

Stokes within our budget, says Goenka

- Exclusive

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Sanjiv Goenka

Calcutta: Sanjiv Goenka, chairman of the RP-Sanjiv Goenka Group and owner of the Rising Pune Supergiants, spoke to The Telegraph on Monday evening.

The 25-minute interview was done during Goenka's drive from a Bangalore hotel to the airport.

Excerpts...

Q You've monopolised the headlines... On the eve of the auction and on the big day itself...

A (Laughs) The announcement regarding the change in captaincy had been scheduled for Sunday, so it was done... It's not that we were looking to make the headlines... As for the auction proper, I'd been very confident about getting Ben Stokes. We were lacking a genuine fast bowler-all-rounder and, for us, he was the man to get.

Stokes took to the auction as very hot property, but a record-rewriting Rs 14.5 crore... That's huge... Were you willing to go that far or the dynamics of the auction left you with no choice?

Actually, I'd been willing to spend Rs 15 crore, so Stokes came within our budget... Therefore, I have every reason to be happy... I'd expected Daniel Christian to go for much more than his base price of Rs 1 crore, but we got him for just that. So, it was a nice surprise... Look at quick Tymal Mills, Stokes's compatriot... His base price was Rs

50 lakh, but he went to the Royal Challengers Bangalore for as much as Rs 12 crore. It's tough to predict an auction.

Who was more keen to have Stokes on board - you or captain Steve Smith?

Smith definitely wanted Stokes, but so did I. I'm delighted the auction went according to our plans and we got all our first-choice players.

All?

Well, all except Pat Cummins (who went to Delhi DareDevils for Rs 4.5 crore)... We also got two promising Indian spinners - Rahul Chahar and Saurabh Kumar.

Did you speak to Stokes after the auction?

No, but I could once I've landed in Calcutta.

You've now got some top-class players from overseas... Smith, Faf du Plessis, Stokes, Usman Khawaja, Mitch Marsh...

Indeed, yes... And you have missed out Adam Zampa.

But would all be available for the entire IPL (April 5-May 21)?

Stokes would be with us till May 14, when we play our last league match... Faf would miss the last two-three matches, for he has to leave on May 6. No issues with the rest.

Has Bengal captain Manoj Tiwary been taken to increase the local flavour? He was, after all, bought in the third round of the auction...

The sentiment element was certainly there, but more than that, Flem (coach Stephen Fleming) wanted Tiwary.

[Tiwary, incidentally, is on the payroll of the RP-Sanjiv Goenka Group's premier entity, the CESC Ltd.]

Mahendra Singh Dhoni, the in-terrific form Ravichandran Ashwin and Ajinkya Rahane form the core of your domestic players...

They are the biggest names for sure, but I have high hopes from somebody like leg-spinner Chahar.

Seems to be a much better mix than last year. Your take?

We certainly have a better and more athletic team... Captain Smith has enough flexibility with match-winners... We've been blessed with quite a few of them, now it's about delivering.

Expectations as the owner...

I expect the team to do very well.

Everything points to you being more hands-on than you were last year...

As I've told you, I have the Pune franchise for two years only and our debut had been disappointing (ending second from the bottom). The time for Rising Pune Supergiants to make a mark is limited... It's not about me trying to leave my stamp on the team, but Steve and the players making a big impression in IPL X... Our players should assemble in Pune either on March 29 or 30, but I'll see them only before the first match, against Mumbai Indians, which is on April 6.

The last one... Is there a motto for the upcoming edition of the IPL?

We'll surely think of something. Growth, fairness and customer (fans) satisfaction are the core values of our Group. They're central to the franchise too.