

# AT THE TIME OF T20, HE MADE GEN-Z FALL IN LOVE WITH RED & WHITES

India wanted him in England but the mind more than the body had taken enough battering to last a lifetime and he didn't want to go through that rigour for another long series, so the Test devotee decided to wave the white flag

**PTI, NEW DELHI:** Virat Kohli entered Indian drawing rooms as a quintessential "West Delhi boy", grew on his fans like a never-ending love story with his boundless passion and finally called time on his career in whites when his legion of admirers yearned for 'One Last Dance'.

In his mind, he knew that although "it is not easy", it did "feel right". The question to be asked is when exactly did Kohli get this feeling? Perhaps it was after a torrid tour of Australia where he scored only 91 runs after his second innings century in Perth. Swing and bounce together made life difficult and even for the eternal optimists, a second coming looked distant.

Yet, Indian cricket needed him in England but it seems, the mind, more than the body, had taken enough battering to last a lifetime and he didn't want to go through that rigour for another five Test series. Virat Kohli, the Test devotee, had decided to wave the white flag.

## From Cheeku to Virat to King Kohli

From being the chubby 'Cheeku' for his seniors, Virat for his contemporaries and now 'Bhaiyya' to the juniors, 'King Kohli' did traverse a fair distance and experienced joys of highs and the despair of lows in equal measure.

There was an 18-year-old Kohli, who in 2006, put his father Prem Kohli's last rites on hold, scored 90 to save Delhi from follow on and

## TOP FIVE INDIAN TEST PLAYERS

**SACHIN TENDULKAR**  
Matches: 200 Runs: 15,921  
Average: 53.78 Centuries: 51 High Score: 248

**RAHUL DRAVID**  
Matches: 164 Runs: 13,288  
Average: 52.31 Centuries: 36 High Score: 270

**SUNIL GAVASKAR**  
Matches: 125 Runs: 10,122  
Average: 51.12 Centuries: 34 High Score: 236

**VIRAT KOHLI**  
Matches: 123 Runs: 9,230 Average: 46.85 Centuries: 30 High Score: 254

**VVS LAXMAN**  
Matches: 134 Runs: 8,781 Average: 45.97 Centuries: 17 High Score: 281



fans, who had come to the Ranji Trophy ground, to watch their hero bat, one last time in whites

against a shiny red SG ball. In the interim 18 years, he scored those 30 Test hundreds and his following grew exponentially with his fans looking up to him as if he was the 'Pied Piper of Hamelin'.

## Honest to his Craft

Kohli played cricket for all the right reasons and while the establishment will be replete with "back-stories" about whether there was a nudge or push, no one should have any doubts that Kohli has timed his Test adieu perfectly.

He will still be seen in ODIs, a format where he has been peerless for a decade and a half but Kohli, the Test cricketer till COVID-19 hit our lives, was a different beast.

But in times when attention span of an average Indian fan is as brief as an Instagram reel, Kohli made the millennials and Generation Z fall in love with Test cricket, managing to draw their attention away from the glitzy Indian Premier League.

One could call it Kohli fandom

and India's propensity to be a cricket star-loving country but if that brought footfall in the stands, would

anyone mind? His Test form was on the wane for some years now and that final average of 46.85 doesn't really scream greatness. Kohli would know that more than anyone else.

He needed another 770 runs to complete 10,000 Test runs, which is still a holy grail for batters in the longest format.

His contemporaries, Joe Root of England is few runs short of completing 13,000 runs in Tests while Steve Smith has also crossed the 10,000 mark. Kane Williamson needs 724 runs and he will certainly complete the milestone as he is still in love with New Zealand whites.

## Last of the Purists

Kohli loved Test cricket and Test cricket loved him back. It was a symbiotic relationship. He grew up in an era in which was the star and playing Test cricket with distinction was the ultimate badge of honour. He had his issues -- the questions outside the off-stump remained, he could never sweep spinners like Tendulkar or Rohit Sharma but Kohli was one player acutely aware of his strengths and knew how to maximise them. And he did that with aplomb.

Since cricket is a reflection of society and T20 is the mirror, Kohli will perhaps remain the last megastar of the game's purest form. It is not likely to change anytime soon.

## CRICKET FRATERNITY HAILS KOHLI

One of India's Test greats calls time in the longest format. Whites off, crown intact. Virat Kohli bids goodbye to Test cricket, leaving behind an unmatched legacy. Thank you for championing the purest format during the rise of T20 cricket and setting an extraordinary example in discipline, fitness, and commitment

— Jay Shah, International Cricket Council chief

Virat Kohli's contributions to Team India will forever be cherished! His name will be remembered alongside the finest ever to have graced Test cricket. His leadership marked a shift in how India competed overseas with aggression, belief, and a refusal to settle for second best. He inspired a generation to take pride in the whites, and his impact on Indian cricket will be felt for decades to come

— Roger Binny, Board of Control for Cricket in India president

## Incredible innings

— Novak Djokovic, tennis great

From making my Test debut under your captaincy to reaching new heights together for our country, your passion and energy will be missed but the legacy you leave behind remains unmatched

— Jasprit Bumrah, star Indian pacer

The intensity, the passion, the fight - you gave it your all, every single time! All the best for what's ahead

— Rishabh Pant, swashbuckling wicketkeeper-batter

From the time I saw you, I knew that you are special. The intensity that you brought and the sheer passion with which you played Test cricket was a joy to watch. You were a great ambassador of Test cricket and wish you the best of times in One Day Cricket

— Virender Sehwag

Kohli was more than just skills. There was something about him in whites. It wasn't just skill. It was intent. He didn't want to survive. He wanted to dominate. To conquer. And in the process, he gave us 14 years of unforgettable memories. Best of luck for your journey ahead

— Jhulan Goswami, one of the most successful pacers in women's cricket

## BEGINNING OF GAMBHIR ERA: COACH BECOMES MOST POWERFUL FIGURE IN DRESSING ROOM

**PTI, NEW DELHI:** Greg Chappell's fall was spectacular when he tried to impose his authority while Anil Kumble could not deal with alpha male stardom but it seems Gautam Gambhir is on course to become that rare India head coach who will wield more power than the skipper.

Indian cricket is replete with examples where powerful managers had to back out in-front of player-power. Bishan Singh Bedi, Chappell and Kumble despite being champion players themselves didn't realise that they have to play the second fiddle. John Wright, Gary Kirsten and Ravi Shastri knew that and were immensely successful.

With the retirements of Virat Kohli, Rohit Sharma and Ravichandran Ashwin, there aren't many megastars left in the Test team and it gives Gambhir time and space to manoeuvre and move his strategic pieces on the cricketing chess board.

If sources in the BCCI are to be believed, Gambhir had a objectives in his bucket-list and the biggest was abolition of star culture in the team. "The Gautam Gambhir era begins now. He was categorical that during the next WTC cycle, India need to have fresh faces," a BCCI source told PTI on the condition of anonymity.

"Everyone, associated with decision making knew where Gambhir stood in terms of carrying seniors in the longest format. Obviously his and chairman of selectors Ajit Agarkar's thoughts aligned," he added.

In Indian cricket, the captain has always been that central figure who would prevail over coaches even they were equally-powerful personalities. Sourav Ganguly, Mahendra Singh Dhoni, Kohli and Rohit Sharma all had the last say in the national teams that they led.

But not anymore with Gambhir, who is now undoubtedly the most powerful figure with the last word resting with him. Rahul Dravid-Rohit Sharma combination had a brief but eventful journey unlike Rohit Sharma-Gambhir, which never seemed like a happy marriage.

With Kohli though, Gambhir had signed truce with powerful people acting as mediators. This is the first time that a coach has got his way in terms of quick phasing out of mega stars. But then power is a double edged sword. It is understood that in the transition phase of Indian cricket, Gambhir wanted the BCCI to empower him suitably so that debacle like Border-Gavaskar Trophy and New Zealand series at home isn't repeated anymore.



## Bound by a thread: Tendulkar recalls Kohli's special gesture on retirement day

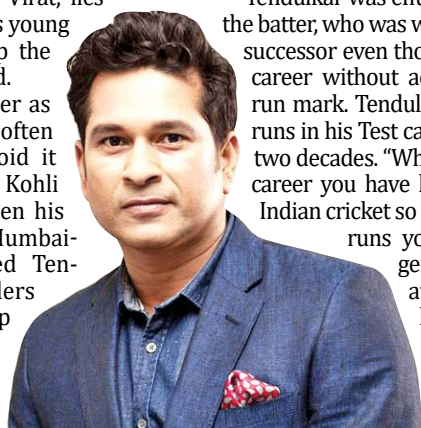
**PTI, NEW DELHI:** He was the heir apparent when Sachin Tendulkar was in the twilight of his career and on Monday when Virat Kohli bid adieu to his storied Test run, the 'Master Blaster' recalled a thread that became a binding force between them.

It was 12 years ago when Tendulkar was playing his last Test in Mumbai when Kohli, then 24, already a world champion and in a nascent stage of his Test career, came up to his idol with a "thoughtful gesture".

"You offered to gift me a thread from your late father. It was something too personal for me to accept, but the gesture was heartwarming and has stayed with me ever since," Tendulkar remembered in a post on X while paying his tribute to the modern day great, who called

it quits after 123 Tests and 9230 runs. "While I may not have a thread to offer in return, please know that you carry my deepest admiration and very best wishes. Your true legacy, Virat, lies in inspiring countless young cricketers to pick up the sport," Tendulkar said.

Kohli lost his father as a teenager and has often talked about the void it created in his life. Kohli has also never hidden his reverence for the Mumbai-born. He had carried Tendulkar on his shoulders during a victory lap after India won the 2011 World Cup. This was after fa-



## The most Australian non-Australian cricketer ever: Greg

It closes the chapter on the most transformative figure in Indian cricket since Sachin Tendulkar; perhaps Virat Kohli even eclipses him in terms of cultural influence and psychological impact on India's cricketing identity. Kohli, the incandescent heart of Indian cricket for over a decade, did not just score runs, he redefined expectations, challenged conventions, and symbolised the self-assured, unapologetic India of the 21st century. Kohli is the most Australian non-Australian cricketer we've ever seen. He was a snarling warrior in whites, never giving an inch, always demanding more. Not just of his bowlers, his fielders or his opposition, but first and foremost, of himself

— Greg Chappell, Australian batting great

identity," Chappell wrote.

"Kohli, the incandescent heart of Indian cricket for over a decade, did not just score runs. He redefined expectations, challenged conventions, and symbolised the self-assured, unapologetic India of the 21st century," he added.

The 36-year-old Kohli announced his retirement on Monday, declaring that he is walking away with a heart full of gratitude even though it was not an easy decision to make.

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tralian non-Australian cricketer we've ever seen," Chappell wrote.

"He was a snarling warrior in whites, never giving an inch, always demanding more. Not just of his bowlers, his fielders or his opposition, but first and foremost, of himself," he said.

Chappell said Kohli's exit from Tests marks a "seismic shift in energy".

"There was a time when Indian cricket, particularly overseas, bore an air of respectful submission - playing with technical skill, yes, but often with psychological inferiority.

"That changed in stages. Sourav Ganguly gave Indian cricket a new spine. MS Dhoni brought ice-cold leadership and white-ball dominance. But Kohli? Kohli lit the fire. He tore

the script and authored a new one, where India was not just competitive abroad but expected to win," he explained.

Crediting Kohli for single-handedly revamping India's Test approach as captain, Chappell described the aggressive right-hander as an exceptionally perceptive man.

"Where others reacted, Kohli anticipated. He saw innings before they unfolded. He lived the pressure before it arrived."

"Yes, Tendulkar was a genius. Yes, Dhoni was a master tactician and an ice-cold finisher. But in the grand reckoning of Indian cricket history, Kohli has been its most influential figure," he said.

"Why? Because he changed not just results but mindsets."

## IPL to resume from May 17, final on June 3: BCCI

**PTI, NEW DELHI:** The BCCI on Monday decided to resume the IPL season across six venues from May 17 with the final slated for June 3 as per the revised schedule.

The IPL was halted on May 8 after the match between Punjab Kings and Delhi Capitals was called off after Pakistan tried to invade Indian air space near Chandigarh, forcing a blackout in the stadium.

However the board officials decided for a quick resumption of the league, following India and Pakistan agreeing a ceasefire in their

border conflict.

"BCCI is pleased to announce the resumption of the TATA IPL 2025. After extensive consultations with government and security agencies, and with all the key stakeholders, the Board has decided to proceed with the remainder of the season," the Board said in a statement.

The first match upon the resumption of the league will be between Royal Challengers Bengaluru and Kolkata Knight Riders in Bengaluru on May 17.

The six venues for league matches as per the revised schedule will be:

Bengaluru, Jaipur, Delhi, Lucknow, Ahmedabad and Mumbai.

The venues for the playoff matches will be announced at a later date.

However, the dates of the playoff matches have been announced and as per the schedule, Qualifier 1 will be held on May 29 followed by the Eliminator on May 30.

The Qualifier 2 will be played on June 1, to be followed by the title match two days later.

A total of 17 matches will be played across six venues and the revised schedule includes two double-head-

ers, which will be played on two Sundays.

## Foreign players availability

Several foreign players contracted with the IPL franchises left for their respective home countries and some were in transit, after the league was suspended.

Now, the teams will have to reassemble them, at least as many as possible, before May 17. However, some players might stay back, particularly those with some niggles.

The comeback plans of Australia's pacer Josh Ha-

zlewood, who plays for RCB, might get affected by a shoulder niggle that forced him to sit out of the home game against Chennai Super Kings.

However, it remains to be seen how many Aussie and South African Test regulars return to the league considering the probability of them featuring in the World Test Championship final at Lord's, starting from June 11.

Pat Cummins (SRH), Kagiso Rabada (GT) etc are some of the names who are frontline Test players of Australia and South Africa respectively.

## Clash with India A tour to England

The revised IPL dates also clash with the scheduled India A tour to England where they will face the Lions in two four-day matches from May 30 and June 6.

Some of the first-choice Test players and contenders are expected to get picked in the India A squad ahead of the senior team's tour to England, beginning on June 20.

It remains to be seen how the BCCI will address this disparity as the India A squad will be announced in a day or two.

## Agarkar & Co show spine, foresight in handling Ro-Ko Test retirements

**PTI, NEW DELHI:** Selecting the forever under scrutiny Indian cricket team can be a "thankless job" and in the recent past, panels have also been labelled "spineless" for not taking tough calls.

However, in a matter of one week, the Ajit Agarkar-led selection has changed that perception by playing a major role in the Test retirements of stalwarts Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli. Needless to say, head coach Gautam Gambhir was kept in the loop.

Considering the start of a two-year World Test Championship cycle with the England series beginning June 20, the selectors had con-

veyed to Rohit of their decision to move on before accepting Kohli's wish to call time on his five-day career, providing another clear indication of their long-term vision for the team.

In a country where it becomes awkward to handle the retirements of legends like Kohli and Rohit, the selectors has shown the required foresight. Dilip Vengsarkar, someone who understands the pressure of a selector's job rather well having been a chief selector himself, said the Agarkar and Co deserve credit for professionally handling the Test retirements of the two Indian greats.