

# Meet the Team India's New Management

His captaincy limited to a solitary Test in the 80s, the man who could have been India's finest skipper has since gone on to even greater things. Ravi Shastri—star all-rounder, omnipresent broadcaster, BCCI stooge or interpersonal expert—has shored India in perilous times.



He last managed the team briefly in 2007 in Bangladesh, filling in for Greg Chappell who had quit in the aftermath of the World Cup disaster. It was the beginning of a golden era in Indian cricket, marked by the World Twenty20 and World Cup win, and the No. 1 Test ranking in Tests. The Mumbai man, who dated a string of Bollywood beauties during his playing heyday, is also cricket's most visible face in the press box.

In his post-playing career as commentator, Shastri's has been the booming, often grating, voice that described Indian cricket's epochal moments: Sreesanth catching Misbah in Johannesburg, or Dhoni's six at the Wankhede.

That same role has also brought him incessant flak and the unshakeable tag of a BCCI crony. That he has survived the heavily-politicised atmosphere of Indian cricket administration and continues to serve whichever regime that runs it, speaks volumes for his astute adaptation. It is no surprise then that Shastri is the go-to man for all the panels and committees that the Board is in habit of constituting. His extensive media commitments, however, have prevented him from taking meatier roles with the Indian team. This latest appointment as the team director—superseding Duncan Fletcher and his staff—is likely a temporary measure, and Shastri's impact on the team's sinking fortunes remains to be seen.

## **Sanjay Bangar, Assistant Coach:**

Even as his playing days were drawing to a close, people in the know (read a handful of domestic coaches) were waiting on Sanjay Bangar to begin his second innings. Local Mumbai circles had already tipped the First Class veteran—with over 8349 runs and 300 wickets across 20 years—for great things on the coaching front. Known as an astute leader who guided Railways to two Ranji Trophy and Irani titles apiece, and played 12 Tests and 15 ODIs for India, Bangar was a respectable cricketer. But his guts were apparent on the opening day of the 2002 Headingley Test when he and Rahul Dravid defied treacherous conditions to set up a famous Indian win.

In 2012, Bangar retired after two decades of service to Railways and after a coaching stint with India 'A', joined the Kings XI Punjab staff. Then began a remarkable turnaround that saw league-laggers Punjab reach the 2014 IPL final. Kings XI captain George Bailey had this to say of his coach: "His

knowledge of the game is wonderful and has the ability to draw younger players out of their shells to play. It has been a pleasure to work with him, absolutely.” Bangar’s rise to the Indian squad, thus, is not surprising. But his ultimate challenge remains making an impact in an era of Indian cricket dominated—and even beset—by foreign coaches.

## **Bharat Arun, Assistant Coach:**

Former Tamil Nadu all-rounder Bharat Arun’s insignificant Indian stint petered out in the months leading to the 1987 World Cup. It is as a coach some thirty years later that he is gaining currency. Known as a stern taskmaster at the junior coaching levels, Arun’s association with Shastri goes back to an U-19 England tour in 1981 on which Shastri was captain. Firmly based inside N Srinivasan’s Chennai camp—he is director of coaching at the TNCA, a post for which he gave up an NCA appointment—Arun was India A’s coach when they won the 2012 U-19 World Cup.

## **Ramakrishnan Sridhar, Fielding Coach:**

The former Hyderabad left-arm spinner has been a coach since 2001, and has also been assisting Sanjay Bangar at Kings XI Punjab. He was recently appointed Andhra’s Ranji Trophy coach. A modest domestic record (35 games for 91 wickets) notwithstanding, Sridhar has been a constant presence at the National Cricket Academy and was Arun’s assistant coach at the 2014 U-19 world Cup.