

VVS LAXMAN

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The last ten days have reiterated just how significant a place the Indian Premier League has carved for itself on the cricketing landscape. Spectacular action and stunning performances have brought the tournament to life right from the beginning, and I expect the next six weeks to be no less gripping.

From our point of view, I am delighted at how well Hyderabad have bounced back from defeat in our opening match, against Kolkata. Even in that game, we were in control till the end of the 17th over of the chase, but Andre Russell took it away from us with brilliant ball-striking. Even though I was in the opposition dugout, I couldn't help but marvel at how he snatched victory from the jaws of defeat.

The beauty of our franchise is that the shoulders never droop, the heads never drop. There is too much experience, quality and class among the playing group for that to happen. As members of the support staff, our endeavour is to keep the players in a good mental space. But eventually, it is the players who have to deliver on the park, and that's what they have done in the last two games.

David Warner has been outstanding. There is little sign that he has been out of international cricket for a year. His work ethics are exemplary, and I can see the hunger and desire in his eyes. He is striking the ball as beautifully as ever, and there is a calmness about him that is infectious. Jonny Bairstow is an excellent addition. He has the same culture of togetherness that we foster in our group, and has fit in seamlessly. The way he and Davey took Royal Challengers Bangalore apart in our second home fixture was a sight to behold.

Rashid Khan is an obvious superstar, and our Indian group is as formidable as always. One of our strengths is the depth in the squad, and that was showcased by Mohammad Nabi's stellar performance against Bangalore. His four for 11 broke the back of a stiff chase. Nabi exemplifies the character of the team – go about your business with a smile even if you are not in the eleven, and step up and get the job done when you get your opportunity.

We have been without our skipper, Kane Williamson, for two of the first three games, but he should be back in the mix soon. We enter an important phase now with three back-to-back games, and will look to build on the momentum of two successive wins.

VVS LAXMAN

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Confronted with tricky surfaces in our last two matches, Sunrisers Hyderabad came up trumps against Delhi Capitals, but couldn't conquer the conditions or Mumbai Indians in our own Uppal backyard on Saturday night.

Pitches that don't facilitate stroke-making often make for low-scoring, and sometimes exciting, contests. If you are bowling first, it is important to stay focussed all the way through, and especially at the death because even one or two expensive overs can make a huge difference. Kieron Pollard's innings was extremely critical on Saturday night, especially under the circumstances, and there is something to learn from that for us as a group.

When you approach a middling target on a slow pitch, it is essential that you build a couple of handy partnerships and focus on team effort. In any case, titles are not won on the back of individual brilliance from one or two players. Both against Delhi Capitals and then against MI, the middle-order had the chance to reiterate its credentials. While it is true that they didn't deliver the goods on Saturday, we have total faith and belief in their abilities. They have been there and done that, and I don't think it will be too long before they hit their straps.

Because Davey Warner and Jonny Bairstow batted so well and so deep in the first three matches, the middle-order didn't have enough game-time. But we ensure during practice that the batsmen prepare for all eventualities. So far as skills and preparation are concerned, there has been no compromise; I am confident the minor glitches in execution will be resolved soon.

We were also a little off the boil when it came to our catching in the last match. We are a team that prides itself on its fielding, and we want to be the best fielding side of the tournament. Saturday wasn't our best effort, but the beauty of the IPL is that the turnover time is very short. We are playing against Kings XI Punjab on Monday, and as the backroom staff, it is our responsibility to make sure the players are in a good mental space. While we will take learnings from our previous matches, and especially from the losses, we don't want players to carry any baggage or negativity. A fresh start is vital, because moping and fretting over what has happened is not going to help in any way.

VVS LAXMAN

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We have had five days to reflect on Sunrisers Hyderabad's defeat to Kings XI Punjab in Mohali, our second loss in a row in the IPL. It was disappointing to end up on the wrong side of the result in a close contest, and we were a little handicapped by having to bat first. Because of the heavy rain leading in to the match, the surface had a little bit of moisture early on and our batsmen struggled for timing. That even someone like Davey Warner wasn't at his most fluent tells a story in itself. We recovered strongly to post 100 in the last 10 overs and put up 150 on the board, but we always felt we were maybe 20 runs short.

KL Rahul and Mayank Agarwal imposed themselves during the chase and Kings XI seemed headed for an easy victory, but once again, our bowlers brought us back into contention. In an exciting climax, we went down with a ball to spare. The result wasn't ideal, but I was delighted with how well the boys fought it out till the end.

This five-day break has come at a most opportune time for us. We had three days off cricket, focusing on recuperating and team-bonding. We had a few team dinners, indulged in competitive group activities and had a great deal of fun. The last two days have been devoted to practice, and I can see that the team is raring to hit the ground running.

The break has allowed players to introspect and see where they can get better. It has also given injured players the chance to recover and put their hand up for selection. As we enter the middle phase of the tournament, it is nice to have a full complement to choose from. To me, this middle period is extremely critical. We have three home games in the next week, and if we can get on a roll and stack up wins, it will mean we won't be under pressure to scramble for points towards the business end of the league stage.

Also, by this time, we have played almost every other team in the competition, and we know what to expect from our various opponents. That applies to all franchises, of course. There is a mid-table scramble currently, and if we can make the most of playing three matches on the trot in Uppal, starting with Sunday's showdown against Delhi Capitals, that will be a huge boost to our campaign.

VVS LAXMAN

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No matter how skilled you might be as a team, it is extremely difficult to keep self-doubt away when you are sitting on a three-match losing streak. But I was impressed with the positive vibes and the calmness during Sunrisers Hyderabad's practice session the evening before our showdown against Chennai Super Kings. Coach Tom Moody and skipper Kane Williamson exhorted the group to focus on the process and not think too much about the outcome. The message was whole-heartedly taken on board, and the result was outstanding.

Even without MS Dhoni, CSK are a very strong side, and they held a one-sided 8-2 record against us before Wednesday night's battle. The way Shane Watson and Faf du Plessis started was ominous, but even at the strategic time-out, what struck me was the composure Kane and the team displayed. Kane was confident that if we strung a couple of tight overs together, the wickets would come.

That's exactly what happened, and the steady loss of wickets and the absence of MS meant CSK couldn't build on the promising start. Our bowlers were all brilliant with Rashid Khan at the forefront, and at the break, I felt CSK were 35-40 shy of where they would have liked to be.

Not for the first time this season, David Warner and Jonny Bairstow got us off to a cracker. Davey struck the ball crisply and scored rapidly, like we have come to expect of him, while Jonny was happy to sail in his wake. His maturity stood out after Davey's dismissal; Jonny was determined to negate the genuine threat of the admirable Imran Tahir and steer the side home, not leave the job unfinished. That's a great trait for any batsman to possess.

Imran was just terrific to watch. T20 cricket is supposed to be a young man's game, but clearly, no one has told Imran that! I see in him the same childlike enthusiasm that I noticed in our first face-off in the English County Championship in 2009, when I was playing for Lancashire and he for Hampshire. Imran is the perfect example of the coming together of passion, commitment, hard work and a pride in performance that manifests itself in his uninhibited celebrations on picking up a wicket. He keeps showing us every day that age is just a number. In my book, Imran is an inspiration for cricketers young and old, with an attitude definitely worth emulating.

VVS LAXMAN

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Tuesday night's defeat at the hands of Chennai Super Kings with one ball to spare was the second time this season that Sunrisers Hyderabad were on the wrong side of the result in a tight finish. We had lost to Kings XI Punjab, also with one ball to spare. One of the reasons for this is that we haven't been able to break threatening partnerships at the opportune time. If it was KL Rahul and Mayank Agarwal who thwarted us in Mohali, then it was the turn of Shane Watson and Suresh Raina to do likewise in Chennai.

Having defeated CSK at Uppal and then brushed aside Kolkata Knight Riders at the same venue, we came to Chennai confident of our chances. But for the second time in three matches against us, Watson took the game away with his blistering ball-striking. In a throwback to last year's final, he began shakily against Bhuvneshwar Kumar, but once he got through that testing early phase, he struck the ball crisply. Watson is one of those players who, when on song, can put even the good balls away for boundaries. That, however, is no consolation for us.

We had reason to be happy with our performance in the first half. David Warner made a hard-working half-century while it was refreshing and encouraging to see Manish Pandey back himself and produce a superb innings in the absence of Kane Williamson, who had sadly to rush back to New Zealand following the demise of his grandmother. 175 was a good score, though given the platform Davey and Manish had laid, we would have been happier with another 10-15 runs.

I think Manish striking form at the right moment augurs well, because this is the time we will start losing some of our internationals to World Cup camps. We planned well at the auction to ensure strong back-ups, but this is a glorious opportunity for our experienced Indian players to make their presence felt.

Jonny Bairstow is the first of the internationals to leave us. It was wonderful to see how quickly he bought into our team culture and ethos. Jonny had an excellent tournament. It was a pleasure to see him and Davey string together one century stand after another. Jonny was brilliant off the field too. He was a leader in many ways, not least with his commitment and hard work. The Sunrisers family wishes him well, and looks forward to reunite with him next year.

VVS LAXMAN

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After the disappointing loss against Rajasthan Royals, it would have been easy for the boys to get a little demoralised, but I was delighted with the character shown by Sunrisers Hyderabad in our last league fixture at home against Kings XI Punjab on Monday. In Jaipur, we seemed headed comfortably for a score in the region of 175 before collapsing dramatically to fall 15 short, and Rajasthan chased it down comfortably. We knew we had to be on top of our game in Uppal; it was heartening to see the team put up a clinical performance in all departments.

In an important game such as this, it was essential to begin strongly, and that's exactly what David Warner and Wriddhiman Saha did. I have been a big fan of Saha's work ethic. Whether he is in the XI or not, he works as hard, with a smile on his face, and serves as a huge inspiration for the younger players in the group. It was good to see him get some runs after spending a lot of time on the bench.

And what can I say about Davey? He has had a turbulent last year or so, made worse by an elbow injury, and we were a little apprehensive at the start of the season that he might be a bit rusty. But Davey was truly outstanding. When the schedule was out, we all knew that he would be available for 12 games. We were in the middle of a shoot in Hyderabad when Davey messaged head coach Tom Moody, promising us 500 runs for the season. It was no empty boast. It's one thing to set goals, but the determined manner in which Davey chased it down was wonderful to watch. He eventually signed off with 692 runs, one of the main reasons why we are in with a shot at the play-offs. Davey is fortunate that he has tremendous mental resolve and, in his wife Candice, a very strong support system.

Hyderabad is a second home to him, and the people of Hyderabad love him. It's no mean feat to score 500 runs in a season five times in a row. Credit to Davey for not just doing so, but scoring those runs at a breakneck pace. To fuse consistency with a high strike-rate speaks volumes of Davey's skills. It's no surprise that he is a true match-winner, and one of the most impactful players in IPL history.

VVS LAXMAN

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It was a case of so near, yet so far for Sunrisers Hyderabad against Mumbai Indians on Thursday night. We did several things right against a formidable home team at the Wankhede Stadium, but fell just short and now have to win our final match, against Royal Challengers Bangalore on Saturday, to stay in the play-off hunt.

We bowled exceptionally well to restrict the power-packed MI line-up to just over 160, backed up by wonderful fielding, and seemed on course after Wriddhiman Saha and Martin Guptill got us off to a rapid start. However, we lost our way against the MI spin pair of Rahul Chahar and Krunal Pandya. That we only managed 43 runs in eight overs of spin put us under tremendous pressure towards the back-end of the innings.

But we found our heroes in Manish Pandey and Mohammad Nabi. Manish has been in glorious touch since moving up to No. 3, and he continued to show maturity and responsibility without sacrificing natural flair. It's no mean achievement to take on Jasprit Bumrah and Lasith Malinga, two of the best death-overs specialists in the game, but neither he nor Nabi lost hope or their head. Nabi is fast emerging as a stellar all-round option for us, while Manish showed nerves of steel by slamming the final ball in regulation play for a six to ensure a tie.

When you lose a wicket off the first ball of the Super Over, however, it is a huge setback because you can only afford to lose two wickets. We left two deliveries unutilised and a target of nine was fairly simple for MI. We have had our moments in the tournament, but as a collective group, we have yet to bring our 'A' game to the park. We are a better side than our tally of points would suggest, and I am hopeful of a complete performance against RCB.

This edition of the IPL has been a blockbuster with very few one-sided games and several matches going to the last over. With the final weekend of the league phase looming, at least three teams are in the running for the last play-off spot, which is both an organisers' delight and explains the huge patronage for the tournament. The fans are the ones who make the event a success by coming out in large numbers, and they have been rewarded for their perseverance with several edge-of-the-seat thrillers.

VVS LAXMAN

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For the first time in my long association with the IPL, I found myself rooting for another franchise on Sunday night. For Sunrisers Hyderabad to qualify for the playoffs, we needed Mumbai Indians to defeat Kolkata Knight Riders in the last match of the league phase. As a group, we gathered in the team room of our hotel in Bangalore to watch the match on the big screen, riding an emotional rollercoaster.

In the end, it became an unscheduled team bonding session, with a fun segment thrown in during the innings break. We were delighted when Mumbai completed victory and facilitated our qualification as the fourth-placed team but, having enjoyed a slice of fortune in our progress to the next phase, it is now up to us to make our own luck.

At the start of every IPL campaign, we break the tournament down into two phases. The objective for the first phase is to advance to the playoffs. We have ticked that box. Now, the aim is to keep going as deep as possible in the competition, because for us, every match from here on end is a knockout game. While it is true that we have had a stuttering run, we can ill afford to focus on that. We must draw lessons from what has happened till now, but our eyes are trained firmly on the future, and on our Eliminator against Delhi Capitals on Wednesday.

DC are a young and exciting team who have shown what they are capable of, but I believe we have the resources to get the better of them. It's vital in knockout games especially to not look too far ahead and merely concentrate on the processes. It is also essential that you go out and play with freedom, not allow yourself to be bogged down by the prospect of elimination in the event of a loss. In our last couple of matches, we have let things slip after holding the upper hand, so that is something we are eager to correct.

At this stage of the competition, everyone knows the strengths and weaknesses of the opposition, so it is easy for the management group to formulate strategies and game plans. But that is only less than half the job done. Everything hinges around the execution of these plans, and I am confident that with the quality we have in our ranks, we won't be found wanting when it comes to execution. We have a fairly good record in Visakhapatnam, having won our last five matches there, and we'd love to extend that sequence.

VVS LAXMAN

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Sunrisers Hyderabad's defeat at the hands of Delhi Capitals, and subsequent elimination from IPL 2019, was symbolic of our entire campaign. We weren't necessarily at our best, but we kept scrapping and battling and, in the end, we fell just short. There are learnings from this campaign that we will take on board, and come better prepared to try and fulfil the expectations of our fans.

Having played in Visakhapatnam previously, we were banking on our familiarity with conditions to take us past Delhi. Despite losing Wriddhiman Saha early, we got off to a brilliant start, thanks to Martin Guptill, but for the third successive match, we lost our way against the spinners in the middle period. We have excellent players of spin, so it was more a case of approach than skills that let us down. We found momentum towards the end to post a competitive total, but like in previous games where a very tepid middle was sandwiched between a blazing start and a good finish, I felt we were about 10-15 runs short.

We knew that Delhi would come hard in the Power Play because the best time for batting was when the ball was new and hard. Shikhar Dhawan struggled a little for fluency but Prithvi Shaw was brilliant. I was impressed with the fearlessness with which he struck the ball despite being dropped, which is another of the ills that plagued our run throughout the season. We did, however, pull things back superbly and at the second time out, we fancied our chances because Delhi needed 42 in the last four overs.

The dangerous Rishabh Pant was still around, and he showcased his ability with a savage assault on Basil Thampi. As painful as it was to be at the receiving end, it was also exhilarating to see Rishabh take on the bowlers. He is clearly the future of Indian cricket, and it pleased me no end to witness the maturity he showed, though he will be disappointed that he wasn't around to finish off the job.

For all our shortcomings, I take great pride in the manner in which Hyderabad kept fighting, taking each of the last three matches to the last over, and one to the Super Over. There is work to be done between now and the start of the next campaign. I am confident we will address the key areas and come back stronger when Season 13 commences.