

Republican American

Love of cricket, country

AWATERBURY Arnold Arnajallum loves to make a speech. Saturday afternoon at City Mills Park he made a wonderful speech.

"One of our own is helping to defend the Land of the Free," Arnajallum said, "protecting our homeland in the fight against terrorism. Our club is proud and wishes to recognize all the members of our armed forces, especially at this time, doing a dangerous job that not everybody wants to do."

Players from West Haven Cricket Club, UBS Cricket of Stamford and also members of Waterbury's United Cricket Club (UCC), vigorously applauded. In fact, they cheered Arnajallum's every word. He talked about freedom and sportsmanship, and he talked about a love for America and a love for cricket, two things that passionately coexist in Connecticut, especially right here in Waterbury.

The United Cricket Club Triangular Tournament wrapped up Saturday at City Mills. Virtually every player on the pitch came from someplace other than America, but I don't believe you could have found another spot in this great country that exhibited more love for the USA than what you would have found Saturday at beat up old City Mills.

"Every American should travel abroad at least once," Arnajallum said while cricket players were cricketing. "Then they would appreciate this country even more."

Those are profound words coming on the week when we celebrate our country's birthday. There will be picnics and parties and ball games on the 4th, but the men and women of the UCC got the jump on us last weekend.

The third annual Triangular Tournament was held this year in honor of Rajin R. Nanku, 20, a Waterbury native, a Crosby High graduate, and a member of the United States Marine Corps who is currently stationed at Camp Pendleton, in Oceanside, Calif. He will be deployed to Iraq in September. The trophy was dedicated in his name and to all U.S. military personnel, wherever they might be in service to their country.

West Haven defeated UBS, 192 to 145, to win the Nanku trophy. Everyone cheered, smiled, shook hands, then settled down for a sumptuous feast at City Mills, a field where the

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old baseball backstop is rusted and overgrown and barely visible in the deep brush, and where a wonderful cricket ground has risen in its place.

Nanku's father, Rajin P. Nanku, 43, is a native of Guyana and the UCC manager. Like all fathers with a son or daughter in the military, he is immensely proud and preparing to get immensely nervous.

"I would rather have him doing what he loves," Nanku said Saturday. "What he is doing is good for this country, and good for our future, but yes, it will be hard for us. It is always hard for someone with a son in the military. It will be even harder. I love my country, and I support it at every turn. We are especially proud of Rajin. He feels deeply about this, and we support him."

Speaking on a cell phone from Camp Pendleton, Nanku, who is called Roy, talked about his decision to join the Marines. Like all of us, he was devastated when America was attacked on Sept. 11, 2001. Nanku was an eighth grader at North End Middle School at the time. In 2006 he graduated from Crosby. He considered attending college.

"I wanted to do something more," he said.

He did. He chose the ultimate. When Roy Nanku's five-year hitch is up in 2011, "I plan

to re-enlist. I love it."

He misses Waterbury, and of course, he misses cricket.

"He calls every week to see how the team is doing and to follow our statistics," said Nanku, the elder.

The UCC is made up of more than 50 players representing nine nations and four continents. They view the American way of life with a perspective that most of us could never comprehend. We were lucky enough to be born here. Nanku came here 20 years ago from Guyana, with his wife, Natasha. All three of his children were born in America, and the joy on his face when he says that is unmistakable.

Roy Nanku is the first member of the UCC to serve in the American military, and the club, all three clubs in fact, cheered him loud and long. Nanku could feel the support all the way in California.

"I love the challenges of being a Marine," Roy Nanku said via his cell. "I look forward to being deployed, but I miss playing cricket. My family has adopted this country and made it their home. They brought

part of their culture here, and they have brought cricket."

Last weekend cricket players from around Connecticut completed their annual tournament. They cheered for each other and they cheered for

their country. They did it all in the name of Roy Nanku, a Waterbury man, a cricket player and a Marine who is prepared to go to war.

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