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'LAST THING YOU WANT IS AN INJURY DURING IPL'

Ravi Shastri Talks To Mirror Now's Faye D'Souza About Managing World Cup-Bound Players In The IPL, His Equation With Captain Virat Kohli, The Side's Cup Prospects & Much More. Excerpts From An Exclusive Interview...

Is the team mentally ready for the World Cup?
Absolutely.

Do you believe that there's room for changes right now or you are set with the lineup?
More or less. The nucleus of the team is there. But you can never discount injuries at the last minute. You have only 15 allowed for the World Cup but you've got to have about 18-20 in the mix.

With the IPL coming up, are you concerned that (World Cup-bound) players might overdo it?

That will always be a concern because the last thing you want is injury. The World Cup is immediately after the IPL and if someone gets injured, it will be a concern. I will be lying if I say I am not on the edge of my seat. I will be watching every game closely.

On a scale of 1-10, how would you rate our chances in the World Cup?

Well, I will be lying if we don't think we can go the distance.

There is an appeal now for India not to play Pakistan in the World Cup...

I will leave it entirely to the BCCI and the government, because they know what's happening. They will take a call and you will go with whatever the government says.

And if the decision is not to play the World Cup?

If the government says it's that sensitive, you don't need to play the World Cup, I will go with my government.

Do you believe this is the best traveling side Indian cricket has ever had?

Close to, if not the best. I would say so across all formats. You have to win more than you lose. So if you look at what this team has done overseas in the last five years it is unbelievable.

A lot of your return to the team depended on the relationship between you and Virat Kohli...

We are very similar in our thinking. We are both aggressive in our thinking, which leads on to how the team plays. The emphasis is on work ethics, where no one can drop their guard. Punctuality is the number one thing. If you are late, the bus will leave. But it doesn't happen as these guys are very professional.

Kohli is fairly aggressive. Is that something you actively encourage?

Absolutely, playing within the rules, why not? I am not there to play carrom. I am there to win and play it hard and within the rules. It's a tough sport and it's a tough world out there.

There was also controversy created between Kohli and Dhoni in the past, that perhaps their different methods of captaining would clash...

Each one has his own style and each one is different. When you mention Virat and MS, yes, they are different, the way they play and the way they captain. MS was the senior man when Virat was coming through the ranks. Virat gave him the respect he deserved. Now MS is not the captain, Virat is, so MS does the same thing. The mutual respect for each other is massive and that's all you want as coach.

Is it fair to compare Kohli with Sachin Tendulkar?



I do not compare leaders. If there is one man who stands out because of sheer performances and averages, it is Donald Bradman. Sobers, in his time, was the best cricketer. Kohli and Tendulkar are very, very similar... the sacrifices they make, the determination, the concentration, the passion. Both are role models. When you have a level of performance that high, you are going to be compared, but it's each one to his generation.

On the controversy over the Rahul and Pandya TV show, there was a lot of criticism of the fact that maybe BCCI handled that badly. Did you think the BCCI was being too hard on them?

They needed the rap on the knuckles. What was said, what was played out, they just for a moment forgot that they are a part of the Indian cricket team. So that's why the rap on the knuckles, which could have been anything but you can't book them for anything. Can you? Legally? We have had guys who have played against us like Ben Stokes who had a criminal assault case going on in London. But he played the Test against us. Then they gave him leave to go and attend the hearing and he came back and played. I thought, at the end of it all, it was handled well.

What is your advice to the younger players, who get hit by this wall of fame and money and criticism all at once...

My advice is never forget what's taken you there.

There has also been some criticism about wives and girlfriends traveling with the team...

I think you can draw a line there. The players know if it is going to affect their performances. They will take the decision. When you see the amount of time they spend away from home, you have got to be practical. But, yes, if it is a big event like the World Cup or a big tournament where you to be absolutely focused 24x7, it's different.

Is the country tough on the team and players?

Yes, I would say they are very sentimental.

Are you as coach tough on the players?

If the work ethics are not right.

So you haven't been afraid of dropping a player if you feel that he is not on his 'A' game...

Absolutely. The bottom line is, whatever you are doing is not personal. You are doing it in the interest of the team. Earlier you could have names like Tendulkar or Kumble or a Dravid. But now they are saying 'an Indian team', collectively, out there. Looks like a team that has smelt blood and is playing in that fashion.

(Catch the full interview on Mirror Now at 9 pm today)



ONE THAT SLIPPED AWAY: Rohit Sharma didn't just lose his wicket to Adam Zampa, he lost his bat too

MORE PROBLEMS THAN SOLUTIONS

A contest at home against Australia was supposed to be a cakewalk for India, and a 'lab' where they could conduct last-minute experiments before the World Cup. However, they ended up not just losing the series, but also groping for answers when it comes to team selection for the mega event. TOI takes a look...

DOES PANT FIT IN?

Before the series, 'keeper-bat Rishabh Pant emerged as a strong contender to travel with the Indian team along with MS Dhoni. However, the 21-year-old endured a forgettable time in the two matches that he played in. Though he cracked 36 off 24 balls at Mohali, he missed a couple of stumping chances, which promoted the crowd to chant 'Dhoni, Dhoni.' In the final ODI, he managed just 16 before falling to off-spinner Nathan Lyon at first slip. The question is, was this talented young gun given enough opportunities to prove himself? Wasn't it tough on him to get just two games to book a World Cup berth?

KL THIRD OPENER?

After making an impressive return to international cricket with 50 & 47 in the two T20 Internationals, KL Rahul would have been looking to get a few runs in the ODIs and seal his spot as the third opener. However, the poor form of the regular openers meant that Rahul got just one game, in which he managed 26. Even in that match, he played at No 3. Certainly, Rahul isn't cut out for the No 4 slot, and hasn't got enough game time as an opener. An Ajinkya Rahane, perhaps, would have offered the option of a middle order bat who can open if needed too, but he wasn't even picked and seems to have been discarded for good.

CHAHAL UNDER PRESSURE

Before this series, leg-spinner Yuzvendra Chahal was an automatic pick, who had won India ODIs in South Africa and Australia. However, once Glenn Maxwell tore into him at Bangalore in the second T20 International, where he went for 47 runs in four overs, Kohli has appeared reluctant to play Chahal. He was played at Mohali, but he went for 80 in 10 overs. With Chinaman Kuldeep Yadav picking wickets regularly and Ravindra Jadeja standing out with his superb bowling and fielding, there now

IS SHANKAR THE ALL-ROUNDER?

He performed decently with the bat, but played a poor shot when he could have taken the game to the distance in Delhi. Questions also remain over his ability as a bowler, despite his heroics in Nagpur, while defending 11 runs. In the next two games, Shankar didn't get a single wicket, and in the last match, he wasn't given a single over. With the ball expected to swing and seam in England, he may be a useful player to have in the World Cup.

NO. 4 SLOT STILL A WORRY

After an impressive run in New Zealand, it seemed as if Ambati Rayudu had sealed his spot in the World Cup team, thereby solving the problem of the No 4 spot, a perennial headache for the team management. The 33-year-old however, struggled badly, managing just 33 runs (13, 18 & 2) in three games before he was dropped. There's an argument that Shankar can bat at No. 4 instead of him in the World Cup, but then Rayudu enjoys at average of 47.05 in 55 games. The problem is, even if he does go to England, Rayudu would be under-confident as he's short of runs.

appears to be a slight doubt over Chahal's spot. What will work for him is the fact that there are no d/n games in England, hence no dew.

—Gaurav Gupta

DHONI'S EXPERIENCE IMPORTANT FOR INDIA, SAYS CLARKE

New Delhi: Former Australian skipper Michael Clarke has warned critics not to underestimate the importance of MS Dhoni to the Indian team. India surrendered a 2-0 lead in the recently concluded 5-match series as the Australians made a superb recovery by winning three consecutive matches to claim the series. Incidentally, Dhoni did not feature in the last two matches. Clarke took to social media to underline Dhoni's importance to the Indian team. "Never underestimate the importance of MSD — experience in the middle order is so important," Clarke tweeted on Thursday. Apart from his skills as a wicketkeeper, Dhoni also guides the bowlers with his instructions from behind the stumps. Left-hand spinner Kuldeep Yadav was one bowler who missed Dhoni's guidance as he struggled in the last two matches. IANS

(Ambati) Rayudu is my man. I can't believe India is even questioning that. For so long, he has been so good. I don't know why they are questioning, maybe because you need to speak about something before the World Cup. I don't see Rahul taking that slot as much as I admire him. His time will come and if anything he is more of a stand-by opener for me as opposed to the number-four slot.

—Matthew Hayden | EX-AUSTRALIA

Whoever gets picked in the end, India's middle order will be its Achilles heel in the World Cup 2019. Really disappointing with Pant and Shankar on Wednesday...what a great chance to show their ability. Shankar may have the big shots but he is no Pant, must learn to keep the strike rate up by hitting more along the ground just like his captain does.

—Sanjay Manjrekar | EX-INDIA

AUSTRALIA TARGET WORLD CUP GLORY AFTER STUNNING INDIA

New Delhi: Buoyed by their come-from-behind One-day series triumph in India, skipper Aaron Finch believes resurgent Australia have the blueprint in place to win the World Cup. "It's unbelievable, the resilience and fight that we showed," Finch said. "Being down 0-2 it would have been easy to roll over. We've had our backs against the wall for quite a while now so I'm really proud of the group." "People have written us off for quite a while now," Finch added. "We always knew that the plans and the style that we wanted to play are all there (and) can win us the World Cup this time." PTI

Kohli to WC contenders: It's IPL time, play smart

'Onus Is On Players To Manage Workload'

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New Delhi: "World Cup comes every four years and we play the Indian Premier League (IPL) every year." Skipper Virat Kohli's message to his core group of World Cup-bound players was clear: He will not tolerate any injury breakdown during the IPL, which could hurt his team's ambition to lift the coveted trophy in England in July. "No one will be forced to do something. Eventually, no one wants to miss the World Cup and hurt the team's good balance," he said on Wednesday night. Kohli understands that the IPL, with its non-stop cricketing action and exhaustive travel, can be very demand-

ing. While the eight IPL franchises who have invested heavily in players would obviously like to derive maximum out of them, Kohli has left it to his players to manage their workloads and be smart.

"We've given the responsibility to the player to be smart and to inform the management of the franchise and be in touch with Patrick Farhart, our physio. All the workload will be monitored during the World Cup — and given a window, the guys can afford to rest," Kohli said.

"I can guarantee that because a World Cup comes every four years and we play the IPL every year. Not to say we won't be committed to the IPL, but we've got to be smart. We will have to work in balance and take smart decisions. The responsibility and the onus is on the player. That's

a factor that's been discussed," he added. The IPL will start on March 23 and concludes on May 19, just 11 days before the start of the WC on May 30. While the IPL franchises are still waiting for guidelines from the BCCI as to how exactly

the board wants the clubs to manage India's 15-member squad's workload, Kohli insisted that all he wants from his players is to "just go and enjoy these two months in the IPL and not worry about the performance pressure".

Kohli has, in a way, made it clear that the IPL performances won't count for much in the overall context of India's team selection for the World Cup. The skipper has already announced that the team management is pretty clear about the playing eleven it intends to field during the WC.

"Don't think of performance pressure or I have to do this or do that. I think we deserve to really just enjoy our cricket and just go out there and play because of the joy of playing the sport. Being on the road for so many months (starting from the Australia tour Down Under to travelling to New Zealand and then coming back to India for a limited-overs series against Australia) does take a toll on you as a team.

"I'm not saying that's an excuse because you're expected to do that and be motivated to win every game you're playing for the country. When you have a long season, you can always reflect on it. I am not someone who takes this as an excuse. If I'm not up to playing a game mentally or physically, I'll inform the management before and I think everyone's responsible enough to do that," he stated.

SC to BCCI: The game must go on, resolve disputes fast

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New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Thursday said all disputes pertaining to cricket administration between the BCCI's Committee of Administrators (CoA) headed by former CAG Vinod Rai and state associations must be resolved at the earliest and appointed a mediator to hold consultations with the warring parties and sort out the mess.

"The game must go on," a bench of Justices SA Bobde and A MS Sapre said while stressing the need to sort out all disputes. The row started after the apex court passed a slew of directions on the basis of the Justice Lodha Committee report to bring transparency and accountability in cricket administration and appointed the CoA to take over the work of BCCI, which was stiffly opposed by officer-bearers of various state associations.

As the matter was pending in the SC for four years even after the court passed two comprehensive judgements, the bench said it wanted to hear the issue on a day-to-day basis. The bench appointed senior advocate P S Narasimha, who is also assisting the court as amicus curiae, to talk to the parties concerned to resolve the dispute amicably. It said if the dispute

was not resolved through mediation, then the court would intervene and pass orders.

Solicitor general Tushar Mehta and senior advocate Kapil Sibal, appearing for state cricket associations, readily agreed with the SC's suggestion to appoint a mediator and said they have no objection in implementing Justice Lodha Committee's recommendations but the CoA should not insist upon anything beyond the panel's report.

Mehta, appearing for Maharashtra Cricket Association, told the court that its stadium was attached by banks for not clearing the liability and the ground might be auctioned. He urged the court to direct the CoA to release funds immediately to save the stadium from being auctioned. The bench directed the CoA to take appropriate steps to discharge the liability of the state association.

The court was also told that office-bearers of Bihar Cricket Association (BCA) had been caught on camera demanding money to select players and an FIR had been filed against them. The unrecognised Cricket Association of Bihar (CAB), on whose plea the SC passed orders to bring reforms in cricket administration, contended that the BCA should be de-recognised.

Agarwal, bowlers help Karnataka grab title

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Indore: If Mayank Agarwal had Steve Waugh's wit, he might have said, "You dropped the Cup, mate," to Vishal Gite. Agarwal, trying to hit back-to-back boundaries, miscued a drive. Karnataka, chasing 156, were 26/1 at that time. Gite, running backwards, failed to hold on to the catch.

Agarwal was on five when **MUSHTAQ ALI TROPHY**

he got the first reprieve. Over the next 15 overs, Agarwal, having got another life on 38, made the Maharashtra team pay heavily for their largesse. The right-hand batsman hit an unbeaten 85 (57b; 6x4; 3x6) and stitched a crucial 92-run partnership with Rohan Kadam (60; 39b; 6x4; 3x6) to propel Karnataka to a compre-

hensive 8-wicket win over Maharashtra in the final at the Holkar Stadium on Thursday.

Having won almost everything, the one prize missing from Karnataka's cabinet was the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy. Kadam continued with his red-hot form while Agarwal made most of the charmed life to help Karnataka fill that void.

Kadam and Agarwal launched a scathing attack on Maharashtra bowlers despite the early loss of BR Sharath. In the fourth over, after being dropped by Gite, Agarwal hit the bowler Satyajit Bachhav for a six and a four as Karnataka raced to 40 for 1 in four overs. The pair added 88 more in the next seven overs when Agarwal got one more life. This time, the guility was Maharashtra skipper Rahul Tripathi as he failed to grab a catch off Fallah's bowling in the 11th over.

Star to BCCI: Allow political advertisements during IPL

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Mumbai: Star India Pvt Ltd, the official broadcast rights holder of the Indian Premier League (IPL), has requested BCCI that a specific clause in its existing Media Rights Agreement (MRA) — pertaining to ban on slotting of political and religious advertisements — during transmission of games, live or recorded — be waived off.

The MRA, signed between BCCI and Star for a period of five years between 2018 and 2022, mentions under Clause 8.6 (B): "Slotting of any political and/or religious advertisements during transmission is not permitted." With reference to the said clause, TOI understands that Star has made its priorities clear to cricket board on Thursday. The broadcaster's move is indicative

of the "tremendous revenue potential" that can be expected from this election season. The ball is now in BCCI's court and it is learnt that the board is yet to revert to Star.

"Will the board waive off that clause? Because if it does, then it is clear that there is no respect for the written word (read: MRA)," sources said. For a long time, industry executives reckon, cricket and politics in the country have walked hand in hand. "But never before has politicisation set in the way it is happening now. First, it was BCCI's decision to write to the International Cricket Council (ICC) on "terrorism", which came in for criticism. And now this," said an industry source.

The BCCI, particularly the Committee of Administrators (CoA), will have to take a call on whether it is willing to waive off the said clause

in the MRA with Star and if it does, the cricket board will be setting a precedent for the future. "Star and BCCI have had two rounds of talks over this. As of now, nothing has come out of it," say sources.

TOI tried reaching the broadcaster to understand the need for the letter but officials at Star remained unreachably. BCCI CEO Rahul Johri too remained unavailable for comment.

Star sits on combined global rights of the IPL, which was bought for a period of five years in 2017 for Rs 16,347 crore. In buying these rights, Star paid in excess of 500% premium to what Sony had been paying BCCI during the previous 10-year rights cycle.

"That's serious money. So, it's pretty understandable that Star would want to make the most of the advertising revenue," said sources.