

I DO NOT WANT TO BE IN THE NEWSPAPERS FOR THE WRONG REASONS

Roshni K Olivera

The ugly spot-fixing controversy may have engulfed IPL season 6, but there were a few good things that emerged, too. Like, Rohit Sharma's captaincy that suddenly came to the fore and finally winning the IPL trophy was surely the icing on the cake for this 26-year-old. Currently, no cricketer is speaking to the media. But, in a candid chat with Bombay Times, a day before the betting controversy broke out, Rohit spoke at length about how this simple boy from Borivali had reached this far, his new role as a captain and leading Sachin Tendulkar. Excerpts:

You suddenly took over from Ricky Ponting as the captain of Mumbai Indians. Did it come as surprise?

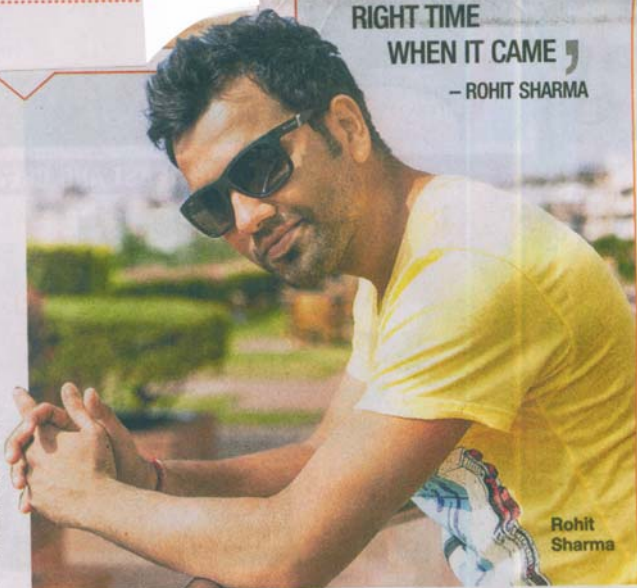
It wasn't a surprise. I was vice-captain and I felt at some stage, captaincy was going to come to me. It was the right time when it came and I was pretty confident about myself. In the last two years that I was vice-captain, I often thought like a captain and that helped.

How has the experience been, considering you have quite a few seniors in the team?

It's been really nice. The seniors have responded very well and we've put in our best as a team.

What was it like to captain a side with Sachin Tendulkar in it?

I'm from Mumbai and Sachin Tendulkar has been my idol. I have grown up watching him play for India. Playing along with him itself was fantastic and then leading him



Rohit Sharma

was like the icing on the cake. Having somebody like him in any team is a big boost. He brings a lot of experience with him and having played for 23 years, he has handled so many pressure situations. His guidance has always been there and he's always there to help.

How did it all happen? At what age did you start playing cricket?

I used to watch a lot of cricket as a

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WHEN IT CAME

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kid. Being in India, it comes naturally to you because it is such a big sport here. Around the age of nine, I wanted to play professional cricket, but my school in Borivali, Our Lady of Vailankanni, didn't have that option. There was an academy near my house but it was really difficult to join that because of our financial problems.

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Sachin Tendulkar has been my idol. Leading him has been an honour



Rohit Sharma

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But somehow, a year later, we managed the funds and I was a part of the academy; I was around 11 then. I did pretty well there and got offers from many schools that had good cricket teams. That's how I became a part of Swami Vivekanand International School in Borivali. Since it's an international school, the fees were high, so my parents weren't keen as we couldn't afford it. I'm thankful to the school director, who gave me a scholarship, waiving off my fees. My coach Dinesh Lad played a huge role because he was the one who told the school director that this kid is talented and can do wonders. That's how it all began. From there, I went on to play for under-14, under-16 and then under-19.

In India, cricketers are considered demigods and one can get carried away by the adulation...

When you start doing well, people put you on a pedestal and then when you don't do well, they drop you. It's not their fault. Cricket is almost like a religion in our country. As players, we've got to keep our heads firmly on our shoulders. We can't get carried away, or drift away with some performances. That's where, again, Sachin is an inspiration. We have a lot to learn from him and some other senior players.

How do you manage when you hit a low?

At the end of the day, it's about how mentally strong you can be. In fact, we have mental exercises like yoga that help us in fitness and well-being. Finally, it's about knowing what you need to do and not letting anything affect your morale.

Your talent was never under question, but at some point there was talk about your consistency. Now with you being in great form, do you feel you've overcome that?

This is something very important in a sportsman's life. Being a cricketer, I know how important it is to be consistent. Every cricketer tries to perform to the best of his ability. Sometimes it happens, sometimes it doesn't, things don't go your way. But, you can't let that weigh you down. I know my ability and that I can bounce back. Consistency is something I am really focused on and working on it.

What's on the personal front? You were linked to a model (Sofia Hayat) some time ago...

Nothing on the personal front. Cricket has given me everything and I'm just focussing on that right now. About the rumours, I really don't know where those came from. I was shocked when I heard about them because I had never even met her and didn't know who she was.

So, that was your first brush with stardom?

It was my first ever controversy with a girl, so I was really shocked. I'm someone who doesn't want to be in the newspapers for the wrong reasons.