

Mihir's SWOT + KP + P

1. CHENNAI SUPER KINGS

INTRODUCTION

Chennai Super Kings had a relatively quiet and predictable auction in which they looked to fill their 'perceived' gaps in the all-rounder department and add a batsman or two. I say 'perceived' because personally, I don't feel they needed any more all-rounders than the ones they had, certainly not at the eventual price tag. Ravindra Jadeja and Sam Curran along with any one between Mitchell Santner and Dwayne Bravo is equally sufficient and capable, if not more, than with K Growtham and Moeen Ali. The overall balance looks mediocre and 'rustiness' could go a long way in determining the fate of the team.

STRENGTHS

1. If anything, CSK have a flexible roster, which also has some depth to it, which should be an advantage usually, but not so much this season where teams play at just 4 venues.
2. One good that has come with the over-stocking of all-rounders is that playing many of them could help in circumventing the lack of apparent firepower in the batting department.

WEAKNESSES

1. There is a huge weakness in their batting lineup in that it lacks a certain firepower one would like to see in a potentially championship winning team. Having plenty of all-rounders is one thing, but remember, bulk of the scoring, including power-hitting, has to be done by the specialist batsmen. If Mumbai Indians had Hardik Pandya, Krunal Pandya and Kieron Pollard, bulk of their scoring was done by Rohit Sharma, Suryakumar Yadav, Ishan Kisan and Quinton de Kock. All-rounders are more of an insurance.
2. At the risk of repeating myself and sounding cliched, an 'old' team with tired legs and lack of match time is always a weakness.
3. I always see it as a weakness in a team which doesn't have room or scope for at least 3-4 youngsters in their playing XI on a regular basis.

OPPORTUNITIES

1. With more weaknesses come more opportunities. A huge opportunity to prove the doubters (including me) that the 'daddy army' has only aged like fine wine and that a synergy between something as different as chalk and cheese is possible. Of course, by chalk and cheese, I am referring to CSK's policy of backing experience unlike most other teams backing young blood and experience equally, if not one more than the other.
2. I see it difficult, not impossible though, for M S Dhoni to fit into CSK's retention "scheme of things" for the mega auction in 2022. Yes, he might continue in yellow and CSK might retain him after all. This gives an opportunity for one last hurrah from MS - a man we have all grown to trust and respect.
3. There is an opportunity for the youngsters in the team to shine on the big stage and stake a claim for a future place in CSK. Because let's face it, even if a playing XI is more or less bound to be composed of tried and tested players, there is always room for change if one can prove skills and form away from the matches.

THREATS

1. If CSK treat this as a transactional season by just waiting for the mega auction in 2022 and not putting much focus on this season, both on and off the field, their campaign will be derailed before it even starts.
2. Another threat is of playing too many all-rounders, weakening specialist bowling capabilities.

PLAYER FROM UNSOLD

ALEX HALES / AARON FINCH

Either of these 2 players would have provided a much needed impetus at the top of the order. Pardon me but it is not like Far du Plessis is the player he was, a few years ago - he might still score the occasional half century but will not provide a T20-esque starts more often than not.

PLAYER FROM ANOTHER TEAM

JASON ROY

What CSK lack in firepower in the batting department would have been more than made up by the presence of Jason Roy in the yellow camp. While unsold throughout the auction, he was snapped up as a late replacement for Mitchell

Marsh by SRH. While Jason Roy is clearly a backup for David Warner and/or Johnny Bairstow at the top of the order at SRH, he would have slotted in directly at CSK according to me.

KEY PLAYER

SAM CURRAN

No prizes for me or you for guessing/estimating that this player is going to be the key player for CSK this season. Given his recent form against India in India, Sam Curran doesn't only provide 4 overs of left-arm seam bowling to MS, he gives MS an option to float him around the batting order depending on the match situation. If MS is looking to be adventurous (like I am, as you would see in my preferred playing XI for CSK), Sam Curran can easily open the innings for CSK and prove to be for CSK what Sunil Narine is (or at least was) to KKR.

PREDICTION

The horizon doesn't look too bright for CSK but it didn't either in 2018, yet we know what happened back then. That being said, a 5th or 6th position finish is definitely on the cards and that's where I think CSK will finish this year.

3. DELHI CAPITALS

INTRODUCTION

It has been characteristic of the Delhi franchisee over many auction s - they try their hand at almost more players than any other franchisee. Even before that, they end up releasing a lot of players and therefore having to buy a lot of players in the auction to fill the roster. In fairness, this year, all they released and subsequently purchased were backups to their otherwise continued core. A small glance at their activity during the auction and one quickly realises that all they were looking out for were backups and unsurprisingly, they did not purchase any player for an exuberantly high price.

STRENGTHS

1. A well-balanced core, with well-defined roles for everyone and well-defined everyone for the roles, if you catch my drift. One of the few teams with "experienced youngsters".
2. DC has a solid bench strength, especially when it comes to quality Indian players, which should allow them rotation without many, or indeed any, collateral chopping and changing.
3. Considering DC play 5 matches at Kolkata, 4 at Ahmedabad, 3 at Mumbai and 2 at Chennai, I would say they have a varied enough bowling lineup and skilled enough batting lineup to handle these variations in conditions.

WEAKNESSES

1. If anything, DC lack a quality 3rd spinner. On turning or tired pitches - maybe not so much as other years since we did not have a full-fledged domestic and international season at home - they may be found wanting.
2. Their fast bowling duties are, baring a decision by Pant to not play Nortje and Rabada, shared by foreigners. An injury or lack in form for any of them would mean getting in an Indian seamer, which would also mean an Indian batsman sits out. This could hamper the balance of an otherwise solid playing XI.

OPPORTUNITIES

The opportunities and threats revolve around just 1 incident - the injury and absence of their regular captain, Shreyas Iyer.

1. Opportunity for Rishabh Pant - I will go out on a limb here and say that the biggest opportunity and the talking point of this season is going to Rishabh

Pant's captaincy. Let's face it, Virat Kohli is 32 and has got about 4 years of captaincy remaining, give or take. India would be on the lookout for a new captain to take over from Kohli. Having more or less cemented his place in the Indian team as a batsman and wicket-keeper it is now towards captaincy. If Rishabh Pant does become the captain of India in the future, remember folks, this will be one of the unique season where we will get to see the India's past, current and potentially future captain, each captaining their respective franchisee.

2. Opportunity for the team to go one step further than last year.

THREATS

1. The absence of Shreyas Iyer could throw the middle order into turmoil; it was around him that the power hitters used to up the scoring rate. This role will either have to be taken up by Ajinkya Rahane who doesn't really guarantee a spot in the XI or by Marcus Stoinis.
2. Not all players thrive under captaincy. We don't yet know what kind Rishabh Pant is but there is indeed a threat that his batting can take a toll due to the added pressure of captaincy.

PLAYER FROM UNSOLD

GURKEERAT SINGH

Snapped up as a late replacement by KKR, he was unsold when I shortlisted this player for this section. He would have slotted into the lower middle order and could have provided a flourish at the end of the innings should Rishabh Pant bat higher and not always be there till the end. He would definitely have been a good backup.

PLAYER FROM ANOTHER TEAM

SHAKIB AL HASAN

Given Morgan, Narine, Russel and Cummins to be certain starters, Shakib Al Hasan will be rendered as a backup in the KKR the lineup. Considering that, I personally feel Al Hasan would have been a better bet for DC, especially as first choice over Woakes for an extra spinning option and better batting abilities.

KEY PLAYER

RISHABH PANT

It has to be the captain, hasn't it! Well, I would have gone with Pant even if Shreyas Iyer was present. Given Pant's new-found form, I think bulk of scoring, especially finishing would have to be done by Rishabh Pant. Being captain makes his contributions all the more important.

PREDICTION

A spot in the playoffs is almost a given. The absence of Shreyas Iyer has hampered the chances a little bit but DC have a lot of Indian batsmen in their ranks. Whether they go to the finals and win the IPL remains to be seen.

3. KOLKATA KNIGHT RIDERS

INTRODUCTION

Despite what role and how much impact Shakib Al Hasan may or may not have on KKR's campaign this year, I think he was one of the most smart buys of this season. Not only in the sub-continent, he is more than a handy bowler anywhere in the world, as his miserly economy of 6.87 would suggest. He is also an impactful middle-order batsman. Should KKR find themselves playing pitches assisting spin more than pace, I think he should play ahead of Andre Russell. KKR kept mostly quiet in the auction, looking to fill up spots on their bench and buying efficient backups for their core. It looks like a well-balanced team which should see continuity in their playing XI as compared to the previous season.

STRENGTHS

1. Strong bowling lineups win you tournaments, ask any captain. KKR has a very strong bowling line-up, despite indications that it is a tad-bit inexperienced when it comes to T20s.
2. One of the strongest middle-order lineups in the tournament.
3. Flexibility in the roster is often underrated. If KKR come across a slow pitch offering some turn, they can easily replace Russell with Al-Hasan or even add Kuldeep Yadav/Harbhajan Singh instead of Prasidh Krishna / Shivam Mavi. Kamlesh Nagarkoti can replace Shivam Mavi on form-related grounds, as Lockie Ferguson can Pat Cummins.

WEAKNESSES

1. KKR do lack a bit in the batting department at the top of the order. Oppositions have found the antidote to Sunil Narine's batting which mean KKR don't have the luxury anymore to open with Narine, or even if they do, their number 3 becomes effectively an opener. This puts additional pressure on their ever-so-strong middle order.

OPPORTUNITIES

1. Given the stability in their lineup and the investment in Eoin Morgan as a captain, this is KKR's best opportunity to end their tittle-drought, before the 2022 mega auction.
2. In playing 5 games at Bangalore and 4 at Ahmedabad, KKR's power-hitting middle-order have a good chance at posting high totals.

THREATS

1. There could be a lure to bat Sunil Narine up the order to accommodate an extra bowler, which seemed to fail more often than not for KKR in the previous couple of seasons.
2. Sunil Narine and Andre Russell haven't had much match practice, or any at all, since the previous IPL while Eoin Morgan and Varun Chakaravathy are coming back from injuries. Shubman Gill has not played T20 games since the previous IPL. All of these are not major concerns but could be a threat if these players do not get off the blocks quickly.

PLAYER FROM UNSOLD

I don't think there is any unsold player at the moment who would have been a great fit in the KKR lineup. An indication of KKR's homework capabilities before auction?! Probably.

PLAYER FROM ANOTHER TEAM

AJINKYA RAHANE

Consider a scenario where Shreyas Iyer was available, in which case, Ajinkya Rahane would definitely have played a subdued role than he MIGHT play now. In that case, Ajinkya Rahane would definitely have added a lot of value to the current KKR outfit where he could either open allowing Nitish Rana at number 3 or himself play at number 3, giving more impetus to the middle-order trio of Morgan, Karthik and Russell.

KEY PLAYER

DINESH KARTHIK

He stood down from captaincy midway last season, it is only fair to expect more from Dinesh Karthik - the batsman. His performances with the bat will be vital as having to replace Dinesh Karthik would change the complete balance of the team.

PREDICTION

Given the continuity of the core lineup from last year and their trajectory, it will be only safe to consider that KKR will march into the playoffs this year. For me, KKR are also the title favourites this season.

4. MUMBAI INDIANS

INTRODUCTION

Barring any last minute injuries, and the known absence of Quinton de Kock for the first game, MI will play the same playing XI from last year. And why wouldn't they? That playing XI, at least the majority of them, won them 2 back-to-back titles. Again, their auction activity was restricted to buy backups or buy back, in case of Nathan Coulter Nile. So, it isn't a surprise that it still looks a strong roster. But 1 thing has changed - the venue, and the fact that they won't be playing any match at Wankhede. Will they play a 3rd spinner and shuffle their combination or will they stick with their winning combination and make it work?

STRENGTHS

1. One of the strongest batting lineup, well complemented by one of the strongest bowling lineups. Not to mention, both these departments have been in impeccable form of late.
2. Playing 2 wicket-keepers in first-choice playing XI is always an advantage. Should 1 get injured or go out of form, all they need to do is replace him with the next best player. Most teams, in the same situation, would need to rethink their balance.

WEAKNESSES

1. There's no rule which says that a team must play 4 foreigners. The 4 batsmen, 3 all rounders and Jasprit Bumrah almost certain to play all 14 games, MI are left with 3 remaining spots - 1 of which I would say goes to Trent Boult and 1 goes to Rahul Chahar. Going by past history, the sole remaining spot will go either to Adam Milne or Nathan Coulter Nile, both of whom are fast bowlers. This, in my opinion leaves the spin department a tad bit weak, and given that MI play as many as 7 games on traditionally slow pitches (5 at Chennai and 2 at Kolkata), they might be inclined to a 3rd spinner.

OPPORTUNITIES

1. MI have a more than good opportunity to make it 3-in-a-row before the 2022 mega auction forces a major reshuffle of their roster.
2. Apart from these, I don't think there are much opportunities for the franchisee or any individuals this season, unless MI start losing all their games.

THREATS

1. The bench strength of their batting department, the quality of it to be precise, is a big threat. It has been circumvented by their quality all-rounders in the past, but there always looms a threat of it failing in crunch games.

PLAYER FROM UNSOLD

ADIL RASHID

An attacking T20 spinner with wicket-taking abilities, as demonstrated in the recently-concluded T20I series against India, he would have been a valuable addition to MI's bowling lineup, providing a 3rd frontline spinning option.

PLAYER FROM ANOTHER TEAM

IMRAN TAHIR

Imran Tahir would have added a lot of value to MI's bowling lineup, especially when they would find a need to play 3 spinners without compromising on their top 7. Add to that, Tahir played an insignificant role for CSK last year and might do the same this year as well.

KEY PLAYER

JASPRIT BUMRAH

Tough to choose a key player in a team full of superstars and from a team which depends on team performances to win matches and tournaments. But if I had to choose one, I would say it is Jasprit Bumrah. Purely on the fact that his absence means MI need to include either Dhawal Kulkarni or Arjun Tendulkar; Piyush Chawla if they are looking for a spinner. Needless to say, his lack of form would leave MI in tatters.

PREDICTION

A playoff spot should come through for MI this year as well, but repeating last year's championship winning campaign won't be a cakewalk for MI this year.

5. PUNJAB KINGS

INTRODUCTION

Having released 9 players in the off season, Punjab Kings, or Kings XI Punjab as they were known then, were always going to be “active” at the auction. But having splurged on individuals, they have shot themselves in the foot by limiting the balance of their roster. Yes, 5.25 crore for someone with the promise of Shah Khan is justified, but I’m appalled by the PBKS spending 14 crores for Jhye Richardson and THEN spending 8 crores for Riley Meredith. Nothing against these individuals and they might end up having a breakthrough season, but as I mentioned, they have certainly shot themselves in the foot to begin with. More on that below.

STRENGTHS

1. I had to rattle my brains for this one - their top-order strength is good enough to give the best of bowling lineups a run for their money.
2. Apart from the top-order strength, if you can find any other strength in this team from an analytical position similar to mine, let me know in the comments. I’ll salute you for that.

WEAKNESSES

1. Spin department is weak - By purchasing Riley Meredith and Jhye Richardson for their eventual price tags, and Mohammad Shami being a certain member of the playing XI, Ravi Bishnoi is the only spin option they have. Playing M. Ashwin would weaken their batting lineup. None of KL Rahul, Mayank agar, Nicholas Pooran and Dawid Malan bowl spin. This means if they want to play a 2nd spinner, they are left trying out an Indian all-rounder, on the lines of Jalaj Saxena, Utkarsh Singh or Srafrax Khan in place of another all-rounder, or play Fabian Allen in place of Chris Jordan or Dawid Malan. This is what I meant when I said, PBKS have shot themselves in the foot before the season has even begun.
2. With a fragile middle and lower-middle order, a lot of pressure is added on the top 3/top 4, which takes them back to KL’s Strike Rate dilemma from last season - he’s forced to stay till the end and not be able to play an attacking game with the peace of mind he’d like.

OPPORTUNITIES

1. I won't be alone in thinking that PBKS, realistically speaking, don't have chances of making playoffs this year. They definitely start out as underdogs without much expectations, which will allow them to fly under the radar and possibly put in some strong performances when least expected.
2. At the moment, KL Rahul is the only one who is almost guaranteed to be retained by PBKS next year. This provides an opportunity for others, youngsters especially, to put in some strong performances and extend their case either for a retention by PBKS and a bigger role in the lineup or a bigger paycheck from another team for next year's mega auction.

THREATS

1. Riley Meredith and/or Jhye Richardson could go down the "Sheldon Cottrell way", in that, a mediocre or bad season this year could mean them getting dropped like hot potatoes and possibly not getting a buyer next season at all. Very few fast bowlers have survived a season of failure in this league.
2. There is a threat of PBKS treating this season as transactional and JUST looking forward to the mega auction next year. As professional athletes, they don't do this, but it doesn't take too long for things to compound and go south.

PLAYER FROM UNSOLD

MARNUS LABUSCHAGNE

An unpopular opinion here, of many unsold players who would probably add more balance to the roster logically, I feel Marnus' batting ability, his flexibility vis-a-vis performance in the batting lineup in terms of position and his surprising effective bowling in T20s would have helped PBKS, not only this season, but in the long run as well.

PLAYER FROM ANOTHER TEAM

SHAKIB AL-HASAN

While Shakib al-Hasan may end playing a significant role, if not the most crucial one, for KKR, he is not guaranteed to play all 14 games. That being said, for PBKS, Shakib would have added a lot of value, right off the bat, no pun intended; his left-armers and batting skills in the middle-order would help address 2 issues PBKS face in the lead up to the season.

KEY PLAYER

MAYANK AGARWAL

KL Rahul and Ravi Bishnoi made strong cases to be in this section, but the former is a bit obvious and the latter is expendable. Mayank Agarwal will have to pull off a Shikhar Dhawan-esque role, in that he has to act as a bridge between the top and middle order and play the match, rather than having a fixed role, allowing KL and Pooran to play explosively around him. Agarwal becomes all the more important if PBKS have no room for Malan.

PREDICTION

Another dismal season looks on the cards for PBKS, with a bottom 2 finish on the horizon. I just hope Punjab Kings give value to stability.

6. RAJASTHAN ROYALS

INTRODUCTION

In the analysis of Kolkata Knight Riders, I mentioned that the purchase of Shakib al Hasan was one of the smartest buys of this year's auction. Another one of those smart buys would be that of Shivam Dube by Rajasthan Royals. An Indian all-rounder on an upward trajectory, with a healthy SR in batting as well as bowling is a good luxury to have in IPL. But RR's auction wasn't all roses and lilies, according to me. I am categorically unhappy with purchase of Chris Morris vis-a-vis his price tag, even the Jofra Archer injury in hindsight and even with the fact that RR have close to 14 crores remaining in their purse; it doesn't even have anything to do with balance, it is more about the value addition to the team, which I don't think justifies the strategy.

STRENGTHS

1. RR's roster does ooze of flexibility, even if it does come at a cost of being monotonous. Having the ability to run horses for courses can be an added advantage when teams are subject to be exposed to a variety of pitches on the same ground.
2. If Delhi and Kolkata do turn out to be their usual slow and turning kind, (RR play a total of 5 games at these venues), RR's strong spin department will come into the picture.
3. RR is all about their "experienced youngsters", which is a quality one would like to have in a fast-evolving format and tournament.

WEAKNESSES

1. There is a lack of dependency on the lower-middle order, as the template is that of a top-heavy batting lineup. Having and taking momentum into the 2nd innings (in case of batting first), or chasing with the luxury of being able to depend on the middle order is often under-rated. This is also why I think Ben Stokes can/should NOT open the innings.
2. Archer's absence, albeit for a few games, has left the death bowling even more hollow. Morris's presence is a mere attempt to fix that hole, it is in no way a guarantee. RR could definitely have done something better here.

OPPORTUNITIES

1. A new captain always has plenty of new opportunities waiting on the horizon of a new season. By no means is Sanju Samson on the the priority list for India's next captain, which perhaps is a good thing as there will be that many fewer eyes on him. This provides him an excellent opportunity to do what he wants to do without garnering much attention or worrying about judgements.
2. In the absence of Jofra Archer, if Mustafizur Rahman does find himself in the playing XI, that would be an excellent opportunity for him to catapult himself back on the T20 franchisee radar. He has not been able to come anywhere close to his performances during his breakthrough season in 2016. The stakes increase more if one is to consider the mega auction next year where he could attract interest from teams.
3. This one is more of a hope, rather than observation. I do hope Manan Vohra is given (more) opportunities at the top of the order. His recent form with the bat begs to be leveraged, and an opening partnership with Buttler (which also allows Ben Stokes to strengthen the middle-order) looks exciting.

THREATS

1. Ok, let's get direct for a moment, with nothing personal against the player. Jaydev Unadkat should not be given preference in the playing XI. He is the biggest threat to RR I can see.
2. Monotonous spin and fast bowling options. All spinners in the RR roster are leg break bowlers (barring Mahipal Lomror), and there are as many as 5 left-arm bowling options in the specialist bowlers.
3. There is a threat of Jofra Archer's integration into the team not being smooth, if he does becomes available during the middle stages of the tournament. After all, he is a fast bowler returning from an elbow injury and finger surgery.

PLAYER FROM UNSOLD

MARK WOOD

Buying Mark Wood would perhaps have been a better bet, either in place of Morris (it's only safe to think that Morris would be required more for his bowling than he would be for his batting) or, with the benefit of hindsight of Jofra's injury, as a backup for Archer in the first place.

PLAYER FROM ANOTHER TEAM

UMESH YADAV

Delhi Capitals prefer to play Anrich Nortje and Kagiso Rabada as their frontline bowlers, leaving no space for an Indian fast bowler. But in RR, Umesh Yadav would definitely have added value and variety.

KEY PLAYER

BEN STOKES

When you have the world's premier all-rounder at your service, he's often the key player. But he will be one all the more this season as he shall be required to open the batting or play in the middle order. He shall be required to bowl 4 overs more often than not, sometimes even during the death. He shall be expected to take wickets as well as long as Jofra Archer is unavailable/not back to his absolute best.

PREDICTION

Consistency has always been RR's biggest enemy. The catalysts to convert promise into results always seem to run dry quickly. Expecting quick results from Sanju Samson the captain would also be unfair. Definitely the dark horses for me this season, as I expect them to finish 5th or 6th.

7. ROYAL CHALLENGERS BANGALORE

INTRODUCTION

RCB released 10 players before the auction and added 10 new players to their roster, the highest among of all teams. It doesn't take an eagle's eye to see that these are actions of a team desperate to win. Desperation is good, it makes one hungry for success, but in all fairness, the same amount of desperation, if not more, has been there in RCB for quite some time now. Is this year going to be any different in terms of results? RCB's problems for many years has been their bowling, but since a couple of seasons, their bowling depth has looked stronger on paper than their batting depth.

STRENGTHS

1. Bowling - This has been the fruition of bad seasons and long-term bowling but I think it is fair to say that to find a RCB bowling lineup as strong as this one, we would probably have to go back to the Anil Kumble era. Remember, Siraj, Saini and Sundar are internationally experienced individuals now while the foreign bowlers and reserves provide exciting opportunities as well as cushion.
2. Presence of 3 spinners in their first-choice playing XI should allow them to tackle 3 games at Chennai and 5 at Kolkata without changing their balance drastically, if at all.

WEAKNESSES

1. Perhaps, a shorter tail could be considered as a weakness, putting all the more pressure on Glenn Maxwell, not only to score big and quick runs but also to shepherd the lower middle order, which trims off his freedom.
2. Lack of versatility in their squad is a major area of concern. If they come across a dead pitch, a flat pitch, a slow pitch, the lack of versatility, at least on paper, seems to be a weakness.

OPPORTUNITIES

1. RCB do have a couple of tender areas in their batting lineup, but that only opens up opportunities for the young and exciting individuals that RCB have secured the services of for this season. Mohammed Azharuddeen, Rajat Patidar and Suyash Prabhudesai are all coming off of a great Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy and could very well find themselves thrust into the playing XI sooner than later.

THREATS

1. Yuzvendra Chahal's form could derail RCB's hopes. His form hasn't been anything to write about off late and if he fails to bounce back from this slump or do too little too late, RCB will struggle with their balance - they don't have an Indian spinner to replace him.
2. If consistency has been Rajasthan's enemy, stability has been RCB's enemy. Let me explain - RCB have a knack of changing too much too soon. They persisted with Saini despite a few failures and that brought results, but that, they don't seem to do it too often.

PLAYER FROM UNSOLD

RCB do seem to have their bases covered and there is no one in the unsold player list who can fit in into RCB or add value right off the bat.

PLAYER FROM ANOTHER TEAM

ROBIN UTHAPPA

I realise that Uthappa is outspoken about his preference to bat at the top of the order, a position he wouldn't necessarily get in RCB, Uthappa in the middle order of RCB would definitely add a lot of stability. And his experience of playing at Eden Gardens whilst at KKR could possibly have come in handy.

KEY PLAYER

WASHINGTON SUNDAR

For all intents and purposes, Washington Sundar is the 2nd frontline spinner of RCB. He would be expected to deliver 7-an-over overs in the powerplays allowing Kohli to hold back his death bowlers. I am sure that Washi would also be expected to shoulder more batting responsibilities this season. His failure to deliver on the batting front could be excusable but his failure to deliver on the bowling front would really curtail Virat Kohli's options.

PREDICTION

Despite the presence of a strong bowling line-up, there are too many uncertainties in RCB for me to say with confidence that they would make it to the playoffs. I think we are in for another disappointment with RCB for this season.

8. SUNRISERS HYDERABAD

INTRODUCTION

With only 4 personnel changes from last year, 1 of which involves a replacement, SRH are the epitome of stability and continuity this year. Another interesting fact of SRH's line-up is that only 2 players are purchased for the minimum base price of 20 lakhs. SRH has a good balance of experience and youth, where the experience is not only limited to T20s but T20s in the IPL. SRH's playing XI forms itself.

STRENGTHS

1. SRH have a problem of plenty in all departments. In fact, I would go to the extent of saying that as many as 23 players make an outright case to feature in the playing XI. This, in my opinion should promote healthy combination and allow for David Warner to have efficient contingency plans.
2. SRH is one of the few teams whose roster is suitable for the venues where they play majority of their games. In all fairness, this would be true even if SRH were to play at completely different venues; such is the depth of their squad that.

WEAKNESSES

1. Even though their middle-order put in some strong performances last year, it is still a bit dodgy. That is the area of concern I see in the team.

OPPORTUNITIES

1. Given that we will have a mega auction next year, and most of the members of this team will get dispersed due to their reputation and performances, this is one of the best chances for SRH to win the IPL one more time.
2. Much of their middle order is youngsters, i.e. Abdul Samad, Abhishek Sharma, Priyam Garg. These individuals have a good opportunity to put in (another) strong season to increase the value of their stock.

THREATS

1. A repeat of one threat from last season, if 2 of Warner, Bairstow and Roy play as the opening pair, Rashid Khan is 100% going to play all 14 games and Jason Holder/Mohammad Nabi given preference for an extra bowling option, Kane Williamson has to sit out. This does make the middle-order a bit more volatile, something they addressed last season by benching Bairstow and playing Saha

and Williamson. Given that their batting lineup hasn't seen any change from last year, this threat still holds true.

PLAYER FROM UNSOLD

MARNUS LABUSCHAGNE

Marnus Labuschagne once again, partly because I was surprised that he went unsold despite his unexpectedly strong performances in the recent Big Bash League and his ability to be flexible in the batting order and roll his arms efficiently.

PLAYER FROM ANOTHER TEAM

I don't see a player from another team, who will most likely not play a major part in their current team, to add any value to this SRH team. That is not to say that the SRH team is perfect.

KEY PLAYER

RASHID KHAN

Rashid Khan is the only foreigner in the team you'd bet your money on to play all 14 games. David Warner is the captain but he is coming off of an injury. He is only 22 years old and already has 350 T20 wickets to his name. His batting skills have sky-rocketed as is evident from his recent performances and overall T20 strike rate of 145.6. It isn't really a surprise to say that how Rashid Khan fares this season will play a major part in deciding how far SRH can go this season. Good form cannot be taken for granted in the IPL.

PREDICTION

A strong chance for SRH to go into the playoffs and probably even a step further. Momentum will be the key.