

Vaibhav Suryavanshi's emergence provides lone bright spark in Rajasthan Royals' underwhelming season

Over dependent on their top-order, Rajasthan pay the price for leaving too many holes at the end of the auction

Rajasthan Royals lost any interest in the race for the 2025 Indian Premier League (IPL) playoffs a long time ago – with their propensity to mess up chases from winning positions largely to blame – but they can pat themselves on the back for giving an opportunity to a player who would be considered too young for elite competition by every metric, except talent.

Vaibhav Suryavanshi had made his name in under-19 cricket when he smashed a whirlwind century against the Australians, which would have prompted Royals to take a punt on him. But even they wouldn't have predicted that the 14-year-old would end up being the brightest spot in their forgettable campaign.

It took an injury to regular captain Sanju Samson for Suryavanshi to get picked, but once he got the opportunity against Lucknow Super Giants, he didn't waste any time and smashed Shardul Thakur over extra cover for six off the first ball he faced in the IPL.

That 20-ball 34 was just the appetizer as he properly announced his arrival in only his third game, smashing 101 off 38 balls against Gujarat Titans, making a mockery of a target of 210. It was the second-fastest century in IPL history, the fastest by an Indian.

That knock would be talked about for a long time, but Suryavanshi's innings during the successful chase against Chennai Super Kings in Delhi on Tuesday showed a dash of maturity in his game, indicating that he can play according to various situations, and is not just a batsman of the slam-bang variety.

While his earlier knocks were exercises in breathtaking shot-making and bravado, Tuesday's effort was a relatively tempered one. Even in his century against GT, there were a fair few leading edges and top edges that eluded the fielders, and even went to the boundary, especially in the early part of his innings. Suryavanshi was more in control against CSK, even though 57 in 33 balls with four fours and as many sixes meant that the bowlers were always under pressure.

When opening partner Yashasvi Jaiswal was taking the bowlers on, the teenager was content to watch from the non-striker's end. In fact, he contributed just a single in a stand of 37 off 22 balls. Suryavanshi even showed a semblance of defence, getting behind the line of good-length balls.

A tentative poke went for a boundary through where a slip would have been, but in Samson's company Suryavanshi began to open his shoulders and display his fast eye and quick hands through the ball.

Most hitters tend to favour the onside, but the boy from Bihar showed he is more than that, managing to cream pacers through and over covers. After the powerplay, he didn't ignore the value of singles, rotating strike by finding gaps in the field. It was complete contrast to his previous innings against Punjab Kings his entire score of 40 came only in boundaries and sixes (4x4, 4x6). Afghan left-arm wrist-spinner Noor Ahmed has been CSK's best bowler in the tournament, but Suryavanshi took him to the cleaners in the eighth over. When Noor pitched short, he was deposited in the stands over deep square-leg, and when he erred on the fuller side, he was driven forcefully through the covers for back-to-back boundaries. A little later, another short ball from Noor also met with the

maximum punishment.

Even the experienced Ravindra Jadeja wasn't spared as a long hop that provided width was smashed for a straight six and a pitched-up delivery was hit over the long-on boundary.

Altogether 40 of Suryavanshi's runs came in boundaries, but the other 17 showed he is developing the composure needed to develop other facets of his game. He picked his moments and the deliveries to go for the big shots, and it was a surprise when he perished to an ugly and needless hoick off Ravichandran Ashwin with the asking rate firmly under control, especially as RR had lost Samson in the same over. The error didn't prove costly in the context of the match, and the youngster should take it as another lesson in his development.

Notwithstanding the promise shown by Suryavanshi, the franchise won't look back at the 2025 season fondly, especially with the immediate previous national head coach in their dugout. Losing close games repeatedly could result in some mental scarring, especially as all of them were winnable games. Royals only managed two victories batting second, and Suryavanshi had a key role in both of them.

They were heavily dependent on their top order and Samson's untimely injury dented their prospects further. Their middle order didn't perform with any consistency. Riyan Parag was mercurial but even when he did score runs, it didn't result in wins for the team. Shimron Hetmyer was a big letdown, not able to finish off chases or give the required impetus at the end of an innings. He often resembled a late-order slogger just throwing his bat in the hope of making an effective connection.

Dhruv Jurel was an unsung hero in some respects with the bat, but often had too much to do in too short a time to have the desired impact. The loss of Nitish Rana midway through the season was deeply felt as could be expected to take down the opposition spinners.

On the bowling side, Sri Lankan spinner Wanindu Hasaranga didn't get the number of wickets hoped for, and the injuries to pace spearhead Jofra Archer – even though he was highly inconsistent – and Sandeep Sharma left them with few options. The likes of Tushar Deshpande, Akash Madhwal, Yuvraj Singh, Fazalhaq Farooqi and Kumar Kartikeya could be expected to have a decent game or two, but couldn't be relied upon to lead a pace attack in the IPL.