

India coach Gambhir hails Samson's match-winning knock

Reuters

Kolkata

Sanju Samson delivered under pressure when it mattered most, coach Gautam Gambhir said, praising the wicket-keeper batter for his pivotal role in securing India's semi-final spot in the Twenty20 World Cup.

Samson's unbeaten knock of 97 guided India to a crucial chase of 196 against the West Indies, sealing victory with four balls to spare in a must-win game on Sunday.

"He's a world-class player, we all know how good a player Sanju is," Gambhir told reporters after the game.

"It was all about backing him. When the team needed him the most - obviously today was the day - he showed his full potential."

Following early dismissals of Abhishek Sharma and Ishan Kishan, Samson steadied India's innings against the Caribbean attack.

He registered the highest individual score by an Indian in a T20 World Cup chase, surpassing Virat Kohli's knocks of 82 against Australia and Pakistan.

"I actually felt that he never accelerated the innings. It was just very normal cricketing shots and I never saw him muscling the ball as well. That is the kind of talent he has," Gambhir said.

Samson's form had been in question after struggles earlier this year, including a poor outing in January's five-match T20 international series against New Zealand where he scored only 46 runs including a golden duck.

"He had a tough series against New Zealand, so sometimes it's important to give him a break as well, because you want to get the guy off that pressure situation as well," the 44-year-old coach said.

"We always knew that whenever we needed him in the World Cup game, he'll come and deliver it for us."

Gambhir highlighted the team's philosophy of valuing collective efforts over big individual performances. He credited Shivam Dube's late cameo, including two crucial boundaries, as well as Tilak Varma's flexibility in batting positions.

"For too many years, we've only spoken about certain contributions. This is a team sport. And this will always remain a team sport," Gambhir said.

"Those two boundaries are as important as Sanju's 97. Because had Shivam not been able to hit those two boundaries. You wouldn't have even spoken about Sanju."

Defending champions India will play England in the semi-final in Mumbai on Thursday, while South Africa meet New Zealand in the first semi-final a day earlier.