



MR. AJINKYA RAHANE

Indian international cricketer and
former captain of Indian team

Taken by the Editorial Board

YT: Your family had always been very supportive of you growing up - and had fought against the circumstances and sacrificed a lot to see you follow your dreams to fruition. What were some of the sacrifices they had to make in the process, and how vital do you think having such a support system is, especially for a young cricketer, considering the training and travelling required?

AR: I have been very lucky to have a very supportive family and whatever I have achieved would not have been possible without them. My parents gave so much of their time to help me develop my cricket skills. I used to stay and initially train in Dombivli. It is situated quite a distance from one of the prime cricketing hubs of Mumbai. So, travelling by the suburban local trains was not easy. I grew into it as time passed though. Quite often, I had to leave home at around 4:30 A.M. My mother used to wake up and prepare lunch for me even before I did. She used to carry my heavy kitbag and walk me to the S.V. Joshi cricket ground in Dombivli when I was very young. She also had my younger siblings to look after, so it was not easy for her. Financially, my father had to

make many sacrifices so that he had the necessary funds to support my cricket. Backing from family is extremely important for players and sportspersons at every stage of their careers.

YT: You've always revered your childhood coach, Mr. Pravin Amre, for playing a significant role in making you a batsman of international temperament. What is the best advice you have received from him which has held you in good stead both on and off the field?

AR: Pravin Sir always encouraged me to maintain my composure on the crease. He is a big believer in visualizing match situations and preparing for the same a day or two before the game. Such traits have rubbed off on me over the years. The calmness bit is particularly important, especially on overseas tours. Often, we are equipped with the required skill sets and it is all about implementing the same appropriately whilst on the field. I have been able to do so primarily because of the learnings taken from Pravin Sir over the years.

YT: **The Indian Premier League was first introduced 14 years ago, and since then it has changed the way domestic T20 cricket has been perceived. What are some significant changes you have seen in the cricketing world from 2008 to 2022 and how have these changes shaped your career?**

AR: The Indian Premier League (IPL) has provided a fantastic launchpad for younger players to showcase their skills and temperament against world-class opponents. It has unnerved us concerning high-pressure situations given that we encounter them countless over the course of an IPL season. Earlier, only a selected crop of individuals got an opportunity to face international players. But the IPL has given that chance to upcoming and domestic talent from our country as well. The IPL has made them well-prepared to deal with the challenges of international cricket and hence, we can see several debutants performing so well right from the start of their careers these days. Personally, the league allowed me to interact with greats of the game like Rahul Dravid and Shane Warne at a very young age. I took some invaluable lessons from Rahul Bhai and thrived from the trust that he reposed in me. Moreover, the league acquaints you with different cities, cultures and supporters, which helps in shaping your overall personality as an individual as well.

YT: **It has become a prevalent practice nowadays for cricket enthusiasts to openly troll, ridicule, and even shame cricketers for any performance they deem as unsatisfactory. Having been faced with the same, how do you react and deal with the afflictions?**

AR: As a sports person, it is important to control what you can control. Appreciations and criticisms are part and parcel of playing the sport. One cannot get overawed with praise or bogged down by failures. I have a solid support system with family and friends who are my sounding board at every phase of my life. Beyond that, I stay unaffected

by the outside noise and just try to do my job to the best of my abilities.

YT: **After the defeat in Adelaide, you led India to a historic triumph that cricket fans will remember for years to come. Your composure during that period was commendable and inspirational. How did you boost the morale of the team and instil confidence after the defeat? Did you, as the team captain, make any significant changes in the preparation?**

AR: Australia 2020-21 was special. We did not panic and did not make any significant changes to our approach after the first game. The team management sat down for a frank chat post the defeat in Adelaide. We collectively decided to forget whatever happened in the first Test and instead start with a fresh slate from Melbourne onwards. I told the team to look at this as a three-match series starting from the second game. The team had enough match-winners and we had a staunch belief that we could emerge victorious in the series. I wanted the senior players to be more involved in the team and the making of the strategy. I had an individual chat with each of them about this and what followed was there to see for all of us.

YT: **In the past few years, there has been constant shuffling in the Indian cricket team, with the intention of giving new talents an opportunity to express themselves. While young players bring new energy to the field, their lack of experience sometimes becomes very evident. In your opinion, which of them counts more on the cricket field, experience or vigour?**

AR: There needs to be a fine blend of both. A team always needs younger talents who can bring new ideas and some fresh energy to the setup. However, experience is equally important to take the team past challenging moments. A good team always finds the correct balance.

YT: Cricket in the times of COVID-19 had become extremely challenging and mentally taxing, with cricketers being confined to their rooms, quite often in isolation. We had also seen many cricketers leave tours and tournaments midway because of 'bubble fatigue'. How does isolation affect the performance of an athlete on the field, and what are the methods they use to cope with it?

AR: Bio-secure bubbles are indeed quite taxing and it is encouraging that we are slowly moving away from that system. Firstly, it is only fair to admit that they were important to resume cricket amidst COVID-19. However, recovery is a very important part of any athlete's routine. It includes rejuvenating mentally as well and that had become quite difficult whilst being confined in a bubble. It hampered our interactions with people, friends and family. Moreover, being stuck in a room, a player is more likely to succumb and give into negative thoughts whilst going through a poor run of form. That gives rise to 'bubble fatigue' and accordingly compels individuals to take a professional break at the peak of their careers. Bubbles are not an ideal arrangement but then Covid was and continues to remain an extraordinary phenomenon as well. We really cannot complain much about external factors as it is essential to adapt to changing times. At the end of the day, being able to play professional cricket is what matters the most for all of us!

YT: You are regarded as one of the best Indian batsmen and have many accolades to your name. Is there any accomplishment that you dearly want to add to your name before you bid farewell to the sport?

AR: I honestly do not think about bidding farewell to the sport at this stage in my career. I have plenty of years of competitive cricket left in me. Until then, the first and foremost aim is to play cricket and score runs aplenty. Test cricket is considered to be the zenith of the international game. We came very close to clinching the World Test Championship (WTC) title last time around. That is one tournament that I really look forward to winning with the Indian team.

YT: The students of St. Xavier's College (Autonomous), Kolkata are ardent followers of cricket, and are undoubtedly inspired by your journey. What message would you like to give them?

AR: Work hard as there is no substitute for hard work. One should go after every opportunity with a 100 per cent positive attitude. Moreover, it is important to remain grounded and humble enough to acknowledge our drawbacks and consistently look to improve upon them. These traits will hold a professional in good stead irrespective of the career that they choose to pursue going ahead.