

'Indian pace attack as good as any in the world'

Aussie great McGrath says Kohli is aggressive as captain and player, knows his game and has the respect of his opponents

S. DIPAK RAGAV
CHENNAI

Former Australian bowler Glenn McGrath is currently in the city as part of his regular visits to the MRF Pace Foundation which he heads. The pace bowling legend spoke on the upcoming World Cup, the quality of Indian pace bowlers and more. *Excerpts:*

Were you surprised at how well the Indian fast bowlers performed in the Test series in Australia?

I wasn't surprised at all. They are a quality lot and they were exceptional, no doubt about that. Ishant Sharma hadn't done well in Australia after his first tour but he really bounced back. Bumrah was exceptional.

I think they bowled well as a unit. They bowled well to left-handers, they had pace, control and consistency.

Is there any area in the Indian pace bowling that you feel is an area of concern?

In Australia, recently in the Test series, there was nothing about keeping them fit and on the park. I am a massive fan of Bumrah. The way he goes about it, he is young, keen and has a great attitude.

He has had an incredible start to his Test career. It's now how you back that up in the second year once the players have seen you and I am looking forward to seeing that. With respect to Tests,



Legendspeak: Glenn McGrath reckons the IPL will be good for the players' mindset in the lead-up to the World Cup. • B. JOTHI RAMALINGAM

the Indian pace attack is as good as any in world cricket.

Looking ahead to the World Cup, Bhuvneshwar is the swing bowler and he needs to perform well.

Bumrah's form in the one-day game has been exceptional. The yorkers he bowls at the death, with that pace, is something unique.

If there is some swing along with the yorkers, he is going to be very dangerous.

How do you see the evolution of Virat Kohli, both as a batsman and skipper?

He is a class player. By the end of his career, he will be held alongside Brian Lara and Sachin Tendulkar. He is quite aggressive as a captain and player, getting his emotions in. Earlier, if he was playing well, he would be fine but if he was under the pump and struggling, he would get carried away. But that's no more the case as he has matured a

lot. He knows his game and has the respect of his opponents.

Your favourites for the World Cup?

I thought the top-two teams were India and England. Since then, England has had a tough time in the West Indies and India had a loss against Australia. So I think the competition is going to be a bit tighter. Australia's confidence will go up and

McGrath happy with Foundation's progress

SPORTS REPORTER
CHENNAI

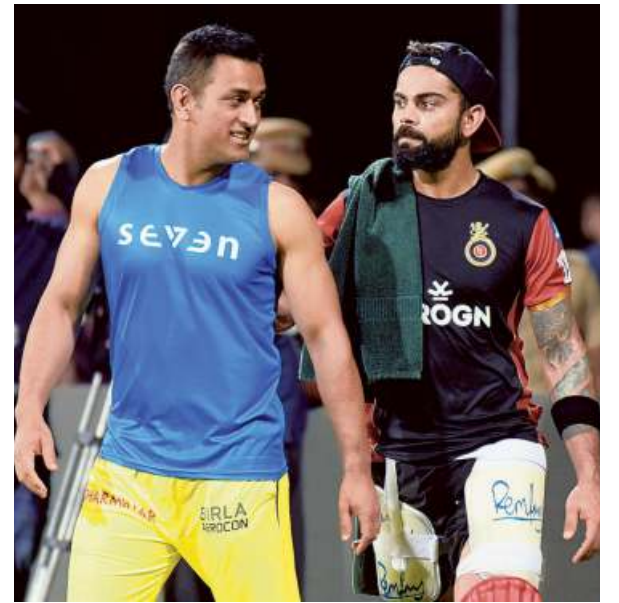
Six and half years after taking over as Director of Coaching, Glenn McGrath said the MRF Pace Foundation had one of its best years in terms of performances of its players in the recently concluded Ranji Trophy and other competitions.

Speaking on Thursday, McGrath said, "It has been a big learning experience for me to pick up from where Dennis Lillee left off. I think we are going pretty well. It has been our best year in quite some time. You get young guys who are raw

and have got potential. So it is about realising that potential. Being fast bowler in India is as hard as it gets."

Head coach M. Senthilnathan added, "Last year players like Aniket Choudhary, Avesh Khan, Basil Thampi, Sandeep Warrier, Ankit Rajpoot, Mukhtar Hussain all took 35 wickets or more."

McGrath added, "You saw Khaleel Ahmed play for India and do well in bits and pieces. So overall, I am very happy and hope to continue that trend and get a few more players playing for India."



Stuff of fans' dreams: Dhoni and Kohli were the cynosure of all eyes at the MAC Stadium on Thursday. • K. PICHUMANI

CSK and RCB get down to brass tacks

Season opener pits two of India's biggest stars against each other

IPL

S. DIPAK RAGAV
CHENNAI

The 12th edition of the IPL couldn't have asked for a better opening than the battle between Chennai Super Kings and Royal Challengers Bangalore, thanks to their skippers M.S. Dhoni and Virat Kohli.

However, on history, the rivalry does not hold the same edge as the home team has an overwhelming record in head-to-head meetings, leading 15-7 (one No Result) in 23 matches.

No wasting time

More importantly, RCB has not won a game against CSK since 2014, the last victory coming in their first meeting of the 2014 season. Since then, CSK has won six games. Kohli would be desperate to end the losing streak come Saturday.

The skipper led from the front with an intense training session just hours after landing in the city on Thursday afternoon and was one of the few from the RCB camp to have a long stint in the middle.

Mumbai's Shivam Dube, who was bought for ₹5 crore, was seen practising his big hitting while Parthiv Patel, Milind Kumar and Moeen Ali, too, spent considerable time in the middle.

Umesh Yadav, Navdeep Saini, Yuzvendra Chahal and Mohammed Siraj were the bowlers to take the field.

After a day's rest on Wednesday, CSK had a three-hour session, with Ravindra Jadeja having his first training stint after arriving on Tuesday.

Shane Watson, all-rounder

We've got most of the bases covered and it's just about getting the guys to perform

STEPHEN FLEMING
CSK coach

der and the star performer in 2018, also had his first significant hit. Dhoni, who delivered for CSK during crunch times last year, especially in the final overs, spent the longest time in the nets.

England all-rounder David Willey is likely to join the team after the second match while Mitchell Santner, Faf du Plessis and Imran Tahir are expected to arrive on Friday.

With pacer Lungi Ngidi ruled out, the team will need to rely heavily on its local fast bowlers in Deepak Chahar, Mohit Sharma and Shardul Thakur, who all bowled with intensity on Thursday.

However, the advantage of playing at home means CSK would rely more on its spinners to do the job.

'Good to have Mitch'

Coach Stephen Fleming had said on Wednesday, said, "Mitch has a good record in the subcontinent and it's good to have him. We obviously missed him last year.

"We backed our pace bowlers last year and they made the adjustment to Pune. Imran Tahir is in good form.

"Karn Sharma is also there and Harbhajan has loads of experience - we've got most of the bases covered and it's just about getting the guys to perform and sticking to our gameplan, especially at home," Fleming had noted.

Kallicharran's story comes alive in the city of his roots

S. DINAKAR
CHENNAI

Alvin Kallicharran was not just about sparkling footwork, immaculate balance, wonderful timing and loads of courage. Behind his crickering achievements is a tale of struggle and sacrifice. He has overcome odds, broken through barriers.

From a childhood of poverty and hunger in Guyana - he had 11 siblings and as many as 20 people slept in his tiny house - to captaining the West Indian team, it is a story of the triumph of the spirit.

In a riveting conversation with N. Ram, Chairman, The Hindu Publishing Group, the left-handed great had the audience captivated with his words of immense wisdom about life in general, cricketing insight and sense of humour.

Upcoming book

It was his 70th birthday and Kallicharran celebrated it in the city of his roots, talking about his upcoming book *Colour Blind* and answering

probing questions from Ram in an event presented by *Sportstar* at the Kasturi Srinivasan Hall, The Music Academy, here on Thursday.

Kallicharran was applauded and cheered on by the gathering all through the session and he turned emotional at the end of it all with tears rolling down his cheeks. "I want to thank the people of Madras for all the love and affection they have shown me."

When asked about his early days, Kallicharran replied he did not have the means to afford a bat. "I would cut a piece of wood and use it as a bat. Then I would make a wooden ball and roll rubber bands over it. I would tie the ball to a tree and then practise all my shots."

Kallicharran revealed, "When in school I used to come home at night after playing and find no food. Then I would do menial labour to earn money to buy hot food."

When posed a question about the title of the book,



Trip down memory lane: Alvin Kallicharran and N. Ram share a laugh during their free-wheeling interaction on Thursday. • M. VEDHAN

Kallicharran replied it was about fighting racism all his life by living through it and not reacting.

Along the way, he had to cope with the Afro-Caribbean community in Guyana, and the whites in the various cricketing nations. He had a run-in with Aussie pace bowling great Dennis Lillee who

sledged him, but chose to focus on his batting.

Kallicharran led a rebel West Indian team to South Africa in the early 80s but, despite the criticism, he said the trip took top-flight cricket to the blacks and the coloured people like never before.

"We went to areas like So-

weto. And the blacks and the coloured were delighted to see us defeating the white South African team," Kallicharran said.

Interestingly, Kallicharran did not join the Kerry Packer Series.

"I would have signed but Warwickshire said they would not renew my con-

tract if I signed."

Kallicharran spoke on the importance of role models and dwelt on the influence of Rohan Kanhai and Garry Sobers.

Greatest cricketers

And Sobers and Vivian Richards were the greatest cricketer and batsman he had played with or seen. Among the Indians, Sunil Gavaskar was the technically most accomplished batsman.

Interestingly, Ram had reported on the Test where Kallicharran made a brilliant 124, among the greatest innings against spin, on a rain-affected pitch against the feared Indian spinners in Bangalore, 1974.

The Caribbean great exchanged views with former India leg-spinner V.V. Kumar on the importance of picking a spinner from the hand.

As Ram said, it was an evening to remember with this West Indian charmer who had "integrity and values."

KNOW YOUR KINGS XI PUNJAB

THE SQUAD
R. Ashwin (Capt.), Chris Gayle (WI), K. L. Rahul, Karun Nair, Mayank Agarwal, David Miller (SA), Sarfraz Khan, Nicholas Pooran (WI), Moises Henriques (Aus), Sam Curran (Eng), Hardus Viljoen (SA), Mandeep Singh, Harpreet Singh, Andrew Tye (Aus), Mohammed Shami, Muejeb-ur-Rahman (Afg), Ankit Rajpoot, Varun Chakravarthy, M. Ashwin, Darshan Nalkande, Arshdeep Singh, Agnivesh Ayachi and Simran Singh

COACH
Mike Hesson (NZ)

X-FACTOR
Motivation of players like skipper R. Ashwin, K.L. Rahul, Moises Henriques, Andrew Tye, Mayank Aggarwal, among others to prove a point or two to their National selectors could well help Punjab ride on some inspired performances. Expect some lesser-known players to play bigger roles

TOP RECORDS FOR KINGS XI PUNJAB

Most runs
SHAUN MARSH
2,477

Most wickets
PIYUSH CHAWLA
84

OVERALL RECORD (2008-2018)

Played	Won	Lost	Tie	NR
162	74	86	2	-

1 Virender Sehwag led the team only once and that match was a tie

11 Number of captains the franchise has had in 11 seasons. They are Yuvraj Singh, Mahela Jayawardene, Kumar Sangakkara, Adam Gilchrist, David Hussey, George Bailey, Virender Sehwag, M. Vijay, David Miller, George Maxwell and R. Ashwin

5/7 Of the seven head coaches till 2018, five have been Australians, Sanjay Bangar (2014-16) and Virender Sehwag (2017) have been the Indians to guide KXIP

PERFORMANCE MONITOR

Year	Stage
2008	Semifinals
2009	5th
2010	8th
2011	5th
2012	6th
2013	6th
2014	Runner-up
2015	8th
2016	8th
2017	5th
2018	7th

MATCH SCHEDULE

March 25 vs. Rajasthan Royals, Jaipur

March 27 vs. Kolkata Knight Riders, Kolkata

March 30 vs. Mumbai Indians, Mumbai

April 1 vs. Delhi Capitals, Mohali

R. ASHWIN

Tough, but not an improbable, task ahead of KXIP

Bowling looks fairly good but middle-order vulnerable

IPL COUNTDOWN

RAKESH RAO

Kings XI Punjab has finished more seasons in the cellar than in the playoffs. Take away the 2008 run to the semifinals or the narrow loss in the 2014 final, Punjab's inconsistency remains its only consistent factor.

After leading the table with five wins in six league matches last year, Punjab dramatically crashed to seven defeats in the remaining eight and finished seventh.

This year, the team has a new coach in Mike Hesson. He was New Zealand's coach when it reached the 2015 World Cup final. He replaces Brad Hodge. Also out is previous season's mentor Virender Sehwag.

Under R. Ashwin, the team has a strong top-order, an uncertain middle-order, a fairly potent new-ball attack and variety among spinners.

Last year, whenever Chris Gayle and K. L. Rahul fired at the top, the team won almost every time during the first

half. When they did not, Mayank Agarwal, Karun Nair and Mandeep Singh could not rise to the challenge. England's all-rounder Sam Curran (base price ₹2 crore) joins the squad after Punjab spent ₹7.20 crore to outbid Royal Challengers Bangalore at the auction.

For the team to advance, Australia's Moises Henriques and West Indies' wicketkeeper Nicholas Pooran and the seasoned South African David Miller will have to prove their worth.

Should some World Cup-bound players leave the squad, Punjab could face problems in finding the right balance towards the business end of the league.

Mohammed Shami, Australia's Andrew Tye and South Africa's Hardus Viljoen are the new-ball options. The team expects a lot from them before different kinds of spinners are thrown in.

Mystery spinner

Led by Ashwin, the spin department has Afghan off-spinner Muejeb ur Rahman and leg-spinner M. Ashwin

besides their 'prized-possession' Varun Chakravarthy.

If Ashwin and Muejeb can bowl even with the new ball, Varun is seen as the 'mystery spinner' capable of unleashing 6-7 varieties. After all, Punjab joined the bid for Varun (base price of ₹20 lakh) at ₹3.60 crore and eventually outbid Mumbai Indians at a whopping ₹8.40 crore!

After his impressive showings in the Tamil Nadu Premier League, this architect-turned-cricketer served Tamil Nadu in Ranji Trophy and limited-over formats this season. Hesson and Ashwin will have to find a way to get the best out of the available resources. The bowling looks fairly good but the vulnerable middle-order is the main cause of worry for the team's think-tank.

The team's biggest problem will be the lack of quality replacements if the likes of Gayle, Rahul, Shami, Curran, Miller are not available in the latter stage of the league or the playoffs. Overall, a very tough, but not an improbable, task ahead of Punjab to reach the playoffs.

'Bowl with a brave heart'



Lamichhane. • FILE PHOTO
PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

Delhi Capitals' up-and-coming leg-spinner Sandeep Lamichhane has received advice from the master of the craft, Shane Warne, who asked him to bowl with a "big and brave heart".

"I have always admired and idolised Shane Warne the most, and fortunately for me, IPL has given me the chance to meet him.

"I met him last season when he gave me certain tips to improve my bowling, which also gave me a huge boost in my career.

"The most important advice that he gave me was to make sure that I bowl with a big and brave heart."