

## CRICKET

## Steve Smith and Ajinkya Rahane offer a straight bat!



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### The RPS teammates diplomatically handle queries on the just-concluded Test series

Steve Smith and Ajinkya Rahane, opposing captains in the final India-Australia Test earlier this week, came prepared to face the barrage of questions from the media.

Though Thursday's event was meant to welcome England's all-rounder Ben Stokes – a buy worth Rs 14.5 crore for Rising Pune Supergiant – with Smith and Rahane presenting the all-rounder with a team-shirt, it was more an opportunity for the media to quiz the two with questions relating to the just-concluded series that had its share of acrimony.

Smith, who continued to pound India with the bat but lost quite a few admirers with his conduct in the series, was an obvious target of the scribes. But he proved equal to the challenge.

Ready for the IPL

In the background of Virat Kohli's views that some of the Australians in the team were no longer his friends, the RPS skipper was asked whether he thought one among them, the man offered a straight bat: "The series is done and dusted for us. India outplayed us and won 2-1. For me, I am moving on from that now and I am ready to take the reins of this IPL team and get into this tournament."

Rahane was asked whether he accepted Smith's invitation of have a beer after series-victory on Tuesday, the soft-spoken batsman said, "We had our own get-together in the dressing room, I was busy there. We were enjoying each other's company. It was a well-fought series. They played really well in India. But for all of us, we played good cricket throughout the season. I enjoyed the moment."

Even as Smith and Rahane repeatedly side-stepped the core questions, team owner Sanjeev Goenka was not too far behind. For instance, his response to why M.S. Dhoni was stripped of captaincy, the response, intentionally or otherwise, had very little to do with the question.

"A lot has been written about the captaincy. Whenever I have interacted with Mahi, I have learnt something new. He is one of the sharpest brains I have interacted with. I have deep respect for him as an individual, as a player and as a leader. I am one of his biggest fans. This is a new season, a new captain, there's complete unity and complete togetherness in the team, so wish us well. We have a great squad. We have the potential to perform well."

Personally, Smith saved the day when he cut out all diplomacy while responding to a question, whether the presence of three other captains – Dhoni, Rahane and Faf du Plessis – in the squad made it any easier or difficult for him.

"(When there are) Plenty of captains floating around, I think it's important not to have too many sorts of opinions, If I want something or they want to say something, they can come up to me. If there are opinions coming from all fronts, it can cloud your judgement or what's going on in your mind. I'll try to stay as clear as possible. It's difficult sometimes when you so many people around."

Stokes, who seemed to enjoying himself, said he did not expect the IPL auction to go the way it did. "Even if I had just brought on my base price, I would then also have tried to perform exactly the same way. I would try to win as many games for Pune. That's what we play the game for, to win the games. Try and do well for the team."

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