

# Sachin finally speaks: All for a good cause

■ Master Blaster reveals his 'secret' charity work and plays ball with underprivileged children

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BANGALORE, SEPTEMBER 5

THOSE talk sessions on media handling and tips on public conduct have already started showing the results. After days of sweating at the gym trying to build their muscles at the pre-season training camp in Bangalore, the Indian cricketers today indulged in some serious image-building.

Sachin Tendulkar, who has been receiving bad press since a certain red car landed in Mumbai, made a conscious effort to change the trend by actions and words. Tendulkar, who had mysteriously skipped the one-to-one with scribes at the camp, finally broke his silence at a collective press meet. And the issue was about charity.

"The public is not aware

that every year I am sponsoring 200 kids. I bear their entire education expenses. I am sure that every cricketer is doing their share of work," he said. The message which Tendulkar wanted to convey was straight and simple: Contrary to general perception, they are not money-minded — despite their huge endorsements and fat BCCI cheques.

As if to prove that these weren't empty words, the Tendulkar-led Team India spent time with the underprivileged children of an NGO in the evening. Organised by former sprint queen Ashwini Nachappa on behalf of Parikrama, working for the orphans and street children, the event saw the cricketers' benevolent side. Tendulkar was as usual the star attraction as he played ball with the excited

## BOUQUET FOR JUGRAJ

The unfortunate car accident to hockey player, Jugraj Singh, evoked a gesture of brotherhood from the Indian cricket players. The Indian cricketers today sent get-well-soon wishes to Jugraj in the form of a bouquet. "We (Indian cricket team) have sent a bouquet to Jugraj. We are happy that he is stable now. It does not matter what sports we play. The thing which matters is that we are playing for India," off-spinner Harbhajan Singh said here on Friday.

kids. It was also rumoured that the cricketers did donate something for their cause.

Nachappa showed her admiration for the cricketer superstar. "Sachin made it a



Sunil Gavaskar gives Sachin Tendulkar some batting tips at the Bangalore camp. Express photo by Ramesh Nair

point to speak to every child and asked them to pursue education and lead a disciplined life to achieve success. It was not only a dream occasion for the kids, but proved a great motivation," she said.

Not just that. The Indian cricketers have also agreed to auction their sentimental possessions. Once again for a good cause. Harbhajan Singh's hat-trick ball from that famous Kolkata Test, one of Tendulkar's bat and Rahul Dravid's keeping gloves used during the World Cup will go under the hammer soon. The proceeds from the event — a charity dinner — would go to a select group of NGOs working on various issues across the country.

With the wicket-keeping debate on, one couldn't help but ask Dravid: Is there a message behind auctioning his gloves? The genial cricketer dismissed it with a smile. "It's all for a cause." Now was there another message in it?