to finish in seventh place (12.35s). Della Jones (11.65s) of England finished third in this heat.

Badra also finished fifth in the 200 metres heats in a satisfactory time of 25.7s, but could not qualify for the semi-finals.

“I ran as hard as I know how,” she said with a smile after the race, “but the others were so good – too good for me.” But she doesn’t think her journey to Scotland for the Games has in any way been wasted. “My country is eager to give me some experiences at big events”, she explained. “I hope to run well in the Asian Games later this year. Hopefully this experience was valuable.”



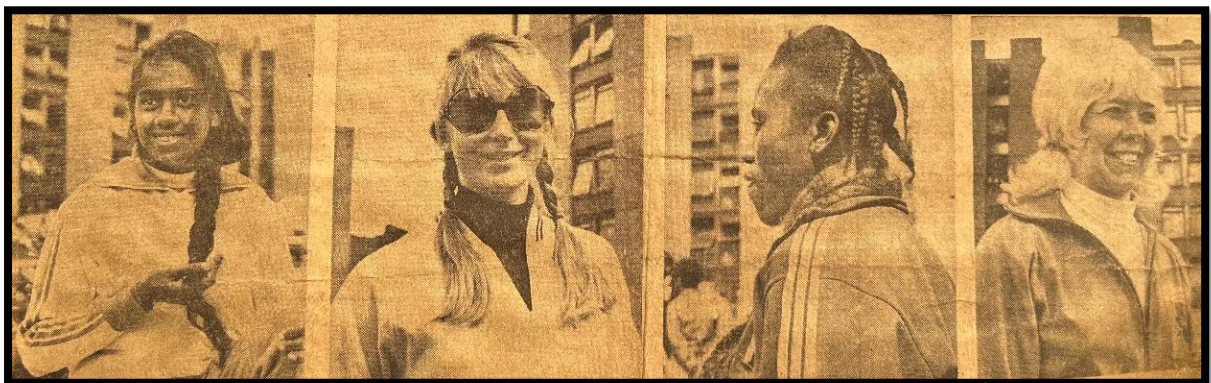
Autograph hunters surrounding Badra at the entrance to the Commonwealth Games in Edinburgh.

“All the competitors and officials from other countries have been wonderful to me, perhaps because they know that I am the only one from my country.....also Scotland is just lovely and the people are so friendly....even the weather is getting better!”



“And the Ceylon Tea Board here in Scotland have been looking after me. They have been like a Manager and Friends rolled into one... The presence of Sports Minister, Mr. K.B. Ratnayake at the Games had also been a source of inspiration.”

SO THAT’S WHAT THEY ALL MEAN BY A ‘FAST’ HAIR-CUT



(L-R): Rope-Trick... Kahanda Badra (Ceyon, sprinter), Pigtails...Petra Rivers (Australia, Javelin - Gold Medalist), 5 Pigtails...Modupe Oshikoya (Nigeria, high jumper), Blonde Bunches...Jean Fielding (England, discus).



IF Ceylon's Sprint Champion Kahanda Badra left a trail of broken hearts in Scotland, it was through no fault of hers. She just got too many marriage proposals! And Badra had no intention of sprinting down the aisle with anyone! The twenty-year-old bundle of energy who flew to Scotland from West Germany where she was undergoing training had won the hearts of thousands at the Commonwealth Games with her friendly smile and charming manners. In fact several were so taken up with her that they wanted to have her – for keeps. But Badra had tactfully brushed their proposals aside.

Being the only Asian girl at the Games, Badra had numerous admirers when she went out in saree. "Perhaps they had never seen anything like it before", she said. "It was so cold there, that it was the ideal dress", she added.



Finish of the Commonwealth Games (1970) 100 Metres Womens Final: Raelene Boyle (11.26s) of Australia takes the Gold from Alice Anum (11.32s) of Ghana.

Badra meets Queen Elizabeth at the Commonwealth Games, Edinburgh, 1970



Badra remembers the extravaganza of the post-Games Garden Party hosted by Queen Elizabeth at a palace in Edinburgh, to which only one representative from each competing country was invited.

It appears that the organisers endured that the invitees were well cared for, even arranging for a team of make-up artists and hairdressers to groom them for their grand occasion! Badra attired herself in a maroon and gold saree.

To meet the Queen was indeed a rare privilege for the young Badra. “Although I did not win a medal, it was a wonderful experience,” she recalls of her journey to the United Kingdom.

Badra is Back



Left: Miss K.G. Badra, Ceylon's sole representative at the Commonwealth Games held in Edinburgh (Scotland) is seen walking down the gangway at the Katunayake International Airport.

Right: Wreathed in smiles, Ceylon's Sprint Queen poses for with a posy of flowers presented to her, on her return from West Germany where she underwent training. She went from there to Scotland to compete at the IX Commonwealth Games.

A few months after the Commonwealth Games, Badra competed at the 1970 Asian Games held in Bangkok.



A Fond Farewell: Sprint Queen K.G. Badra gets a kiss from her mother before boarding the Air Ceylon Trident which flew the Ceylon team for the 1970 Asian Games in Bangkok.



The Ceylon Team, on their way to the 6th Asian Games, are seen waving to the large number of friends and fans. The Games are to be held from 9th to 20th December 1970 in Bangkok, Thailand.

Ceylon won 2 Golds and a Silver at the Asian Games. Running bare-footed, **Lucien Rosa** was in stunning form as he claimed a 5,000-metre (14m 32.2s) and 10,000-metre double (29m 55.6s) – in the process setting a new games record and becoming the first Asian to break the 30-minute mark for the 10,000m.

W. Wimaladasa came second in the 400 metres (46.7s). He would go on to win the 400m Gold at the **1974 Teheran Asian Games** (46.21s) and also anchor the Sri Lankan 4x 400m quartet to Gold (3m 07.4s) – both being new Asian Games records.



K.G. Badra clocked 12.3 seconds in the women's 100 metres to win her heat and qualify for the semi-finals.



“One of the stars of the first day was **Miss Chi Cheng** of Republic China, the world’s fastest woman, who came out of semi-seclusion and physiotherapy for an injured leg to clock 11.6 secs – the fastest heat in the 100 metres. Twenty six-year-old Chi shares the current 100-metres World record. She also holds the World 100 and 200 yards records. (*In 1970, she broke or tied five world records, accomplishing 3 in the space of just one week. She was first woman to run 10.0 second for 100 yards. She also ran world bests of 11.0s for 100 metres, 22.4s for 200 metres, 22.6s for 220 yards, and 12.8s for 100 metre hurdles).

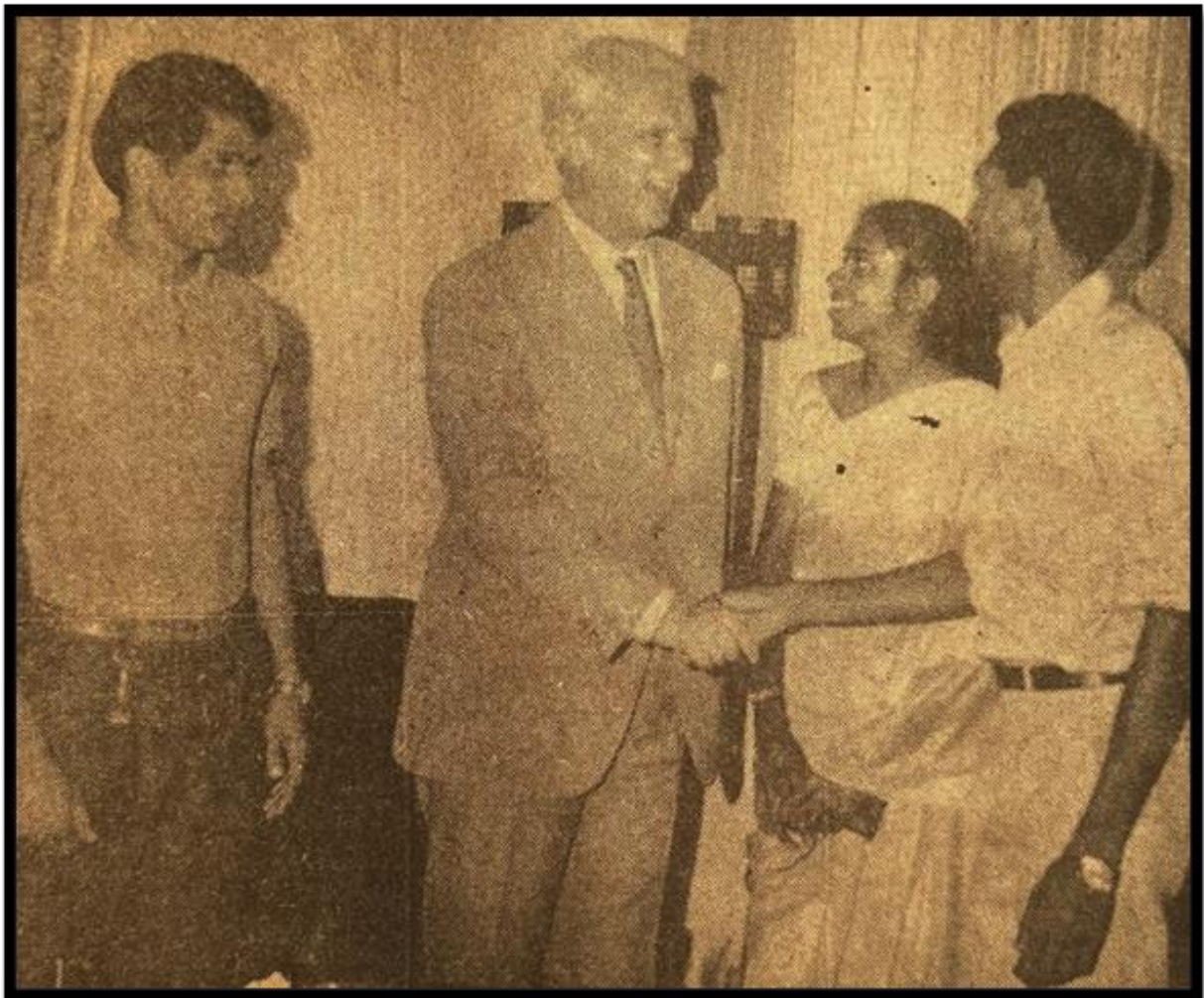


Chi Cheng, whose left thigh was heavily strapped, went on to win the 100-metres Asian Games finals in 11.6 seconds - a new Asian Games record.

Badra who was tipped to win a medal, unfortunately could finish only fifth in the 100 metres finals.

Dream Shattered!

1971 was yet another defining year for Badra. She was one of a select few athletes from Asian countries who were picked to train in Munich, Germany, in preparation for the 1972 Olympic Games there. To her delight the pool included three athletes from Sri Lanka, the other two being sprinter Sunil Gunawardena – who would later become Badra's husband – and S.L.B. Rosa, double Asian Games gold medalist and long distance runner who became known as the 'barefoot' marathoner some years later, and who had won the Most Popular Sportsman of the Year award in 1968, the same year that Badra won in the female category.



Mr F.J. Hoffmann, the West German Ambassador, bids goodbye to three Ceylon athletes – Sunil Gunawardena, KG Badra & SLB Rosa who left for the Federal Republic of Germany on 15th July 1971 as Guests of that country to take part in a 9-week Pre-Olympic program of training and competition organised by the German Athletics Association and the Sports University of Cologne.

In Germany for a second time, Badra was persuaded by her coach to train seriously for the 400 metres. Badra rose admirably to this new challenge and at some training meets, she defeated even the Asian Games gold medalist, Kamaljit Sandhu, in this event.



“Asian Athletes undergoing training in West Germany, at the invitation of the German Government, set five of their own country national records at a meet in Bonn today (11 September, 1971).

K.G. Badra, from Ceylon, bettered her Sri Lankan National record in the 400 metres by clocking **56.8** seconds.

400m Women: 1st G. Thyseen (West Germany) 56.4s; 2nd **K.G. Badra (Ceylon) 56.8s (*National record)**; 3rd Kamaljeet Sandu (India)* 57.3s.

* Kamaljeet Sandu of India had won Gold at the 1970 Asian Games in the 400m with a time of 57.3s”.



After returning to Sri Lanka, she went on to lower the 400-metre national record in 1972 that had been held by Indrani Jayaweera.

Badra could hardly await the dawn of the 1972 Olympics in Munich, but fate dealt her a cruel blow.

A few weeks prior to the opening of the Games in August 1972, she was diagnosed with hepatitis, which shattered her dreams of travelling to Munich and becoming an Olympian.

Soon after her recovery from hepatitis, Badra decided to commence paid employment. As her training was scheduled in the evenings, she had an open calendar during the day. So Badra joined the Ceylon Transport Board (CTB), as a clerk in 1972. The main reason she joined CTB was that Sunil Gunawardena, was by then more than a close friend, and was already employed by CTB.

Within three months, however, Badra left CTB to join the Ministry of Sports as a Sports Officer. There she was charged with training athletes and other sportsperson – a role more in line with her interests.



Even while working at the Ministry, Badra continued her running and training at the Torrington Square grounds, coached by Sunil Gunawardena.

In July 1974, couple of months prior to the Asian Games in Teheran, she set a new National record for the 400 metres with a time of 58.6 seconds.

She represented Sri Lanka at the 1974 Asian Games, but could only finish fifth in the 400m heats in a time of 57.03s.



By the time Badra retired from competitive running in 1977, she had bagged a haul of Nine Gold Medals for Sri Lanka in the 100, 200 and 400-metre events held at various overseas meets – in India, Singapore, Thailand, Iran, Germany and Scotland.



In the meantime, Badra's and Sunil's relationship had continued to develop to the point that they became romantically linked. However, their plans to get married were delayed due to opposition from both sets of parents on the ground of religious differences. – Badra is a Buddhist and Sunil a Catholic.

Fortunately, a happy ending prevailed upon this impasse. After seven years of courtship, love eventually triumphed, and they wed with the blessings of both sets of parents.

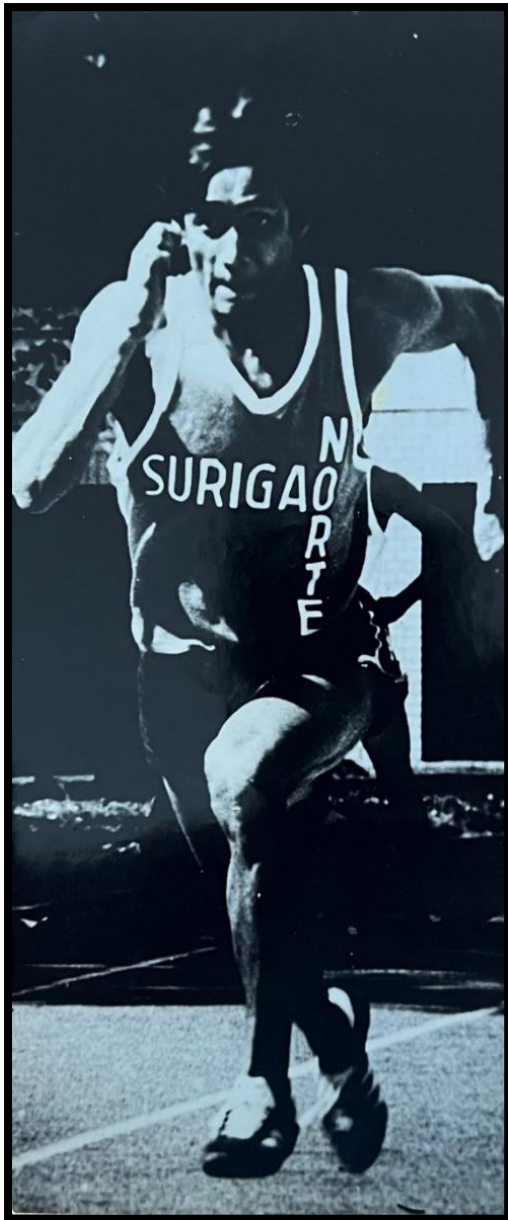


“In 1978, as the fastest woman in Sri Lanka, I married the fastest man in Sri Lanka at that time and also fellow athlete, mentor and coach Sunil Gunawardena....

.....I think I’m very lucky to have a husband like him. I’ve heard him saying to his friend that if he is to born again, it is me whom he will be marrying again (laughs). He is a caring husband.” - Badra

As high-achieving sportspersons, Badra and Sunil had a mutual respect and understanding of each other’s aspirations and were aware of the challenges of competitive sport. This meant they were able to complement and encourage each other in the pursuit of their individual goals.

Badra received tremendous support from Sunil and worked closely with several local coaches, including Mr. K.L.F. Wijedasa from the University of Colombo and Lakshman de Alwis from the Ministry of Sports.



Badra's husband **Sunil Gunawardena** (left) was a sprint sensation in Sri Lanka Athletics for a decade – unbeaten from 1968 to 1978.

Both Sunil and Badra were more than happy to bid farewell as Athletes at the age of 29.

Apart from their marriage, both of them were bored at dominating the local scene due to the lack of any real competition.

Sunil held both the National 100-metre (**10.5s**) and 200-metre (**21.7s**) records for twenty years (1970-1990). He was an Olympian (1972 Munich) and Asian Games Gold Medalist (1972 Teheran in the 4x400m relay that set a New Asian Games record).

Sunil also ran the fastest 200m by an Asian at the Munich Olympics in a splendid time of **21.31** seconds.

Badra believes her success in athletics required not only physical prowess but also mental strength. Although formal psychological training was not available during her days, her confidence was boosted by attending leading Colombo schools and gaining exposure to national and international events.

At the Ministry of Sports, Badra seized an opportunity to enter sports coaching. She was made an athletics coach in 1980, becoming one of four persons holding this position and the first woman to do so. To be eligible for this promotion, she had to complete a nine-month Diploma in Sports which was conducted by the Ministry. The transition into coaching was a natural step for Badra and she slipped into it with ease.

Badra's capabilities ensured she was later selected for an eighteen-month program in athletics-coaching at the Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz in Germany, again with the sponsorship of the German government. It was Badra's third trip to Germany and allowed her to acquire fluency in German, having been compelled to study the language for six months as a pre-requisite to the course.



Above: Badra at Johannes Gutenberg Universität, Mainz, Germany, 1986

Badra graduated from Mainz in 1986 with a Diploma and a First Class in Sprints. She views this result in the context of excelling in a challenging assignment where she was required to motivate a group of more than twelve children and perfect their sprint "start" technique. She could not have hoped for a better assignment, for, being a sprinter herself, she found this project particularly suited to her strengths and experience.

Unlike the many athletes of her era who left the country, Badra has for over thirty years patriotically dedicated her services to the Ministry and to the development of athletics in Sri Lanka during her positions as Sports

Officer, Athletics Coach, Project Officer in Athletics and in 1995 as Assistant Director, Department of Sports Development.

She had trained aspiring athletes at many of Colombo's leading schools, steering hopeful stars towards success. Among her trainees are several of Sri Lanka's national record holders in track and field events, especially in the 100 metres, long jump and hurdles.

Having endured the constraints of local resources during her own athletics career, Badra aspired to improve the level of coaching and training equipment throughout the country.

She has contributed her time to number of athletics associations, and has held several honorary positions, including Vice President of the Sri Lanka Athletics Association. As a council member of the Women's Asian Amateur Athletics Federation (from 1996 to 1999), she had the privilege of travelling to Jakarta, Indonesia in 1997.

Badra also travelled to Namibia to represent Sri Lanka at the 1998 World Conference on Women and Sports.

"There was no money in sport in my days. Coaching was minimal and one relied heavily on talent. Now of course, it is a profession," observes Badra. Her inherent love for athletics and constant flow of achievements helped sustain her desire to win.

Badra encourages girls to take up competitive athletics. "They can earn from it now. Training outdoors with other athletes is a form of relaxation and beneficial health-wise. It is also possible to combine sports with the role of a good housewife", she says.

She considers herself as an example of how one can embark on a rewarding journey in athletics - from being an amateur athlete, to athletic coach, to administrator – adding that there are far greater opportunities and avenues open nowadays to pursue one's passion in sports.

Her advice to aspiring young athletes reflects the wisdom of her professional and personal experience. She counsels them to "be modest about one's achievements and help one another," noting that this holistic approach "will foster a sense of satisfaction and happiness."

Husband and Wife Coaching Team!



Although Badra and Sunil were not blessed with a child of their own, the thousands of kids that they both trained and mentored have more than wiped away many tears and have brought tremendous joy with their victories and successes in life.

They both have been coaching & mentoring young athletes for over 50 years without charging the athletes a cent for their work while ensuring none of them take to drugs or illegal substances. Together they unearthed and fine-tuned the running skills of Sri Lanka's brightest athletic stars.

"One doesn't have to be your own child to stretch a helping hand for them to come up in life. Sunil and I both love children. Though we don't have children, we treat all the youngsters in the track field as our own,"

- Badra



Dec 2024: Fitness session conducted by Veteran Athletic Couple of Sri Lanka - Sunil and K.G. Badra Gunawardena at Vavuniya, for U17 & U19 Cricket Players from Vavuniya, Mannar & Mullaitivu Districts.



Besides excelling on the track, Badra committed herself to the development, administration and coaching of Sri Lankan athletics for nearly 50 years. This included holding a senior position as Assistant Director, Department of Sports Development at the Ministry of Sports.



29th March 2025 (L-R): Badra with Sunil Gunawardena, SLB 'Lucien' Rosa & Badulla Jayasinghe.

Having played her part to perfection producing many national champions this dashing QUEEN and tagged the GALLE EXPRESS hung up her spikes leaving the track that she dominated open for other athletes to follow and if possible erase her phenomenal records.

BADRA still sports that winsome smile.



Badra owes her success in Athletics to many. She is especially grateful to Mrs Mallika de Silva (BLC), Miss Trixie Jayasuriya (HFC), Dr W. Dahanayake, her various Coaches including Mr. K.L.F. Wijedasa and Lakshman de Alwis, Mr. Julian Grero – President Sri Lanka AAA, Dr. H.S.R. Goonewardena - Director of Sports, Officials of CT&FC and the Ministry of Sports, her older sister Sumana, her brother K.G. Karunasena, her husband, coach, mentor and best friend Sunil Gunawardena, and last but not least her parents - K.G. Francis Appuhamy, and Ciciliana Munasinghe.

“Looking back at my sporting career I have much to be proud of having been the ‘Most Popular Sportswoman & The Sportswoman of the Year’ title twice over and having held the Sri Lankan records for 100m (12.0s), 200 (24.9s) and 400m (56.8s), the first two which remained unbroken between 15 and 20 years.” – Badra



Memorable reunion with Badra on 24th Dec 2023

Dear Badra, wishing you the Very Best of Health & Happiness on your
75th Birthday. - Ravi Rudra

*Compilation of this tribute is based on articles and paper clippings, courtesy of Sunil & Badra Gunawardena during my visit to their beautiful home on 26th Dec 2023 – RR

