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Growing Into the Game: The Making of Rohit Paudel

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Rohit Paudel was 15 when he walked out to bat for Nepal in a One Day International. At that age, most cricketers are still learning what their game might become. Paudel was facing an adult national side in the Netherlands, playing in Nepal's first ODI series.

He made six runs. The innings did not announce a finished star. Its importance was that Nepal trusted a school-age batter in a team carrying a country's new status.

Eight years later, Paudel had become Nepal's highest ODI run-scorer and its longest-serving captain. He led the side at World Cups, an Asia Cup and a historic series victory over the West Indies. When the captaincy changed hands in August 2026, he was

still only 23.

His career had already contained several versions of a sporting life: talented boy, record-breaking teenager, young captain and senior batter forced to grow in public.

The television that changed direction

Paudel grew up in Nawalparasi, watching his older brother and neighbourhood players play tennis-ball cricket. Football and other games competed for attention, but cricket offered the stronger pull.

Nepal's appearance at the 2014 ICC World Twenty20 in Bangladesh turned that interest into ambition. Paras Khadka's team showed that players from Nepal could enter a global tournament and compete under the national flag. For a boy watching at home, the distance to international cricket suddenly became imaginable.

Paudel moved through age-group and domestic cricket quickly. He was not a finished stylist. What coaches noticed was composure: the ability to remain at the crease and solve the next ball rather than perform the idea of being fearless.

In 2018, he joined Nepal at the World Cricket League Division Two tournament in Namibia. The team was fighting for a place in the World Cup Qualifier and, ultimately, ODI status. Senior careers

and the future of Nepal cricket were being decided around him.

A teenage international

Nepal earned ODI status in 2018, a breakthrough that guaranteed more meaningful fixtures and formalised the country's place in international cricket. Paudel debuted against the Netherlands at 15 years and 335 days, then among the youngest men ever to play an ODI.

The milestone brought attention, but his more convincing statement came in January 2019 against the United Arab Emirates. He scored 55 from 58 balls and, at 16 years and 146 days, became the youngest male cricketer to make an international half-century.

The record was later broken by teammate Kushal Malla. That is the nature of age records: time makes them temporary. The innings remained important because it showed Paudel could build under pressure. He was not selected only for potential; he had contributed to a senior international result.

He also captained Nepal's under-19 side. Age-group leadership placed him between roles. With the senior team he was the child learning from established players; with the under-19s he was expected to make decisions for others.

Learning through an uneven calendar

Associate cricket rarely offers a smooth schedule. Teams move between qualifiers, bilateral series and long gaps. A poor week can remove the next major tournament; a successful one can change funding and public attention.

Paudel developed inside that uncertainty. Batters need innings to understand patterns of dismissal and scoring, but Nepal's players could not assume the volume of international cricket available to full-member nations.

His role gradually shifted up the order. Early selection had sometimes placed him in rescue situations near the lower middle order. As his technique and responsibility grew, Nepal needed him to occupy the crease, manage spin and accelerate later.

In March 2022, he scored 126 against Papua New Guinea, his first ODI century. Nepal lost the match, a reminder that individual milestones do not guarantee control. For Paudel, however, the innings established a ceiling higher than his teenage half-century.

The captain at twenty

In November 2022, Nepal appointed Paudel captain. He was 20. Leadership arrived before the age at which many players secure a permanent place in their national side.

A cricket captain makes visible decisions—bowling changes, field placements, batting order—but much of the job occurs elsewhere. The captain must speak after defeat, protect teammates, work with coaches and manage the expectations of supporters who experience every match as a national test.

Paudel inherited a talented group with public pressure and internal complexity. Nepal's fan base is one of associate cricket's great assets, filling grounds and following qualifiers across continents. The same passion can make every selection and tactical error intensely personal.

His manner was usually quiet. He did not try to reproduce the charisma of earlier captains. Leadership came through batting responsibility and an emphasis on the team's ability to compete beyond its ranking.

The road to the Asia Cup

In 2023, Nepal won the ACC Men's Premier Cup in Kathmandu and qualified for its first Asia Cup. The tournament placed the team against Pakistan and India, two of the sport's largest and most commercially powerful nations.

Nepal did not advance, but the matches carried symbolic force. Players who had grown up watching their opponents were now sharing the field. Against India, Nepal made 230, a competitive total built through partnerships rather than a single flash of

aggression.

For Paudel, the Asia Cup was an education in scale. Full-member sides analyse weaknesses with extensive data and can replace one elite player with another. Nepal's progress depended on learning quickly without the same depth of resources.

World Cups and narrow margins

Paudel captained Nepal at the 2024 T20 World Cup in the United States and Caribbean. The campaign included a one-run loss to South Africa, a result that created pride and pain in equal measure. Nepal had brought a leading international side to the final ball but could not complete the chase.

Close defeats are praised by outsiders because they confirm competitiveness. Players experience them differently. A single run becomes a missed option replayed for months.

The team's growth continued in 2025. In Sharjah, Nepal defeated the West Indies in a T20I series, the country's first bilateral series victory over a full ICC member. The result demonstrated that earlier near-misses could become wins. Paudel contributed as captain, batter and occasional off-spinner, helping a team from outside cricket's traditional hierarchy control the series.

At the 2026 T20 World Cup, Nepal again came close to a major upset. England survived by four runs after Paudel and Dipendra

Singh Airee built a partnership that unsettled an experienced attack. The tournament ultimately ended without the results Nepal wanted, and a heavy loss to the West Indies exposed familiar batting problems.

Paudel's public response was direct: the batting unit had failed and needed to improve. Captaincy required him to name the weakness while remaining part of the group responsible for fixing it.

Domestic cricket and the NPL

The Nepal Premier League added another layer to his career. As marquee player and captain of Lumbini Lions, Paudel carried regional expectations alongside national responsibility.

In the inaugural 2024 season, Lumbini finished at the bottom even though Paudel led the tournament's run-scoring with 279 runs. The contrast repeated an old lesson: a batter can dominate personally while the team fails.

Franchise cricket matters to Nepal because it provides pressure, income and contact with overseas players. It can deepen the talent pool if the league remains stable and competitive. For Paudel, it also offered leadership in a different environment, where squads are assembled quickly and results arrive across a compressed season.

The captaincy changes hands

In August 2026, Nepal transferred the ODI captaincy to Sandeep Lamichhane. The decision ended Paudel's run as the country's longest-serving captain across formats.

By then he had led Nepal in 63 ODIs and 59 T20Is, overseeing 31 ODI wins and 33 T20I victories. The numbers included qualification breakthroughs, global tournaments and the West Indies series.

A leadership change can be framed as rejection, but it can also release a player from constant public management. Paudel remained central as Nepal's leading ODI run-scorer and the first Nepali batter to pass 2,000 runs in the format. His next contribution did not require a title.

The transition also arrived while he was younger than many international players at debut. Because Paudel began so early, supporters sometimes treated him as a veteran before he had finished developing.

Still growing

Nepal cricket has advanced rapidly, but its path remains fragile. ODI status, tournament qualification and domestic leagues must be repeatedly secured. Players carry the memory of how quickly opportunity can narrow.

Paudel's generation inherited Paras Khadka's proof that Nepal could reach a World Cup. It then had to build a longer calendar, challenge full members and turn passionate support into sustainable performance.

His career reflects that movement. The teenage record brought attention. The century established him as a batter. Captaincy made him responsible for a national project still under construction.

There have been errors, missed chases and tournaments that ended early. Those belong in the story. Leadership in an emerging cricket nation is not a sequence of celebrations; it is the work of carrying disappointment into the next qualifier.

Rohit Paudel entered international cricket before he had grown into his adult face. Nepal watched the process happen ball by ball. The armband has changed hands, but the larger task remains: score runs, learn faster and help the team stay in the game.

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