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JUST FOR KICKS? Ivory Coast and former Chelsea star Didier Drogba and India's Virat Kohli in action during an exhibition soccer match in New Delhi | P 19

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CRICKETERS SWOON OVER DIDIER DROGBA

Cleesea Icon Charms Delhiites, Dhoni & Co

Devadyuti Das | TNN

New Delhi: He was in the Capital to promote 'T20' football but the wait for Didier Drogba stretched well beyond regulation time for the media, and into extra time. Drogba landed in the country and dived straight into the media conference followed by an appearance at the grand finale of the Pepsi T20 Football event on Sunday.

The Thyagraj Stadium here, refurbished to host the netball event at the 2010 Commonwealth Games, was packed to capacity of 4,500 as fans came in droves to catch a glimpse of the Chelsea legend and top cricketers Mahendra Singh Dhoni, Virat Kohli, Suresh Raina, Harbhajan Singh and Murali Vijay. For a change, the cricket stars were also part of the fan brigade as they vied to get their pictures clicked with the Ivory Coast striker. The kind of over-enthusiasm that these cricketing idols displayed on Sunday was a rare spectacle. To see the likes of Kohli and Raina behave like star-struck, ardent fans was a rare sight, although a welcome one.

Drogba, who has quit Chelsea after helping them win this year's Champions League crown, has very little idea about cricket apart from the fact that India are the world champions. "I took my time to understand the game of cricket. I found that it was too long and went on for too many days. But then in England everyone was following the World Cup last year. It was then that I found out about Indian team and Dhoni. I am sure it feels great to be world champions," Drogba said.

The 34-year-old refused to divulge his next destination. "The eight years with Chelsea were the best of my career. Everybody knows my heart is blue. The next step is going to be interesting but for now you just have to wait to find out," Drogba hedged.

The cricketers looked ill at ease inside the make-shift cage constructed for the modified brand of football on show. When asked about the best footballer in the team, Team India's man in form, Kohli said, "We play a lot of football in the training sessions and Dhoni is definitely the best amongst us. The worst in the lot will probably be Murali Vijay and Ravindra Jadeja."



DIFFERENT BALL GAME: Dhoni matches his soccer skills with Drogba as Baichung Bhutia looks on

Dhoni though had a different take, saying, "The three best footballers in today's team will be Vijay, Harbhajan and Raina."

The skills of Vijay, Bhajji and Raina were 'exposed' during the brief warm-up session as none of them could manage a single shot on goal from just three feet away! Indian soccer icon Baichung Bhutia, who was manning the net, only had to parry away one shot from Dhoni.

The crowd, no doubt, had a lot to cheer about. As for the 'competition', Delhi walked away as champions after pipping Punjab in the final.

DROGBABYTES

On Champions League final:

The final felt like a dream. It was like a Hitchcock movie with so many twists and emotions. Lots of things were going through my head while I came up to take the final penalty. I wanted to score for my friend (Petr) Cech, who had saved three penalties in the final.

On coming to India for the first time: It is really hot in India, more than my country. But it is better than Europe

where it's freezing at the moment. I like it when it's hot.

On Chelsea managers over the years:

We've had so many managers over the years and everyone has brought something different. Jose (Mourinho) brought spirit to the side which we kept all these years. But one who will be most remembered will be Roberto Di Matteo for winning the Champions League.

On racism in football:

I don't think the racist people will ever shut up. Football is a social sport and can unite people. With

sport we can break these stupid ideas. People who speak like this know nothing about life.

On Chelsea being 'boring':

Manchester United and Barcelona have their own style of play and we have ours. There isn't only one way of winning. I don't think we are boring, we are probably defensive.

On decision to leave Chelsea:

I took this decision of mine after the Champions League final. I took my time over it, obviously. I had won everything there. It is always good to go at the right time.