

SPORT

'Selectiveness' set Sachin apart'

BISHWAJIT ROY



One may not want to hear stories from a cricketer who was recently disgraced for his involvement in corruption, especially when the stories are about a man whose career, spanning three decades, embodied the virtues of integrity and sincerity. But if you want unique insights about the cricketing icon named Sachin Tendulkar from a Bangladesh cricketer, only one name crops up: Mohammad Ashrafu, who was fortunate enough to spend ample time with the Indian legend.

Cricket may no longer be a pleasant topic for Ashrafu but the man who shared a dressing room with Tendulkar for 45 days as a member of IPL team Mumbai Indians in 2009 was more than eager to share his privileged vantage point. "Like millions I will also sit in front of my television set from tomorrow (Thursday) to watch this great man's last appearance. But right now a vivid memory comes to my mind -- I can still remember a safari in South Africa during the 2009 IPL," Ashrafu started his reminiscence of Sachin.

"We all embarked without any woollen cloth, all except Sachin. We had hardly noticed the cool weather but Sachin was well-informed and prepared accordingly. I spent 45 days in the dressing room and in hotels with him during that tour with the Mumbai Indians and I found him prepared before every move, which was simply a unique experience for me. He is god-gifted but he did everything with a plan," he continued.

It was the human aspect of Sachin which most astonished Ashrafu, who idolised the Indian maestro from his younger days. "Primarily, you see a man who always thinks about cricket. Actually he lives in cricket but one can't understand how great he is as a human being until or unless one gets the opportunity to spend enough time with him," said Ashrafu.

"He was very selective in the people he let into his inner circle. I can remember he has only four to five friends. We know well how disciplined he is but I personally believe this selectiveness has played a great role behind his outstanding success, which was not the case for me or many other cricketers. As a cricketer he is a champion but I believe he will receive more marks as a good human being than as a cricketer from the people who got the opportunity to spend time with him," Ashrafu opined.

"When I met him in 2004 (on Bangladesh's tour of India), he told me to speak Bangla as he said he understood the language because I was struggling to speak English and Hindi. The man was always humble. I am reminded of another interesting thing. Sachin came to my house in 2009 for dinner and we were all surprised to see him taste all the items. Generally, he preferred eating roti but there were times when he didn't follow any particular diet... perhaps the only area where he broke rules," Ashrafu recalled.

Sachin was Ashrafu's idol. But Sachin's calming influence and mentorship skills did not see Ashrafu blossoming to realise his true potential. Therein lies Tendulkar's greatness -- many, like Ashrafu, are born with talent but Tendulkar's career has been a shining example of how to make the most of it through discipline and hard

A gentleman to the core

PTI, New Delhi



Besides his enormous contribution with the bat, Sachin Tendulkar's wise counsel has defused some ugly situations in the Indian cricket team's dressing room.

The Indian cricket team had risen in revolt against their then coach and former New Zealand captain John Wright during India's tour of England in 2002, it has been revealed by the manager of the team Rajeev Shukla, currently a union minister.

Tendulkar helped end an ugly situation in the dressing room after Wright had slapped Virender Sehwag for the manner in which he had got out during the ODI match at The Oval.

Shukla, who is also a vice-president of the Board of Control for Cricket in India, revealed that it was Tendulkar who saved Wright from embarrassment as the then captain Sourav Ganguly wanted the New Zealander to apologise to Sehwag for slapping him.

"I saw Sehwag in a bad mood. When I asked him he said that John had slapped him. It became an issue and Ganguly insisted they will not leave [dressing room] unless Wright apologises to Sehwag.

"Then I found Wright and asked him if he did it. John said that he wanted Sehwag to score a century but 'Sehwag repeated his mistake of lifting the ball and got out, so I was angry. And he is like a disciple to me so I just pushed him out of anger'," Shukla recalled.

As the tension built up in the dressing room, Tendulkar requested Shukla to ensure that Wright's dignity as coach is kept intact.

"Sachin came to me and said that 'you must ensure that John does not apologise, otherwise the coach will lose his respect'. I got back to Sehwag and explained that it was just like a father chides his son, John did it. He understood and let it go," Shukla said.

Shukla also revealed how the retiring legend saved the Indian cricket team from embarrassment with his mature and sane advice during the 2002 tour of England.

Shukla said had it not been for Tendulkar, most of the players would have taken off their shirts and waved after the magnificent victory in the Natwest Trophy against England. "Sourav wanted that all the players do it. Maybe he wanted to pay back Andrew Flintoff in the same coin. But Sachin came and whispered in my ears that 'this should not be done. It's a gentleman's game and if Sourav wants to do it let him do'," Shukla said.



THE MAN WHO WOULD BE KING: A baby-faced Sachin Tendulkar (C) stands between two Indian legends, Kapil Dev (L) and Mohammad Azharuddin, before his first Test against Pakistan in Karachi in November 1989. Although he is dwarfed by Kapil and Azhar, over the next 24 years Tendulkar would go on to dwarf their cricketing accomplishments and establish himself as the pre-eminent Indian sportsman of all time. He will end his storied career with the second Test against West Indies, starting at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai today.

PHOTO: INTERNET

One last hurrah

No better place than Wankhede for Sachin

IANS, Mumbai



A little over two years and seven months after witnessing the ecstasy of India's World Cup triumph, Mumbai's Wankhede Stadium here will be the scene for another milestone in Indian cricket, hosting batting great Sachin Tendulkar's 200th and farewell Test match against the West Indies beginning today.

Perhaps, never in the history of the game has any cricketer's swan song series or farewell match generated such frenzy, so

much that the cricketing rivalry between the Calypso charmers and the sub-continental giants has been reduced to a sideshow.

In his 199th Test at the Eden Gardens, Tendulkar fans had a heartbreak as he managed just 10 before getting out to a contentious decision. He didn't get a chance to bat in the second innings as India thrashed the West Indies by an innings and 51 runs.

For the 40-year-old Tendulkar, his home town venue would be most apt to end his fairytale journey of 24 long years. It was in this city that he played most of his formative

years' cricket, rose to stardom, reinvented himself after being dubbed 'Endulkar' and finally realised his childhood dream of winning the World Cup in 2011.

Seeing India lifting the 2011 World Cup on a mild summer day on April 2, Tendulkar couldn't control his emotions and tears rolled down his cheeks as he took the victory lap with his two kids, Sara and Arjun, in tow along with his teammates.

Similar scenes could be seen when he finally goes round the stadium in a thanksgiving, but before that 'Tendulkar would like to bow out in style.

He was expected to play his 200th Test in

South Africa, but he has apparently made a request that he would like to end his career in front of his supporters at home and a short series against the West Indies, comprising two Tests and three ODIs, was hurriedly arranged.

Tendulkar has an excellent first class record at Wankhede, but not much when it comes to Tests. In 10 Tests that he has played here, the right-hander has got 847 runs, highest being 148 (against Sri Lanka in 1996-97), at an average of 47.05.

However, it was Tendulkar's choice to play at the Wankhede, considering the ill health of his mother Rajni and his coach Ramakant Achrekar as both wanted to see

Taskin eyes Jan return

SPORTS REPORTER



Taskin Ahmed's career, following his blistering performance in the Bangladesh Premier League in February, has been in the 'anticlimax' zone ever since. The 18-year-old pacer, who mesmerised many with his aggressive bowling in the BPL -- where he took eight wickets in four matches -- has been on the sidelines with a left knee tendon injury and a host of other problems ever since.

However, the tide it seems is turning for the bowler, who returned to bowl at the nets last week after a gap of almost nine months. According to Taskin, he will be 'fit enough' to play T20 cricket by January next year.

"Since last week I have been bowling 30 deliveries per session at the nets and my knee feels a lot better now. It was difficult when I initially started bowling, because it's been a while, but two days on I got the hang of it," said the lanky tearaway.

The bowler was sent to Australia in June this year to undergo a surgery that was expected to 'fix' his tendon problem. Instead of the surgery though, the doctor advised Taskin to follow a proper rehabilitation programme.

"I am only 18 and the doctor said these kinds of surgeries are not done until some one reaches 22 or 23, because I am still growing and it might cause problems later," explained Taskin.

"Because of the tendon issue I have to maintain my lower body power in order to avoid an injury. It might even mean that following a match, when everyone takes a day off, I will need to take special sessions for that," said Taskin.

With the BPL's third season uncertain, the bowler hopes that he can participate in a separate T20 tournament that the BCB is planning to organise ahead of the T20 World Cup.

But in order to make that full-fledged return Taskin has to work hard in the next two months, an aspect that he is aware of.

As he puts it, " Instead of worrying about my return, my first aim is to get back my line and length, my rhythm and be 100 per cent fit, the rest will follow."

Born to bat

AFP, New Delhi



Sachin Tendulkar's international career spanned 24 years, set new standards for batting and elevated him to demi-god status in India, meaning his retirement leaves a void that may never be filled.

The 'Little Master' will finally depart the scene after playing a record 200th Test match in front of home fans at the Wankhede stadium in Mumbai from Thursday.

The most influential contemporary cricketer, and the highest run-maker in history, will be remembered as an icon who was consistently brilliant, universally admired and modest to a fault.

Tendulkar grabbed the headlines for more than two decades with his record-breaking batting, leaving millions of adoring fans in India and abroad in awe.

Despite years of high-pressure national expectations and fierce media attention, the 40-year-old barely put a foot wrong, remaining the smiling, boyish figure he was when he burst onto the world stage in 1989, aged 16.

An unprecedented 100th international century last year was another landmark for Tendulkar, who holds almost all coveted batting records except Don Bradman's career average of 99.94, or Brian Lara's individual scores of 400 not out in Tests and an unbeaten 501 in first-class cricket.

Rani keeps winning

SPORTS REPORTER

WIM Rani Hamid continued her winning run in the Women Grand Masters Chess Tournament in Chennai, India as she beat India's Supriya Joshi in the tenth round yesterday.

Rani has now six points from ten games and is followed by WFM Zakia Sultana, who has stands on her previous 5.5 points after losing against WFM

Shuttler alleges of nepotism

SPORTS REPORTER

Shuttler Taslima Taher Tania has brought allegation of nepotism against the selection for the national team ahead of Yonex Sunrise Bangladesh International Series Badminton Tournament, scheduled to be held from December 3-7 at the Suhrawardi Indoor Stadium.

Tania recently appealed to the federation to include herself in the training instead of Bristi, who has been included in the four-member list after second-ranked Shima pulled out of training.

"We have up the shutlers in line with their

ranking and we did not favour anyone. Bristi is now the fifth ranked shuttler whose points are same as number six Tania, Irina and Akhi and their rankings have been decided on the basis of their game points as well as the number of games they won in all ranking tournaments held in Bangladesh," explained Bangladesh Badminton Federation's joint secretary Golam Aziz Zilani.

Bangladesh started their preparation at the start of this month with four female shuttlers and 16 male shuttlers as some top-class shuttlers from Malaysia, Taiwan, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka are expected to take part in the five-event tournament in Bangladesh.

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