

## How much fight can Warne's Royal Challengers pose

Dubbed as the weakest team among the eight franchises of the Indian Premier League, Jaipur's Royal Challengers have charismatic Shane Warne as captain and coach.

The legendary Australian leg-spinner has a knack of grabbing headlines both on and off the field, even after his days of playing international cricket. He will naturally tower over a team packed with has-beens and raw youngsters. Warne surely would play every trick up his sleeve to see that Royal Challengers' challenge does not sink without a fight.

Emerging Media Group, the owners of Royal Challengers, got its strategy wrong at the auction and failed to spend the mandatory ceiling money of \$3.3 million. They shelled out \$2.9 million for eight players and ended up giving more to some players who would have otherwise gone at a cheaper price.

It was only in the second auction that they woke up and did some smart buying. By that time not much was left to shop. Some of their purchases raised eyebrows and gave the impression that they lacked tactical acumen in finalising their squad.

'We did go with a plan in the auction and went after certain players. We knew there would be another auction. During the first auction, we picked players and also had a eye on the price at which we felt that they had value for us,' says Royal Challenger's CEO Fraser Castellino.

Apart from Warne, Jaipur's big overseas names are South Africa skipper Graeme Smith and his tally, lanky fast bowling colleague Morne Morkel. England's Dimitri Mascarenhas and Australian Shane Watson will certainly match overseas stars in other teams.

Both Mascarenhas and Watson big hitters of the cricket ball and effective medium pacers, key ingredients one needed to succeed in a Twenty20 cricket.

They have also roped in Pakistanis Younis Khan and Kamran Akmal, but they are not slam-bang cricketers and only time will tell about their utility to the team.

'We are happy with the players we have picked. Warne, who is our captain and coach, has an incredible record. Instead of having a separate coach, we thought of signing him both as captain and coach. Youngsters in the team can learn so much from Warne,' says Castellino.

### Strengths:

Their biggest strength is Warne, a shrewd operator on the field who has not learnt to concede an inch to the opposition. Mascarenhas, the only England player in IPL, can play such explosive knocks that can tear any opposition down. The squad is filled with some unknown names of domestic competition and Graeme Smith and Younis Khan will bring in much needed experience and guidance.

### Weaknesses:

The squad is already hampered with not many big names in it and it will face more trouble as most

of the foreign recruits will turn in late. Smith and Morkel will be available only after four games as they have been asked to finish their domestic competition back home. Pakistan's Khan, Shoail Tanvir and Akmal will join the team a mere three days before their first fixture, which will not give them enough time to gel with the rest of the squad.

Their best bet in bowling Munaf Patel is prone to mysterious injuries and is also very temperamental.

Players to watch out for

Overseas:

**Dmitri Mascarenhas:** The Hampshire player is a clean striker of the ball. Mascarenhas, who has a strike rate of 132 in ODIs, can change the complexion of the game in a matter of few deliveries. His six-hitting prowess is well-known and is a regular in England's Hong Kong sixes team. Indian fans will certainly not miss the player who tonked Yuvraj Singh for five sixes in a row in Oval last summer. Mascarenhas is also a good medium pacer and can trouble the batsmen with his swing. He is ideal for the T20 game.

**Morne Morkel:** A genuine fast bowler who is improving with every outing in international cricket. Morkel is a quick learner and can generate pace and bounce that is disconcerting to batsmen. The 23-year-old has been riding high on his success against famed Indian batting line-up in the Test series. Morkel has been much talked about even before his entry into the big league and is pipped as the future of the South African attack that once boasted of white lightning Allan Donald.

**Shane Watson:** The all-rounder from Tasmania is a package roled into one. A medium-pacer who can hit the ball with immaculate ease and can chance his arms against World's best runner, Watson is an asset to any side. Watson has not been able to seal his place in the competitive Australian side as injuries at crucial times in his career have laid him low. He will grab this opportunity with both hands.

Domestic

**Mohamad Kaif:** Riding high after a very successful domestic season, Kaif knows this could be the last chance to get his India cap back. He has already been recalled for the Test squad but is still to get a look-in in the eleven. Kaif's athleticism and energy in the field will be motivating for the young players.

**Yusuf Pathan:** The hard-hitting batsmen and off-spinner from Baroda is better known as the elder brother of Irfan. Yousuf though has carved out his own niche in last two domestic season. He was part of India's victorious T20 World Cup squad though he got only one chance to wield his willow and that too in the finals. Yousuf would surely want to prove that he was not a misfit in that World cup squad.

**Turuwar Kohli:** Kohli came into limelight after his brilliant knocks in the Under-19 World Cup in Malaysia this year. A consistent performer with the bat, Kohli raked up 218 runs with three consecutive half centuries and India to World Cup triumph.

Dubbed as the future India player, the Punjab player would be closely watched among international

stars.

## Squad

Shane Warne (Australia \$4,50,000), Mohammad Kaif (India, \$6, 75,000) , Kamran Akmal (Pakistan, \$1,50,000), Justin Langer (Australia, \$2,00,000), Dimitri Mascarenhas (England, \$100,000), Morne Morkel (\$60000), Munaf Patel (India, \$2,75,000), Yusuf Pathan (India, \$4,75,000), Graeme Smith (South Africa, \$2,50,000), Sohail Tanvir Pakistan \$1,00,000), Siddharth Trivedi, Shane Watson (Australia \$1,25,000), Younis Khan (Pakistan, 2,25,000), Aditya Angle, Swapnil Asnodkar, Ravindra Jadeja, Sumit Khatri, Taruwar Kohli, Parag More, Pankaj Singh, Niraj Patel, Mahesh Rawat, Anup Revandkar, Dinesh Salunke, Jaydev Shah.

*Avishek Roy ( © IANS / India eNews)*