



MR. GAUTAM GAMBHIR

Former Indian Cricketer and
Member of Parliament

Interview taken by
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YT: In the 2011 IPL player auction, you were the most sought after player and were given the captaincy of a team you just arrived at. What importance did this responsibility and trust placed in you by the management and the players hold to you? How did you handle being not only a new player but also the captain itself, with respect to understanding the strengths and weaknesses of the team and leading them to the playoffs?

CG: The biggest hindrance in the performance of any sportsperson is constantly thinking of proving oneself. So, if you have the backing and support of the management, you put all your efforts and focus on the game which leads to better results and successful campaigns. That is exactly what happened then. Being a new player in the team means building a rapport with other players which became even more important as I was the captain. Cultivating relationships with players is extremely important so that a trust factor is created. You have to back your players to the hilt in order to facilitate them to go out there and give it their best.

YT: There is a general opinion that restricting Indian players to only IPL is not only hindering the exposure of the players but is also a major factor in letting the IPL retain its stature, thus, becoming a corporate gimmick. Being a major influence in the IPL, what are your thoughts on this?

CG: This is for the BCCI to decide whether Indian players should be restricted to IPL or not. However, IPL has provided a platform to innumerable youngsters to showcase their talent, not only to the country but the entire world. It has also provided them with immense exposure to international players, new techniques and learning opportunities. This is the reason behind IPL's stature in world cricket.

YT: In the 2011 World Cup final, you entered the field after Virender Sehwag was dismissed, and soon after Sachin Tendulkar was dismissed. Virat Kohli, back then a new player by World Cup standards came in with a massive total set by the Sri Lankan team led by Kumar Sangakkara. You had all the pressure on you to

lead the team to a stable position. Even though you were a veteran player, the pressure was no doubt mounting. What strategy did you adopt to deal with that situation knowing what was at stake? What was going through your mind?

GG: When you are at that stage, your concentration is more important than any complicated strategy. My job was very clear. I had to stabilize the innings while keeping the scoreboard moving at a steady pace. The last thing we needed was being in a position where we had to get too many runs in the last overs. That was the only way to reduce pressure for myself and for the team. The only external thing which had a bearing on my mind was that I cannot let 1.3 billion people down who had been waiting for a world cup for 27 years!

YT: Even though you have retired from cricket, you continue to be an active analyst, whilst being a Lok Sabha member. How do you balance your time between your professional, national and familial responsibilities? Do you ever feel overburdened and if so, how do you deal with them equitably?

GG: When you become a public representative, it has to be your first priority over and above everything. I personally meet the people of my constituency for grievance redressal at least 4 times a week and I am available on call 24X7. Then there are sessions in Parliament as well as meetings of Standing Committees where macro level policy decisions are taken. Cricket has been my life ever since I understood what life was. So, it is only natural that I would want to contribute to the growth of the game as much as possible. But as far as being an analyst is concerned, I am only fulfilling contractual obligations which were entered into before I became an MP. My family has been extremely supportive and understanding throughout my life and I make sure that, at the least, I am there for my kids whenever they need me. Now that I do not have to travel too much because of cricket, I am making up for lost time.

YT: You regard your maternal uncle, with whom you stayed in the 90s, as your mentor and you said

that you always called him up before important matches. What role did he play in shaping your career?

GG: My family is the reason why I have been able to achieve so much in life. They encouraged me to go out and do my best without worrying about anything. When you are young, you need someone who can guide you and motivate you. Someone who can stop you from going down the wrong path and also understands your concerns. My uncle has been my rock. I am truly blessed to have received guidance from several great people in my life.

YT: You have been commenting on politics since your playing days. On joining so, you installed the first Smog Tower in Delhi which was very well received. Do you think this is just a temporary measure and that the best way forward would be to switch to sustainable sources of energy?

GG: The rationale behind installing the Smog Tower or as we call it the Giant Air Purifier was to explore unconventional ways of reducing pollution or at least clean the air we breathe to provide much needed respite to the people and give a wake up call to the State Government which was not willing to think out of the box. It is a fact that these measures can only partially solve the problem. Ultimately, we would have to think about new ways of crop disposal which is one of the biggest reasons behind pollution in North India which is also known as stubble burning. In the long run we would have to switch towards renewable sources of energy and transform our lifestyles in order to be environment friendly so as to not put pressure on nature.

YT: Your measure of installing CCTVs led to widespread appreciation but Delhi is still said to be unsafe for women. What more do you think could and should be done to make our National Capital a safer place?

GG: Improving law and order, having proper surveillance and developing infrastructure are

necessary to control the situation. I have heavily invested in having self defence classes for women in my constituency. However, a change in the mindset of society is most important. Boys from a very young age need to be taught about consent and women should be encouraged to always complain about any inappropriate behavior. Victim shaming needs to stop completely. If such behavior is called out early on, it might instill a sense of fear and shame in the perpetrator which might stop him from committing such acts in the future.

YT: A trend seems to be emerging in India as successful people from other fields enter politics, however, most of them fail to make a mark. What attracted you towards politics and what quality of yours sets you apart, making you a successful leader in the nation? What is the practical and the optimal way to get the youth involved in politics given that they often have a pessimistic view towards the same?

GG: If you only enter politics for limelight, a bungalow or some other perquisites, then ultimately you will fail. You might win once but disappointed voters will see to it that your reputation is tarnished forever. You must genuinely want to change people's lives. Also, many successful people from other fields who enter politics are hesitant in taking a stand or expressing their views due to a fear of backlash. Politics by nature is confrontational and one cannot shy away from taking it head on if one needs to make a mark and grow. As far as young people are concerned, it is important for them to think whether they want to limit themselves just to social media and rallies or they want to become a part of the decision making process. For that they need to bring a skill set to the table and should work in the grassroots. Decentralisation of politics at the lowest level is very important and youngsters can make this dream come true.

YT: As the pandemic raised expectations of the healthcare provided to the common workforce, you came out in support of "FYI Health", a community health monitoring system for enterprises. Considering that Delhi has been one of the major victims of the crisis, what steps does the government need to take to ensure that the spread can be curbed as the nation opens up?

GG: Ramping up testing, door to door monitoring in containment zones, reduction in charges of hospitals and tests, developing infrastructure and isolation centres are necessary for keeping COVID in check. Fortunately, most of these things are being done in Delhi especially after the meetings held between our Hon'ble Home Minister and State Chief Minister. In addition to these, underprivileged sections of the society need to be taken care of by providing them subsidies, so that they are not forced to go out in case they are unwell.

YT: Your unrivalled spirit and zeal to transcend all boundaries has been a source of inspiration for lakhs of people; the students of St. Xavier's College (Autonomous), Kolkata are no different. What message would you like to give to them?

GG: Xavier's has a special place in my heart as I got so much love and support from fans from this college during my time in KKR. Students of this college have always proved their mettle in various fields. I just want to say that no matter how successful you become, always try to be of service to your country and fellow citizens. All the money and all the knowledge is of no use if it cannot uplift those who are less fortunate than us. Also, never give up, no matter what. There is always light at the end of the tunnel!