

SOURAV GANGULY, SANJIV GOENKA, HARSH NEOTIA AND UTSAV PAREKH PLAY BALL WITH t2

A day after the four big boys became co-owners of the Calcutta franchise of Indian Super League (a football tourney on the lines of IPL that kicks off in September), they met for a fun chat with t2 on the sidelines of a press conference at Jhaal Farezi.

What does Sourav Ganguly mean to you?

Harsh Neotia: Captain, friend... in that order.

Sourav Ganguly: Should I go out? (smiles)

Utsav Parekh: I always look towards him as the one of the finest all-rounders cricket has produced.

Sanjiv Goenka: A phenomenal mind. A great human being.

Sourav, give us one word for:

Harsh? Artistic.

Utsav? I had never met him before but I can vouch that he'll be the best of all four! I mean it!

Sanjiv? The boss!

You have played football till...

Sourav: School (St. Xavier's Collegiate School). I was the school captain. At that age you didn't play for goals. You played for your school. You enjoyed the game.

Sanjiv: I have played football, but I was a very bad player. In school (St. Xavier's Collegiate School) pretty much during the lunch break, the whole school played football, the whole school played hockey, the whole school played everything! So, you had about 1,000 guys running all over, kicking 20 balls. So, it was one of those things. If you wanted to kick here and the ball went there, it really didn't matter.

Harsh: I have never played football in a team. I have just kicked the ball around as Sanjiv said. I think it is now an opportunity to put on the jersey, some boots... maybe, it will help us get fit also!

Utsav: Not a 90-minute game. I played in school (Hindi High School) about 30-40 years back. I was very lazy, so half the time I was the goalkeeper!

Any football experiences on the Maidan?

Sourav: Mohun Bagan-East Bengal. 3pm. The wooden rampart. Every day I used to go. I have played on the Maidan many times, but I don't miss those days. What I got from cricket, I must be blessed.

Sanjiv: Never had the confidence. I was very bad!

Harsh: I haven't played football on the Maidan, but been to the Maidan many times.

Which football team or footballer are you watching right now?

Sourav: Little bit, not full-time. My all-times favourites are Maradona and Pele. But Number One is Maradona. Neymar is a current favourite. Too much of skill!

Sanjiv: On and off... the World Cup, but I am not an avid football fan. My knowledge extends till the known players because they are most popularly talked about... Ronaldo... that's not the point. It's not the love of football that has got me here. It's love



(L-R) Sourav Ganguly meets Sanjiv Goenka and Harsh Neotia on entering Jhaal Farezi on Monday. (Inset) Utsav Parekh
Pictures: Rashbehari Das

for Calcutta which has got me here. The motivation is a little different.

Harsh: We do some of those big events which are highly publicised, when a lot of my friends would sit down over a drink and watch it, we do. The World Cup and major marquee events, but not on a regular basis. Interestingly, I must say that my first experience of really international A-class football match was watching Pele live at Eden Gardens. That was way back in the '70s when he came to Calcutta. That was so hyped up, not that I understood very much of the game, but I thought it was a great moment to be in that space at that time with that legend. Of course, of late, we have seen Messi and Maradona. They were both in India. There is Ronaldo of course. There's not been a great favourite as such, but all of them have been people we have admired. And Beckham in many ways, not only because of his football, but he has taken football to a different space of being a celebrity, an icon beyond the game. That was interesting to read about.

Utsav: I watch passionately. I am watching La Liga and EPL now. From EPL, I watch Manchester United, Chelsea and Liverpool. And from La Liga, Atletico de Madrid, Barcelona and Real Madrid. Now, my favourite is only Atletico and my icon is Diego Costa. When I started watching football, I used to follow Germany, Italy, France and Brazil. Brazil is always the hot favourite. Today my idol is Cristiano Ronaldo. I love the way he plays. You give him the ball and he is always up to something.

Sanjiv, Harsh and Utsav are you aware of the game's technical details?

Harsh: It is a classic case of novices trying to manage a business that they have no bloody clue of!

Sanjiv: When we got into the power business, I got to know what a

HARSH: A SOURAV GANGULY FLAMBOYANT MOMENT FOR ME IS THAT LORD'S MOMENT.

UTSAV: HE MAY NOT WANT TO TALK ABOUT IT, BUT WE ALWAYS FEEL WHAT HE DID, HE GAVE IT BACK TO THEM!

SOURAV: WHAT I CAN DO NOW IS THAT IF WE WIN THE FIRST YEAR, WE'LL GET ALL THREE OF THEM TO DO THAT! (ALL LAUGH OUT LOUD)

SANJIV: NOT ONE OF YOUR READERS WOULD WANT TO SEE THAT PICTURE!

UTSAV: WE WILL FOLLOW HIM (SOURAV). I CAN TELL YOU THAT MUCH. HE IS GOING TO BE THE LEADER OF THE PACK. WE WILL BE LIKE LITTLE LAMBS FOLLOWING HIM. HE KNOWS IT. HE HAS DONE IT. HE IS AN ICON HIMSELF. THE ENTIRE NATION LOOKS UP TO HIM. I STILL CANNOT FORGET LORD'S. SO, VIVID IN MY MEMORY, AS IF IT HAPPENED YESTERDAY. IT WAS A PROUD MOMENT.



transformer meant. I didn't know it! There is an expectation that we will succeed, but really it is a passion which drives us. Passion for the city. Sometimes you say, 'Okay, maybe we will lose a couple of crore, but if we can contribute towards the cause of the city'....

Harsh: Clearly for us, including Sourav, the overriding passion... under the bid, we were entitled to bid for more than one city, we were very clear that if we get Calcutta we take it, if we don't get it, we don't get involved. We were not able to generate that passion for any other city. If it was purely business, I suppose, any place would have worked. Since it was the passion that could not get generated... since this is our home, and that emotion cannot come from any other place. **Utsav:** I follow football avidly, that's it.

What about your kids?

Sourav: It doesn't register with Sana yet. Once the game starts, she'll see the people, she'll see the stands... she is too young.

Sanjiv: I don't think he (Shashwat) is particularly excited or unexcited. You'll not get a reaction.

Harsh: My son (Parthiv) is very excited but he has no idea about football, but he is very excited because a lot of his friends are into it. **Utsav:** My son Saharsh is a football freak. He has almost started preparing the team! We watch matches together regularly. In fact, we also fight because he is a Manchester United fan and I am a Real Madrid supporter.

What about the huge expectations?

Sanjiv: Expectations are there. You have to deal with that.

Harsh: It is a good feeling that we got the bid. There were a lot of butterflies in our stomachs for a couple of weeks, but yes, I am clearly



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sensing for the first time since yesterday that a lot of work has to be done. We are going to learn it as we go along. But it is not a negative pressure. Most importantly, you are working amongst friends. As a group, we are going to have a lot of fun together. I said rarely have we collaborated as business people to enjoy losing money... first time we have got together and actually bid to lose money!

Saionee Chakraborty
What is your message for Sanjiv, Sourav, Harsh and Utsav? Tell t2@abp.in