

The Honourable Chairman, Principal Sir,  
Distinguished Guests, Staff and Students of St  
John's, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Thank you very much for inviting my wife, Anita and me here today, as your guests of honour. It is indeed an honour and I am deeply humbled to stand in front of you all.

St John's College has a very long history, having been founded some 191 years ago. The education of life that this great institution provides is never evident when you are a student. It becomes evident only when you go out into the real world, where one is challenged. St John's quietly enables us to face them all, to overcome and go forward. We sing - 'Johnians always play the game'. This doesn't just refer to sports but it refers to the wider game of life.

Having spent almost all my school days at St John's, I am eternally grateful for what I learnt here. The learning was endless and at times painful. The first few years of hostel life was tough. Forming friendships was challenging as we came from so many different backgrounds. Sometimes, it was

difficult, to getting used to teachers who were such strict disciplinarians. But underneath all this, there was something special about St John's that I can be very proud of. Today, the first thing I proudly say to anyone is -"I studied at St John's, College, Jaffna, Sri Lanka – the best school in the world!"

The innocent friendships that we formed some thirty-five years ago have grown from strength to strength. The fear we had for our teachers has turned into utmost respect and total loyalty. Most of all, our affection for St John's continues to grow in every possible way.

I am not sure how many years have gone by since the first college prize giving was held, but surely I must be the only Chief guest, who had never won a prize. Among this audience, I can see some very familiar faces. I see some of my former teachers who would never have dreamt, that I would be standing here one day, as the Chief Guest. I would like to say that it feels like a dream for me, too.

I want to begin by congratulating each and every one of you who has won a prize. This is a reflection of your hard work and dedication throughout the past year. Whether you won a prize for academic achievement, for achievements in sport or in any

other field, it is truly great to have your efforts richly rewarded and recognised. I am sure you made yourselves, your parents and family members and all your teachers very proud. Well done and I wish you all continued success.

When I was a student, we, the non-prize-winners, were always asked to sit at the back of the hall. As the winners were getting their well-deserved prizes, the one thing that constantly crossed my mind was – ‘Could I ever be successful?’

Today I want to speak to all of you- those who won prizes and those who like me, are wondering whether they could ever be successful. I would like to tell you this - it is all up to you. It is you and you alone who can define your success. I want to really challenge you by asking a simple question “Do you know how good you are - to be successful?”

I want to tell you a story - a true story where I was present. It happened on the 24<sup>th</sup> of April 2007 at Sabina Park, Kingston, Jamaica. It was a very hot and humid day when Sri Lanka took on New Zealand in the World cup Semi-finals. It is the stand out innings of Mahela Jayawardena, which I would like to share with you.

The scorecard will tell us that Mahela scored one hundred and fifteen runs in one hundred and nine balls. But, the scorecard will not tell you the hard work that went into getting there- how his innings was formed, how he was patient, how he let go of so many opportunities to score and how he built partnerships. The scorecard will also not tell you how he used his strengths and used that perfectly to overcome the challenges he faced, to build and deliver a great innings.

Most importantly, Mahela Jayawardena, the Sri Lankan Captain believed in himself. He knew he was good enough to deliver a quality innings. That was the key component of his success and of his beautiful innings that day.

Well, we all can learn a lot from that. We define our success by what is on the board or by the prizes we win. What success was for Tharanga that day was different to what it was for Mahela. Tharanga was judged by the explosive start that he gave to the innings while Mahela was judged for the calm and steady way he settled for a long innings, accelerating at the end. Both of them were successful. It is therefore important to understand that all of us can and will achieve success through different routes.

It is my fundamental belief that every one of us has the capacity and capability to achieve success. It does not mean that we become over confident and arrogant about our talents. It is about believing that we can!

When Mahela came to the crease, Tharanga was in full flow. The run rate was still around five, but Sri Lanka's batting was vulnerable, which even the opposing captain Stephen Fleming acknowledged at the toss.

Mahela knew that he too, could join Tharanga and start scoring fast. He could have done that but he didn't. He buckled down and scored very slowly, giving Tharanga the opportunity to score freely. He played carefully so that he could easily pick-up his run rate later. That was his strength and he was aware of that.

On the other hand, when I got through my Ordinary Level examination with much difficulty, I believed that I should try to become a doctor. As you know, this was a prestigious profession – it was then and, I am sure it is now! I enrolled my self to the Bio stream; despite the fact that I had failed Biology. My first class was Zoology where I was given a frog to dissect and then to draw it. When I finished

drawing, my Zoology teacher told me that my frog looked like a goat. Next day, I spoke to the Principal and quickly transferred myself out of the Bio stream into Mathematics stream. I knew my limitations but tried to ignore them.

Successful people know and acknowledge their limitations. Your limitations will throw you challenges and obstacles. There is no point fighting them. It is better to overcome them; otherwise they will hold you back from achieving success.

At the end of Fortieth over, Sri Lanka had slowly built their innings to one hundred and eighty runs for the loss of four wickets. Mahela was not out at forty runs from seventy-four balls. The commentators were giving him a hard time. They were accusing him of taking too much time saying that Sri Lanka had had a decent platform and have now they've messed it up.

This is what happens in real life too, People will judge us by what they expect from us without realising that all of us have different paths to achieve success. The world will not know our limitations, the world will not know our strengths and the world will not know the challenges we

face. But the world will be quick to judge us by what they expect from us.

That is where your own determination and drive will have to come in. That is how Mahela built his innings - He got to his fifty in the forty-first over and in seventy-six balls.

What happened from there on was a privilege to watch – a brutal attack on the New Zealand bowling. He raced to one hundred in one hundred and four balls. The last fifty came up in twenty-eight balls and took Sri Lanka to two hundred and eighty nine for the loss of five wickets. This was way over what was predicted. It was done solely by his sheer belief and careful execution.

As we go on to live our lives outside the school environment, we will have wickets falling around us. We will have commentators predicting what we could achieve and commend or condemn the way we bat. The challenge for us is not to allow these external factors to affect us. Do we allow these external pressures to stress us or do we build our innings carefully and according to what we want to achieve and play a Mahela innings? To achieve success and bring the best out of you, you will need to withstand these external pressures and build your own innings.

One has to look back at Mahela's innings and admire the way he built it. He took a long time to lay a good foundation. His, was a slow and steady innings.

Likewise, success doesn't come overnight. One has to work for it patiently and build it up slowly. We should run a marathon, not a sprint. You will need to take your own time, according to your own plan and ability and then go and achieve your own success!

When I was seated at that grounds watching that match and was getting frustrated by his innings, I never realised how well he was planning it. Cricinfo, the cricket website, described it as, 'An innings that has been worth it's weight in gold'. Every time the run rate was dropping, he would slowly squeeze in a four and every time a wicket fell, he took on a slightly attacking role and then went back to playing a steady innings. He was reacting to the situation rather than worrying about it.

This is an incredible attribute that we all need. Every time we face a crisis or a challenge, we really need to take a step back, analyse the situation and react. – React positively. As they say 'the reaction to a challenge is more important than the challenge itself'. There is no point in worrying about a wicket that falls, but it is important to figure out what needs to be done next. There is no point in worrying about not winning a prize but you should think forward as to how to do better and thereby giving yourself a chance to win a prize.

There are so many stories like Mahela's innings from which we can learn about life. Whether you are a prize winner today or not, there are bigger and better things to look forward to in the future.

You will and You can achieve success :

- By Understanding your strengths and limitations.
- By Reacting positively to your challenges.
- By Accepting that your path could be different to that of others.
- By Being patient and building your life over a period of time.

And most importantly: By Believing **in yourself!**

Before I finish, once again I'd like to thank you all for inviting Anita and me. As I said at the outset, we are deeply touched and humbled to be here.

In closing, I would like to say to all of you again – Believe in yourself! You have so much inside you that will make you very successful! Next time, don't ask yourself the question that I asked myself. Assure yourself by saying 'Yes, I can be successful'

And as the great Boxer Mohammed Ali once said, 'If my mind can conceive it; and my heart can believe it; then I can achieve it'

THANK YOU VERY MUCH