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## Pune's billionaire owner Sanjiv Goenka praises Australian captain Steve Smith

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Steve Smith was booed off the ground in Bangalore, where he became India's Public Enemy No.1 following his ill-advised and oft-replayed glance to the stands.

But Smith remains an inspirational leader in the eyes of billionaire Sanjiv Goenka, who is the owner of Indian Premier League franchise Rising Pune Supergiant.

Smith was installed as Pune captain last month, replacing national icon M.S. Dhoni.

It was a sign of how highly the Australian is regarded by everyone at the club, including the boss who shelled out an astonishing \$2.8 million to secure Ben Stokes at this year's auction.

The controversy surrounding the second Test, in which Smith so deeply outraged fellow captain Virat Kohli when he looked to support staff for advice regarding a potential review, has not altered Goenka's view.

"Steve inspires me as a leader," Goenka said.

"Steve has a huge amount of enthusiasm in his leadership style. He's very engaged, he's very involved.

"He's very emotional about victory and I think he's passionate about performance.

"I haven't spoken to him over the last couple of days, so I don't know what his current feeling is.

"BCCI and Cricket Australia have said let's move in and I think that's what all of us should do."

Smith flew out following the second Test for a pre-planned visit to the factory that produces his bats in Jalandhar. The squad reassembled on Sunday for a training session in Bangalore.

The trip has given Smith, who left contrite and sheepish regarding his "brain fade", a chance to clear his head.

He is set to smoke the peace pipe with Kohli on Wednesday, when the skippers meet with match referee Richie Richardson.

Michael Clarke, Smith's predecessor as captain, noted the saga and series being level would heighten pressure on the 27-year-old in the third Test that starts on Thursday.

"The Indian team are going to remind Steve Smith and Peter Handscomb of what has gone on in Bangalore," Clarke told *India Today*.

"There will be eyes on him in the next Test and even from his teammates leading up to the Test.

"This is probably the first time the spotlight has been on him individually ... the first time he's had to face criticism from Indian media.

"Steve is a tough character."

Several former India skippers had called for Smith to be punished by the International Cricket Council.

Goenka describes Smith as a "simple, plain-speaking, sharp-minded" leader.

The pair have shared plenty of phone conversations during the current four-Test series, particularly before the IPL auction, when Smith was in Mumbai and met up with Pune coach Stephen Fleming to talk tactics.

"He was totally involved. He'd seen videos of players that he didn't know anything about. He did research," Goenka said.

"He's very clear about what he wants to do and how he wants to do it.

"I've been very impressed with the way he's handled the Australian team over the last several months."

Chairman of selectors Trevor Hohns agrees, noting Smith has become more vocal in discussions since Australia crashed to a horrible fifth straight Test defeat in Hobart.

"That's exactly what we want from our national captain," Hohns said.

**AAP**

*This story was found at: <http://www.smh.com.au/sport/cricket/punes-billionaire-owner-sanjiv-goenka-praises-australian-captain-steve-smith-20170312-guwi05.html>*