

Ready to lead a new bunch: Smith

Our SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi: Till a couple of days ago, they were arch rivals in the bitterly fought Test series between India and Australia. On Thursday, in the capital, Ajinkya Rahane and Steve Smith appeared in identical jerseys and vowed to fight it out together for the interest of the Rising Pune Supergiant (RPS) in the IPL.

Though both the Australian skipper and India's stand-in captain in the Dharamsala Test said the fourth-Test series was "done and dusted" and they were looking for a fresh start in the IPL, they were still bombarded with queries on the Test series.

"For me, the series is done and dusted... India have outplayed us. I am now ready to lead a new bunch at the Rising Pune Supergiant."

Smith and Rahane clearly anticipated the mood and preferred playing with dead bats while replying to questions ranging from Virat Kohli's relation with Australian players to the Pune side's earlier decision to remove Mahendra Singh Dhoni as captain.

Asked why the Indians could not accept the invitation from the Australian side to have a beer with them, Rahane said the team was busy celebrating in the Indian dressing room.

"We had our own celebrations in our dressing room and I was busy there. It was a well-fought series and we wanted to enjoy after a long and successful season," he added.

Asked about their contrasting styles while leading the side, Rahane said: "I am calm and cool, and that brings the best out of me, while Virat is aggressive and that brings the best out of him."

"Virat is a great leader, a great ambassador of the game. He has done so well for the country," he added.

Rahane echoed Smith's comments on the recently concluded Test series.

"We have now shifted from Test to T20 cricket. To switch on and off is always a challenge. Currently I am not thinking about the series. I believe it is always better to stay in the present. Credit should go to Australia...

they also played great cricket. Now we will play together to take the team (RPS) ahead," he said.

Last season, Pune was led by Mahendra Singh Dhoni, but this time he has been replaced by Smith. Asked how comfortable he would be in leading a side having three captains (Dhoni, Rahane and Faf du Plessis), Smith said it won't be any problem.

"I am looking forward to interacting with different leaders... certainly it will make my job easier."

"The IPL will be beneficial to me. There are a lot of international players and I will get to share the dressing room with them. I will know what people from the different parts of the world are thinking."

"There are plenty of guys to talk to, but it is important not to have too many opinions. If opinions are coming from left, right and centre, it can cloud your judgement," he said.

The RPS owner Sanjiv Goenka said Dhoni will join the team in Pune early next month. "He is very amicable... he was part of the selection process of the team. I consider him a great individual... I remain his biggest fan."

"Every time I meet him, I come back learning something from him," added Goenka.

"There are no issues between MS Dhoni and me. We have shared some messages, MS is very supportive and it doesn't change my professional relationship with him or anyone else," Smith said.

● **Related report: Page 16**



Rising Pune Supergiant captain Steve Smith, owner Sanjiv Goenka, Ben Stokes and Ajinkya Rahane on Thursday