

The Hero of the India's first ever series victory



The Hero of the India's first ever series victory on Australian soil, Cheteshwar Pujara revels how he improved his overseas performance. He looks forward first ever world test championship .

- Interview by Sujit Bose (Courtesy: Divya Bhaskar)

Q:India's first ever series victory on Australian soil came after 70 years. You proved to be the architect of this famous series win. Any special preparation before this tour.

Cheteshwar: I got a chance to practice for two weeks at Rajkot before the Australian tour, which proved important for me. More over experience of county cricket helped a lot. Experience against Australian bowling line up in past tour (2014-15) also helped me to face the bowlers.

Q:Kangaroos are infamous for their sledging nature. Any preparation to overcome this kind of attack?

Cheteshwar: Actually sledging never affect me. I have played a lot against Australians. So I knew what they will speak out. I made my debut against Australia in 2010. I played against them in 2012-13 on their soil. so I had enough experience playing against them. I had clear idea about their overall planning and bowling strategies. Unless you focused on your game, you don't require any advance preparation against sledging. It's a part of game. It doesn't mean that Australians only depend on sledging . They always have a concrete plan. As every team has their own plans, its for their part of planning. England doesn't believe in sledging. Hardly their couple of players have this practice. Over all they focus on their skill. Australian's strategy is such .

Q:Before the Australian tour started, focus was on Virat, but you stole the show . How do you feel?

Cheteshwar: It's a great feeling. It was a great opening with Adelaide test. If that test been lost, then come back in series would have been very tough. After victory in the first test, we realized that Ausis can be defeated on their soil, also can come out from bad situation. At one juncture we lost our 5 wickets with only 86 runs on board. I just continued with tail-enders and India score reached on 250, very important factor of day 1. After a reasonable score, our bowlers did well. you see, for winning any test series good bowling is must. If our bowling is not competent enough to all out opponents twice, then it's difficult to win. So in this series victory there is a great contribution of our bowlers.

Q: Do you think that this Australian bowling side has lost its edge?

Cheteshwar: Not at all. Instead I feel that it's really difficult to score against this bunch of Aussie bowlers. In past Australians only have had good seamers . Now they have good spinners too. They have very good bowlers like Hazelwood, Starc, Cummins; in addition Mitchell Marsh and Lyon if required. I think their bowling is good. In the absence of Smith and Warner their batting is little weak. And In comparison our bowlers are better. Our seamers Bumrah, Shami, Bhuvaneshwar all are at their best. Our back up bowling is good too.

Q: Generally kangaroos hardly praise anyone, but when rival captain praised you, how did you feel?

Cheteshwar: It was a proud moment for me. Especially when opposition praise you not only in one test but through-out the series including their

critics; its indeed a matter of honour. According to them this type of batting (old school fashion) is still required. More over from all round the world cricketers like Shane Warne, Kevin Peterson praised us.

Q: You broke the jinx that you can't do better overseas tours. How did you do it?

Cheteshwar: My very first tour was of South Africa. In 2010-11 as a new comer I was not aware of their pitches and conditions. Even not aware of their bowling strategy. you even realize which new shots to be developed. When you revisit the place your experience helps you. You realize which shot to be played in particular condition. You understand the bowler strategy better. You even understand that how he wants to gain your wicket. Even you understand wicket behaviour better. More over the county cricket I played made me confident in those conditions. So I got success.

Q: You got a chance to play with Sachin Tendulkar in his last Test as well as in your debut test. Felt lucky?

Cheteshwar: It's a dream moment for any player to make debut in a team which has Sachin. My dream came true. More over the guidance you get from him (Sachin) is unique. He played with different generation of bowlers. Me being a new comer he shared his experience with me and also taught me how to prepare mentally for batting. At that time other stalwarts like Dravid, Sehwag, Gambhir and Laxman were also there. At the time of KKR, Saurav Ganguli shared his experience with me. Learning from these greats is complement for me.

Q: You have very special feeling for Rahul Dravid. How do you feel when people compare you with him?

Cheteshwar: He is always an inspiration for me. My personal experience with him is unique. He has always shared his views on technique and temperament with me. When I made my debut he was there, when he retired I got his coaching in India A team. When in Indian team, my performance, which I wouldn't call it bad but was average and I continuously got his guidance. He helped me a lot to overcome this situation. Well I don't believe in comparison but feel great when compared with such a great name.

Q: When your playing style is tagged with old school cricket, how do you feel?

Cheteshwar: Its a perception. If people feel that now a days Cricket can be played in certain way only. It not like that in Cricket. Everyone has his own technique. I may have different playing style. In past we have both Sehwag and Dravid. They had different styles of playing. Ultimately result counts. both of them were intends to make runs for India. How they score, its on them. When we talk about modern cricket specially T 20 and One day, in which few unorthodox shots are played like paddle sweep etc. which are not copy book style. This doesn't meant that you can't produce runs with normal cricketing shots. Kane Williamson who received the Orange cap in the IPL is best example of this. He played copy book shots in IPL. Obviously in T-20 you can't play only in V shape but he never used shots like reverse sweep, paddle sweep, playing lofted shots on mid-wicket, over cover, point and guiding in third man is a normal cricketing style. So for scoring run its not necessary only to play unorthodox shots. What counts is the style you have got and your strength as a cricketer.

Q: During the last test where you played a 193 run inning, at home your father had to go through a heart surgery procedure, how was your mental state?

Cheteshwar: Basically at that time my wife and Dr. Ajay Patil who was looking after my father, both of them assured me that his condition is not critical. Risk factor is not to that extent but medical procedure is must. The doctor who will do the procedure is the Asia best, so you need not to be worried. There won't be any problem. So I was relaxed a little bit. When he is hospitalized and I am not around him its natural that back of the my mind some tension. At the same time when you are on field in cricket you can't carry such thoughts in your mind. I was playing for India and last test of series was very important. Had Australia won that test they would have squared the series. We didn't want to muffle the chance of winning first ever test series victory on Australian soil. In past it had happened few times. Moreover if I wouldn't have been playing I was not in a position to help my father in medical way because I am not a doctor. My father also insisted me on playing. He told me to focus on game and not to worry. Rest was the history I scored 193. We snatched the series and created history.

Q- when you missed the double ton just by 7 runs, what reaction you received from your father.

Cheteshwar-He asked me not to go on numbers because what my team needed from me I had delivered. 193 proved as good as double century only.

Q-which bowler you find most difficult to face.

Cheteshwar- At present it's difficult to point out. In the starting of my career I toured South Africa, there I was not comfortable against Dale Steyn and Moni Morkel, they were on their peak. Being a new comer I lacked enough experience so it was difficult to face them. In my first tour of England Anderson gave me a tough time.

Q-Any special compliment from stalwarts?

Cheteshwar- Basically my 72 runs debut innings against Australia was much appreciated by Sachin, Laxman and all the teammates. Before my debut they just heard that a new lad is doing well in domestic cricket, has first Class triple century in his bag. This was just they heard, but when actually they watched my game all realized that this fellow can certainly handle the pressure too at highest level. Even at the time of RCB guidance from AB de Villiers helped me a lot. I got some fielding tips from Ricky Ponting. In the last tour of England I got a chance to meet Sangakara the prolific runmaker in county cricket. He has huge experience in International Cricket .If you see the condition in Sri Lanka is almost similar to India. So he gave me important tips for overseas tours.

Q-Your idol?

Cheteshwar-In my early days I always liked watching Dravid, Sachin and Saurav Ganguly playing. I have learned a lot from them too. So they can be called my idols.

Q-Last season Saurashtra had a golden chance to win Ranji title but opportunity was missed .Much was expected from you in the final.

Cheteshwar- See , in cricket you always try to give your best, but sometimes opposition does a better job. I think in final Vidarbha played well. At same time if we look back, in last season Saurashtra did a splendid job. The way Saurashtra made a come-back in quarters, I don't think any other team could have. The new talent injected in the team is excellent. I think the future of Saurashtra team is very bright. Jaydev Unadkat was leading for first time. With time he will mature. In final, we were chasing 200 runs. We needed only a good partnership ,which didn't formed. Apart Saurashtra is performing better in limited over games too.

Q-Any record you wish to break...

Cheteshwar-See if you keep on playing good, records are automatically broken. If my performance like last season continues, records will be created automatically. To be honest when you get a chance to represent country you have to give your best. I want to carry forward the always the best.

Q-Any of Your best inning..

Cheteshwar- practically if see, there are many in my career. It tough for me to single out. If we talk present ,I consider the 123 runs innings at Adelaide as my best. It gave a good opening in Australian tour. One more I would like to mention is 145 runs innings in Sri Lanka... In which I carried bat through. More over my one of the best inning was against Australian in Bengaluru. I scored 92. We had lost the previous test at Pune. We needed come back performance. Otherwise every innings has it's own flavour.

Q-Do you still call your father for his guidance like in your childhood.

Cheteshwar- Of course, it's regular practice. When I am in tour, I always discuss with him. Sometimes I ask him some point or sometimes he points out something while watching live on tv. I always remain in touch with him after the match.

