

In IPL draft, Rajkot prove to be smart shoppers

Written by [Devendra Pandey](#) | Mumbai | Updated: December 17, 2015 8:29 am



Both Suresh Raina and Ravindra Jadeja will represent the Rajkot franchise in IPL 2016. (Source: BCCI file)

That the biggest question going into the first-ever IPL draft concerned the most recognizable face of the celebrated league was no surprise. Obviously everyone wanted to see which city would have MS [Dhoni](#) as their 'hometown' hero for the next two years after Chennai had made him one of their own for eight long seasons. As it turned out, it was the new Pune franchise, owned by the RPG group, who snared the 'big fish' on Tuesday morning.

But as the draft ended, while Pune had the bragging rights over the celebrity pick and four other high-profile names, it was the [Intex](#) Group-owned Rajkot franchise that seemed the happier of the two. They had after all found and formed the core around which the rest of their team will be built around.

You might wonder how that could be the case considering each team was allowed to pick only five players during the draft. But after a smart draft strategy, Rajkot had acquired two batting heavyweights in Suresh Raina and Brendon McCullum, two world-class T20 all-rounders in James Faulkner and Dwayne Bravo and a match-winning spinning all-rounder cum local boy in Ravindra Jadeja. For the record, the Pune outfit ended with four big-name batsmen in Dhoni—who will also keep wickets and captain too—Ajinkya Rahane, Steve Smith and Faf du Plessis and R Ashwin, arguably the best spinner in the world—a strong foundation but one lacking a well-rounded look at this nascent stage anyway.

There is no denying that du Plessis, Smith and Rahane bring an abundance of batting might to the table. And no other captain in cricket history has quite lifted as many trophies across all formats as Dhoni. Not to forget the mysticism that Ashwin has started to bring with ball in hand over the last 12 months. But they still stand out as individual behemoths who leave a lot of cracks elsewhere to be covered up during the auction.

That's not quite the case with Rajkot though. In Raina and Bravo, they have the IPL's highest run-getter and CSK's most successful wicket-taker. The Trinidadian also made a name for himself in Chennai's yellow turning matches around with bat in hand, closing out run-chases with late flourishes. In a competition that venerates its all-round talent, Faulkner has emerged as one of the most dangerous finishers in the world over the last two years. He's also renowned for his death bowling exploits buoyed with pin-point yorkers and back of the hand slower ones. The Saurashtra Cricket Association (SCA) Stadium has proved to be a batsman's delight over the years and the home team will thrive on the variety that Bravo and Faulkner bring to the table with the ball. Jadeja, meanwhile, has often come into his own as a late-overs basher in IPL cricket and is forever a threat on Indian pitches, especially Rajkot, which has been his den for years.

And later in the day, Rajkot franchise owner Keshav Bansal explained how their strategy never included Dhoni as they were quite sure that Pune wouldn't turn down the opportunity to go for the Indian ODI and T20 captain. Pune were set to get the first pick according to the IPL draft rules as they were the team which had come in with the lowest bid during the tender process.

"We had a strategy and we knew Dhoni will not be available. So Raina was a strong option. On the Rajkot pitch we need aggressive batsmen as well as strong bowlers. We needed to have a balanced team," Bansal said post IPL draft.

Out of 10 players picked in the draft on Tuesday, seven belonged to the suspended Chennai Super Kings (CSK) franchise and three from Rajasthan Royals (RR).

Bansal did admit that his side will have the newbie disadvantage, without the experience of the first eight seasons but will also look at the mistakes made by teams over the years to learn from them. And while Pune will in all likelihood have Dhoni at the helm, it remains to be seen whether Rajkot give the reins to New Zealand's firebrand skipper McCullum or stick closer to home with Raina.

"We are a new franchise while others have the advantage of playing in the first eight seasons. But we will learn from their mistakes. My personal Twitter is flooded with tweets. We will be announcing the captain soon," he added.