

Ganguly could not have timed it better

He was in his element at the media conference, answering varied questions on his career: His anguish at not being picked for the Irani Trophy; the ensuing four-Test series against Australia; the pressures of donning the India colours; the disappointment of being frequently dropped from the Test team and the need to respect senior cricketers and let them go out on their own terms.

There was no hint of what was to come. But when he delivered the sucker punch, he left the media searching for questions. There was frenzy as the Prince of [Kolkata](#) left the makeshift hall at the Chinnaswamy stadium, as TV reporters rang in their editors about Sourav Ganguly's stunning decision to quit Test cricket after the series against Australia.

His timing was perfect, as perfect as he would cream a juicy half volley through covers with elan. He smiled as he left, knowing pretty well that the pressure that he sustained for 12 years would no longer be there when he bids adieu at the end of it all.

'Just one last thing, before I leave, I just want to say that this is going to be my last series. I have decided to quit and I have told my team-mates before I have come here. This series is going to be my last. Thanks for all your support, hopefully we'll go on a winning note. Thanks.'

For someone as ferociously committed and determined as him, the left-hander would seek to leave the square on a high, possibly on the same note as he had announced his arrival in international cricket with classy 131 on Test debut at Lord's. What followed was another gem at Nottingham, an elegantly dignified 136.

His glorious 255-run third wicket partnership with Sachin Tendulkar and the emergence of Rahul Dravid, was to signify that India's middle order batting was in great hands. V. V. S. Laxman was to fortify the batting when he arrived a few months later. India's batting had never been so good before, more so with Mohammed Azharuddin around with his enchanting style.

Indian cricket's fortunes were to change for good when he took over the reins from Sachin Tendulkar in 2000. He hand picked talented youngsters and led from the front, willing to cop the blame in adversity. His character came to the fore when he mentally disintegrated Steve Waugh, deliberately arriving late for the toss to get under the Australian skipper's skin. It was to pay dividends as India came back from the brink to win the 2001 home Test series, arguably one of the most hotly contested series in modern cricket.

But he had this flipside as well. That he intimidated senior players, didn't go well with the selectors and former coach John Wright. He was to pay the price for the controversial 'mediagate' series in Zimbabwe.

His career took a bumpy ride especially after his run-in with former Indian coach Greg Chappell. Dropped from successive series, he made a telling comeback with gutsy performance. He was on a good wicket until the away series against Sri Lanka in May. He was as much under pressure as were Tendulkar, Dravid and Laxman.

'I have been dropped a few times before. But I least expected to be dropped from the Irani Trophy squad, especially ahead of an expectedly combative series against Australia. It was apparent that

they (selectors) did not want me. But they surprised me when they picked me for this series,' said Ganguly.

Obviously disenchanted with the frequent axing, Ganguly has chosen to leave the game on his terms. His fans would want him to sign out in style. Everyone hope he does.

James Keith (© IANS / India eNews)