

## I am dying to play for Knight Riders: Shoaib Akhtar

Sourav Ganguly and Shah Rukh Khan stood firmly by him as he struggled against his ban so that he could play for [Kolkata](#) Knight Riders in the Indian Premier League, says Rawalpindi Express Shoaib Akhtar.

Akhtar's arrival here Monday night has breathed new life into the Knight Riders and their supporters, beleaguered after a string of defeats.

The 32-year-old controversial fast bowler was finally allowed to play in the IPL after an appellate tribunal suspended for a month his five-year ban by the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB). He had been banned for violating the PCB code of conduct repeatedly.

IANS caught up with Akhtar at his hotel-gym early Tuesday morning.

Q: Are you playing Thursday's match against [Bangalore](#) Royal Challengers at Eden Gardens here?

A: Well, I am all set to take the field. Even when I was undergoing so much tension in those miserable situations I didn't skip gym and nets for a single day. Coach John Buchanan wants to test my fitness before he can take a decision whether I will play Thursday or not.

Q: What do you want?

A: Of course I am dying to take to the grounds. I will be practising with the entire team at Eden this afternoon (Tuesday). Honestly, I wish to start my IPL match here. Eden Gardens is lucky for me. After all it was at this ground that I got Sachin Tendulkar out on the very first ball (Asian Test Championship, February 1999).

Q: Have you watched any of the Knight Riders' matches so far?

A: I have not missed a single Twenty20 match. It's difficult to make you understand how I craved to become a part of my team. I even got myself a huge plasma television set to get a feel as if I am watching the matches from the pavilion.

Q: What do you have to say about the fourth consecutive defeat of the team?

A: All we need is one victory right now. Then the entire scenario at the IPL will change. And I am sure we will win.

Q: Don't you think that your presence is a big relief for the team?

A: I don't know about the team, but my presence is the biggest relief for me.

Q: Did you ever think that you would be allowed to play in the IPL?

A: I don't want to discuss my case here. I just want to start afresh. But one thing I would like to say - I have been able to overcome this traumatic situation and return to the field because of IPL chairman Lalit Modi, Knight Riders owner Shah Rukh Khan and captain Sourav Ganguly. The way

they stood by me, fought for me and empathised with me is unbelievable. I will never let them down in my life.

Q: Did Sourav Ganguly really support you?

A: I don't know what people think about us (Ganguly and me). But we are old friends. At times we have to be tough on the field when you are playing against each other. But off-field we are close friends. And our friendship has become stronger now. I will try to live up to his expectations in this league.

*Sreya Basu* ( © IANS / India eNews)