

JACQUES KALLIS

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It is so good to be back at my second home. The year has passed by so quickly, it feels like I only walked out of the door a couple of weeks ago.

I have been excited before every edition of the IPL, at every stage of my career as a player and a coach, and this one is no exception. I don't know how you measure excitement but this year's KKR squad has got me on the edge of my seat.

We are definitely better balanced than we were last year with much better fast bowling options and more quality depth in all departments. It is a pity that our South African fast bowler, Anrich Nortje, has had to withdraw through injury, but that's the nature of professional sport – especially for fast bowlers! But he is a serious talent and I have no doubt he will make his mark in the IPL in years to come – for us.

The majority of the squad has been attending academy sessions throughout the year which have very clearly benefitted them all. Apart from general strength and conditioning they have all been working on and practising specific skills which I'm looking forward to seeing in action.

I don't want to tempt fate but every squad member is strong, fit and raring to go. The practice sessions and warm up games have been excellent. Sometimes it is difficult to create the intensity you need for meaningful practise but that wasn't the case for the last ten days or so.

The best news, of course, is that all our home games will be at Eden Gardens. Every franchise is proud of their home venue and their home crowd, but everyone also knows that the level of support we get and the atmosphere at the Gardens is like having a 12th player on the field.

We have a few new faces in the squad but mostly we have the same guys who have done so well for us in the past. As most people will be aware, the KKR 'family' is a cornerstone of the franchise philosophy and we don't trade our brothers lightly!

The senior players all seem to be super fit and hungry for success. Sometimes we have players who arrive feeling and looking a little jaded after a long domestic season or international tour but that certainly is not the case this year. Nobody will be needing any 'recovery time' before the first game. KKR will be hitting the ground running this year.

JACQUES KALLIS

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It's been a fine start to the campaign with plenty of action and entertainment and it's some comfort to start a run of four consecutive away games with two-from-two at the Gardens. Many thanks, once again, to our home crowd. Honestly, I'm still blown away by their support, even after all these years.

It is important to keep hitting the reset button and not taking anything for granted. I was told as a young boy, 'don't flirt with form', and I remembered it throughout my playing days. You respect good form when it is with you and you are grateful for its presence, but it can – and does – get up and leave at any time, for no apparent reason!

At KKR, we always remind ourselves that the team comes first and that, although certain individuals might shine in a particular game, it is all XI (and 25 in the squad) who win or lose.

However – it is hard not to talk about Andre Russell at the moment. Wow. It is not unusual, of course. His career, after all, shows that he has hit more sixes than fours in T20 cricket and he has produced many similar innings before. Maybe not quite as devastating, though.

It is not just his batting – he has led the way with the ball, too. I believe Andre can and should be the best all-rounder in world in this format. He may already be.

I guess many people would think of Chris Gayle when associating cricket with Jamaica but that may change if Andre keeps this form going. He is a very special guy with a fantastic sense of humour who keeps us all entertained. Crucially, he is one of those people who doesn't get too 'up' or too 'down.' You wouldn't know if he'd scored nought or 50 off 15 balls if you sat next to him in the change room.

It is important to try and maintain momentum in this format because single wins and losses often turn into three or four.

People have asked me why Sunny Narine doesn't open the batting in every match – well, tactics change for certain individuals and different opposition. Every team tries to get the best match-ups with both bat and ball. There is a lot of research and studying that goes on (not all by me!) We take the information we are given and try to maximise our chances of scoring runs and taking wickets. We all try to second guess the opposition's starting XI and likely batting and bowling order – that's why it's important to change things around and not to be too predictable.

JACQUES KALLIS

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Injuries are an inevitable part of a long and intense tournament like the IPL and they should never come as a shock or a disappointment to the coaching staff because every contingency plan should have been made. Well, of course they are disappointing but it is pointless worrying about them and you simply move on.

It is so important to have a strong squad with plenty of depth but it is equally important to ensure that the reserves are getting the best and most intense practise possible. It is extremely hard for any player, no matter how talented or experienced, to come into the XI 'cold' after a couple of games on the bench.

Fortunately we are all still in very good health and fitness at KKR but we never take anything for granted and are always thinking and planning ahead because plans rarely stay the same for long in this competition – either ours or the oppositions.

This might be a World Cup year but you wouldn't know it from the players, not just amongst the Knight Riders but in any of the squads. Everyone involved in the IPL is so invested in winning it that it's almost impossible to think of anything else. Besides, the next game is always just a day or two away.

The concept of 'pacing' a team's campaign in the early stages is an interesting one and different coaches have different ideas. Some believe in rest and rotation more than others while some are advocates of adjusting the length and intensity of training between matches to keep players fresh. In most cases, certainly when they have worked together for a season or two, I believe the coach knows what's best for the team and for each individual.

Overtraining inevitably leaves players 'flat', and that can be either physical or mental. Train too little and players are inevitably under done which affects not only their performance but also their stamina. Strangely enough, our problem is getting players OUT of the nets and gym rather INTO them!

Personally I preferred being slightly under done (but only slightly) as it made me sharper when it came to match day. But each player knows where they prefer to be and how much fuel there is in the tank.

It's a really challenging stretch of matches coming up for us now with four consecutive 'travel-play-travel' fixtures on the bounce. One bad night's sleep at the start of a sequence like that and it can stay with you for a week. But you can look at it both ways. A tough challenge, sure, but if we can get onto a winning streak then it could also put us in a healthy and advantageous position in the league table.

JACQUES KALLIS

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The most remarkable aspect of Andre Russell's tournament so far has been the consistency of his batting. It is hard enough to score runs on a regular basis but to do so in the style he bats is incredible.

It is easy to think his approach to batting is 'high risk' and impulsive, but such a run of consistency would be impossible if he was just swinging at everything. He actually has a finely tuned method and understands his game and technique superbly. Bowlers just need to work out where to bowl to him now because he can't, actually, hit every ball for four or six – despite how it looks.

All in all it was an excellent road trip with some hard fought and valuable victories in the two weeks we were away from home. We played some smart, thinking cricket and made a lot of good decisions at vital times. Of course Russ was at the heart of the wins but he'll be the first person to tell you it's a team game.

We didn't do ourselves justice in the last game against Chennai but that can happen from time to time. It's hard to be at your best at the end throughout the tournament, particularly at the end of a run of away matches. Perhaps some of us were distracted by thoughts of going home!

Chennai have been an excellent team for several years now and that is reflected by the number of familiar faces they have. The senior pros know themselves and each other so well and they remain calm and level-headed in every situation. Actually, there are a lot of similarities between CSK and KKR.

The good news is that we have a couple of home games now and the reality is that other teams find it hard to perform at their best against us at the Gardens. As I have said many times, the support of the crowd is like having an extra fielder.

We also have a lengthy break after the next two games so the boys will be giving it their all with the prospect of 'half-term' holidays just around the corner. If we can go into the short break with another couple of wins we'll be well placed to push for a top two spot in the second half of the tournament.

We have a few injuries in the squad but they are mainly just 'niggles' which can be managed. Nobody wants to have a game off at this stage and we have an outstanding support team which will do everything to keep the main men on the field.