



We had to take a drastic step this season: Goenka

Owner of Rising Pune Supergiant says they want to continue beyond 2017 IPL

Dubai: If England's fiery all-rounder Ben Stokes' price tag in the auction for Indian Premier League X made the heads turn sometime back, the owner of his team Rising Pune Supergiant (yes, that the new name this season) attracted no less eyeballs.

Sanjiv Goenka, the soft-spoken industrial scion of RP-Sanjiv Goenka Group and one of the top 100 businessmen named in Forbes, showed he meant business when his bidding team broke the bank to go for Stokes at a staggering \$2.17 million and then dropped a bombshell by replacing Mahendra Singh Dhoni as the captain. Steve Smith, who held his own as Australia's Captain Courageous in the just-concluded tour of India, will be in charge of an overhauled team as they look for a reversal of fortunes after a disappointing seventh place finish last season.

"To make a mark, we had to try and do something drastic. The team believed that we needed at least one more potential matchwinner with bowling and batting ability," Goenka told Gulf News in an email interview from Kolkata, justifying the astronomical fees that they had to cough up for the allrounder and England vice captain.

As the Indian cricket media went on a tizzy over the removal of Dhoni as the first instance when 'MSD' was being removed from any form of captaincy, Goenka did not beat around the bush and said it was a 'managerial decision' to drop the most successful captain in the history of IPL. "It was a decision taken in the interest of the franchise. "All our senior players are extremely matured, they are outstanding individuals, they are committed to the goal of RPS. I do not anticipate any problem whatsoever," Goenka said.

MSD, however, will be more than a player after the Pune franchise received the setback of losing Ravichandran Ashwin, who will miss out on the 10th edition with hernia along with leading Indian internationals like Ravinder Jadeja, Lokesh Rahul and Murali Vijay.

From a tentative start as newcomers last season, RSG had looked more purposeful from the beginning this season and it was not a surprise that Goenka had decided to pitch himself in the thick of things even more. "(Ben) Stokes is the best allrounder in the game. He has the potential of winning games on his own. We have other potential players with Stokes. They are suitable and have the winning ability," he said.

What are the realistic expectations from his team this year? "Every franchise of the IPL aspires to be in the play-offs. We will give our best to make it happen and take it from there," said Goenka, whose co-owned football team in the Indian Super League (ISL), Atletico de Kolkata had been one of the major success stories in the new, franchise-owned league so far. They have won the event twice in three years, reaching the semi-finals on the other occasion.

Looking at the future, the Kolkata-headquartered Goenka Group seems to be in the IPL for the long run even after the two-year window gets over this year. "I think IPL has had a huge positive impact on the group on the visibility. It is something we have been happy with," he said.

Does it mean that they will give it a shot to stay in the mix next year when the licenses of all IPL franchises come up for fresh bidding, Goenka said: "We have enjoyed this association. If given a chance, we would be happy to continue."