



The Million Dollar Arm
Media Recap

REUTERS

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Indian teenagers chase American baseball dream

By, N. Ananthanarayanan



NEW DELHI (Reuters) - Two Indian teenagers are chasing an American dream as baseball professionals and their promoters hope they can stir up interest in the game in their cricket-mad homeland.

Rinku Singh, 18, and fellow javelin thrower Dinesh Patel began a year-long training stint in Los Angeles last week after winning an India-wide pitching contest, "The Million-Dollar Arm".

The boys, from poor families, used their natural shoulder strength to take the top two spots from among 8,000 participants.

Another teenager, Manoj Shukla, will receive a month's training after he came third of the 27 finalists.

The winners, who were handed their visas in a ceremony at the U.S. embassy in New Delhi, will get an opportunity to be assessed by professional baseball scouts at the end of their one-year stint.

Their U.S.-based promoters are hoping the youngsters can make it as professionals, saying such success would boost baseball in India in the same way that Yao Ming's move to the NBA created a fan base for basketball in China.

"Yao Ming has been a huge success in linking China and the USA in basketball and has created over 350 million new fans of the game in China over the past seven years he has played in the U.S.," Jeff Bernstein, managing director of 7 Figures Management, a sports marketing and management firm, told Reuters.

The Million Dollar Arm Media Recap

"Our hope is that our contestants can duplicate that success in baseball, creating fans in India over time through following these Indian nationals in their baseball career in the USA," he said in an e-mail response to questions.

COMMERCIAL HUB

India, world cricket's commercial hub, has become a big draw for other sports hoping to tap into its booming economy.

Golf is taking giant strides and India staged its first European Tour events this year while soccer authorities are pushing to revive the game in the country.

The Australian Football League (AFL) announced plans this month to push the game in India in their search for new markets.

Singh, son of a truck driver from the northern state of Uttar Pradesh, won the first prize of \$100,000 after pitching at 87 mph (140 kph) and being declared the most accurate.

Patel was fastest overall at 89 mph (143 kph) but was second in accuracy while the 17-year-old Shukla topped 86 mph.

Bernstein said he decided to test the throwing skills among Indian youngsters after watching a game of cricket.

"That led to the idea to run a contest and identify those arms to see if any of them could be trained to play baseball in the U.S."

LIVE ACTION

The winners began their stay in Los Angeles with trips to watch their first live baseball games.

"The training has started and it feels very good," Singh told Reuters by telephone. "We've just got back after watching a match, we had no clue about the game."

The left-handed Singh, who has hurled the javelin to a modest distance of 67 metres, is aware of the tough job on hand.

"The first trial was held when I had taken a break from my athletics training because of injury.

"Our coach told me and Dinesh that they were looking for a 'bowler' in this game," he said. "I tried and felt good because here too you throw the ball javelin style."

One of seven children, Singh is hoping he can forge a professional career and support his family.

The Million Dollar Arm Media Recap

"My father was a truck driver but he is at home for the last one year," he said. "I want to buy a truck for him, my (family) background is very bad."

Dipesh Solanki, an Indian coach doubling up as interpreter for the boys, said the prize money had been a big attraction.

"Actually, 80 percent of them wanted to throw the ball and become rich."

Although Major League Baseball (MLB) games are televised live in India, they do not attract the same interest as NBA games or Formula One races.

Some baseball is played in the western state of Maharashtra, of which Mumbai is the capital, and an American club is promoting the game in the northeastern state of Manipur.

USA TODAY

Wednesday, November 5, 2008



Pair of pitchers from India eye major league opportunities

By Bob Nightengale, USA TODAY

LOS ANGELES — They have never heard of Babe Ruth, Hank Aaron or Jackie Robinson.

They can tell you about Sachin Tendulkar, one of India's greatest cricket players, but would tell you Michael Jordan is a clothes designer, not a former basketball player.

Rinku Singh and Dinesh Patel, two 19-year-olds from small villages in India, desperately want to live the American dream. Their shot at it is a decidedly improbable one.

They had never picked up a baseball until a year ago. Thursday, they will pitch in front of major league scouts in Tempe, Ariz., in hopes of landing a professional baseball contract.

"This is the most amazing thing I've been part of," says Tom House, University of Southern California pitching coach and former major league pitcher, who has spent the last six months training the duo.

"This is like medical science. It's turning raw athletes into pitchers. You wouldn't believe how far they've come."

Singh and Patel threw the javelin in India, and Singh played some cricket. When they came to the USA in May, Singh and Patel had no idea how to play catch, let alone use a water fountain. The first time they played catch, they threw the ball, and when it came back, they dropped their gloves and caught barehanded.

The first time they saw a baseball game, watching USC play Washington State, Patel was confused.

"What did the shortstop do wrong?" he asked.

House: "Why do you say that?"

Patel: "He's the only one in the infield without a base."

'Raw ability' evident

Singh came to the United States with Patel after being declared winner of the Million Dollar Arm contest in India, run by promoter Jeff Bernstein, Barry Bonds' marketing

The Million Dollar Arm Media Recap

agent. The contest — the second edition is scheduled to begin this month and targets India because of its population of 1.1 billion even though the country has never produced a major leaguer — was based on those who could throw the most pitches 85 mph or faster for strikes. Singh consistently hit 87 mph and earned \$100,000. When veteran major league scout Ray Poitevint went to India to see whether he had potential, he also recommended Patel, who threw harder but wasn't as accurate.

"I certainly had my doubts," said Poitevint, former international scouting director of the Boston Red Sox and Chicago White Sox. "I took a 21-hour flight to see every pitcher who could throw over 80 mph. They had such funny motions, the way they ran to the mound and jumped, but I couldn't believe how hard they'd throw.

"You saw that raw ability, and you wondered if that could be molded. I don't wonder anymore."

Singh, who resides in Bhadohi, became the richest person he had known with his contest winnings. He was a month away from joining the Army. His entire family — he is the youngest of eight children — worked in agriculture, where his dad earned \$25 a month to drive a vegetable truck. Now, Singh says, his father pays someone else to drive the truck while he stays home.

Patel, who lived in Varanasi, isn't sure whether his family — he has two brothers and one sister — quite understands what's happening. He received \$2,500 with an all-expenses trip to the USA. All they know for sure is that he's an awful long way from home.

"I miss my family," says Patel, who, along with Singh, learned English watching Baseball Tonight while also taking online courses. "Hopefully, when I go back home, they will be proud."

Patel and Singh are scheduled to travel to India on Nov. 11. They plan to stay for three weeks, and then return to the United States, where they hope to begin their professional baseball careers.

"When I first saw these guys, I thought they had maybe a 40% chance to pitch professional baseball," Poitevint says. "Now, after seeing them, I think they've got an 85% chance to be in the big leagues. I can't believe the difference."

Pizza by phone

In their villages in India, both Patel's and Singh's families rely on well water in their dirt huts, which have electricity, but also tarps for roofs.

As they look back on their gradual assimilation to life in the USA, they chuckle at their naiveté. They talked about the first time they encountered a water fountain. They turned the knob and tried to catch the water with their hands. They had no idea you could put your mouth over it.

The Million Dollar Arm Media Recap

Bernstein, who housed the two pitchers, taught them how to wash clothes and operate a dishwasher.

Patel still has trouble fathoming the idea that you can pick up the telephone to order pizza delivered right to your door.

Traffic in Los Angeles can be a nightmare, but as Patel will tell you, it's nothing compared with home. Traffic can be at a standstill for hours, he says, waiting for cows — which are sacred in India — to cross the road.

There are myriad distractions in Los Angeles, yet they refuse to let anything deter them from their dream. Instead of accepting any invitations to campus parties, Bernstein says, they have asked for earplugs so they can sleep.

"We want to pitch, and hopefully one day make the major leagues," Patel says. "That's why we're here. We'll do everything in our power to make it happen."

At least 20 teams to attend

The letters and phone calls to major league general managers went out weeks ago, and judging by the early responses, agent Jeff Borris says, there could be a large turnout Thursday.

"The GMs are very intrigued by this," Borris says. "No one is saying these guys will be in the major leagues in 2009, but in 2012, 2013, who knows?"

There will be at least 20 major league teams represented at the workout, Borris says; at least a half-dozen teams, including the Boston Red Sox and Cleveland Indians, confirmed to USA TODAY they will attend.

"We don't know what to expect, but we'll be there," says Allard Baird, assistant to Red Sox general manager Theo Epstein. "We're intrigued like anyone else."

Says Cleveland Indians general manager Mark Shapiro, who will have player personnel director Steve Lubratich at the workout: "It's not like you're going to send all of your scouts over there to watch, but you never want to be left out, either. You never know what will happen. It's a country that's been unexplored."

House believes it's no different from visualizing young Dominican pitchers in the major leagues. Simply, he says, every team must project the future in these two raw pitchers.

"It's a blank slate," House says. "It's like getting 19-year-olds in their infancy. There are no bad habits because they had no habits to begin with. They are a coaches' dream with their work ethic and makeup. Literally, the sky's the limit."

The Million Dollar Arm Media Recap

"You've got to remember, you're talking about two guys who could not even play catch. I wondered, 'How is this ever going to work?' But you look at them now, and you really can't tell that they had never played baseball."

Singh, a 6-2, 195-pound left-hander, throws 89-90 mph with a split-fingered changeup. He continually tinkers with different breaking balls. Patel, a 5-11, 185-pound right-hander, throws 91-92 mph with a circle changeup. Patel says he's the conservative one of the two, leaving the experimenting to Singh.

"These guys are wonderful to be around," says Casey Daigle, former No. 1 pick of the Arizona Diamondbacks who has frequently worked out with them and House. "It's fun because they're like sponges. A few months ago, they didn't even know what a baseball was."

"What's great about them is that they are so determined to pitch in pro ball, and when you're around them, you can't help but root for them."

Singh and Patel have tried to watch as much baseball as possible since their arrival. Their favorite pitcher is Cliff Lee of the Cleveland Indians. Patel loves the New York Yankees and didn't quite understand why they weren't in the playoffs. Singh loves to watch Chicago White Sox slugger Jim Thome hit.

They watched every inning of the World Series. They loved Philadelphia Phillies pitcher Cole Hamels, couldn't believe the Phillies' Jamie Moyer is still pitching at 45, and laughed at themselves trying to pronounce the name of the Phillies' Shane Victorino.

No matter what transpires Thursday, Singh and Patel say, they have had no regrets. They've told friends and family back home about the time they met Bonds, Randy Johnson and Chan Ho Park. They have pictures from their tour of the Fox movie studios. They went to Hollywood like any other tourist and compared their hands to Will Smith's on the sidewalk in front of Grauman's Chinese Theatre. They even saw their first football game Saturday and found themselves captivated by the USC Trojan riding the horse onto the field.

"It's hard to put in words what all of this has meant to us," Singh says. "This is a world we didn't even know existed. We're living it now."

"We don't want it to end."

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

THE DAILY FIX

November 5, 2008, 11:51 am

Sabathia Sweepstakes Headlines MLB Free Agency

Your guest Fixer is Garey G. Ris:

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India boasts more than a billion people, but it's never produced a major-league baseball player. On Thursday, however, two Indians make their pitch before baseball scouts in Tempe, Ariz., to get a major-league tryout. Rinku Singh and Dinesh Patel are 19-year-olds who didn't play baseball until a year ago, when both of them impressed a scout. It's been a steep learning curve, though. "When they came to the USA in May, Singh and Patel had no idea how to play catch, let alone use a water fountain," Bob Nightengale writes in USA Today. "The first time they played catch, they threw the ball, and when it came back, they dropped their gloves and caught barehanded."

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ASSOCIATED PRESS

November 6, 2008

Indian prospects pitch for scouts

By Andrew Bagnato, AP Sports Writer

TEMPE, Ariz. — Squinting into the desert sun, the scouts huddled behind a screen, their radar guns cocked.

The catcher went into his crouch as the lanky lefty pawed at the mound, then rocked and fired. The only sounds were a grunt and the pop of the ball in the mitt.

At first glance, it looked like any other big league tryout. This one had a twist: the pitcher, Rinku Singh, had never picked up a baseball before May. And he's from India, better known for producing world class cricketers than pitching aces - although Singh hopes that will soon change.

"Baseball," Singh said later in halting English. "Love it."

Singh and Dinesh Patel, both 19, pitched in front of some 30 major league scouts on Thursday at a Tempe sports clinic. The tryout was among their rewards for winning an Indian reality TV show called "The Million Dollar Arm," which drew more than 30,000 contestants.

A California sports management firm organized the contest. The rules were simple: pick up a baseball and throw it as hard as you can.

Singh and Patel pitched in the Delhi region and topped out in the high 80s mph. That earned them a trip to the U.S., where they've spent the last six months training with Southern California pitching coach Tom House in Los Angeles.

They've pitched in a handful of scrimmages against junior college competition, House said, and spent the rest of the time preparing for their once-in-a-lifetime chance to throw in front of big league scouts on Thursday.

"I don't know if your bosses made you be here, but I'm glad you're here," House, a former big leaguer, told the scouts. "Think of them as two Dominican kids. They're very raw. But I think this has a huge upside."

When a scout asked how the teens had adjusted to life in the U.S., House replied, "They hold their own. They speak just enough English to be dangerous. They're kind of shy, but they get it."

The Million Dollar Arm Media Recap

Neither Singh nor Patel had ever left their respective villages before coming to the States, according to their interpreter, Ash Vasudevan. But while both were understandably nervous on Thursday, neither seemed overwhelmed by the tryout. Both Singh and Patel said they have competed in the javelin in India.

The short, stocky Patel hit 90 on the radar gun during a 30-pitch stint, leading House to call him "a right-handed Billy Wagner." Singh was clocked at 84.

Singh and Patel threw mostly fastballs, mixing in a handful of breaking pitches. Most of their deliveries were right around the plate, although Patel uncorked one pitch that whizzed past the screen as the scouts flinched and ducked.

"I'm confident," Patel said through his interpreter. "I think I have a real shot."

Singh and Patel may not be stars yet. But they have a prominent agent - Jeff Borris, who said he decided to represent them after watching a workout at USC.

"I was somewhat of a disbeliever at first, but I had an open mind," Borris said. "When you think of it, with a billion people (in India), the odds are that someone can throw a baseball hard enough to make the big leagues."

Indian-born pitchers may be the ultimate niche market, and Borris said he expects to field "multiple offers."

Ten minutes after the workout, Borris was already making his pitch through the media, noting that Singh and Patel have "hardly any wear on their arms."

"No one's saying they're going to pitch in the big leagues in 2009, but with the proper development, maybe three, four years," Borris said. "I just wanted them to show promise, throw hard, show their athleticism. I've signed guys who are a lot worse. Pitching's pretty thin."

For now, the only Indians in major league baseball play in Cleveland. It is not believed that India has ever produced a major leaguer.

Will Singh or Patel be the first?

That question was probably on the mind of many of the scouts who showed up for Thursday's workout on a dazzling fall morning. Most of them were taking a break from scouting the Arizona Fall League, which wraps up later this month, and several said they were intrigued by what they saw.

"I didn't know what to expect," said Ron Schueler, a senior scout with San Francisco. "You've got two athletes who had never picked up a baseball before. Obviously, they're very crude. The fact that the one kid touched 90, that's stuff to work with. "Their country should be proud of them," Schueler said.

The Associated Press

Arizona Republic November 7, 2008

India's top pitchers try out for MLB scouts

by Jim Walsh - Nov. 7, 2008 12:00 AM
The Arizona Republic

Dinesh Patel and Rinku Singh had never seen a baseball before they entered and won a contest in their native India in February by throwing one very fast.

Curious Major League Baseball scouts were impressed Thursday by how far the two 19-year-old former javelin throwers have progressed as they tried out at the Physiotherapy Sports Clinic in Tempe.

About 30 scouts were on hand, but whether Patel, a right-hander, or Singh, a left-hander, will make that improbable journey to the big leagues is hard to say.

"You can't really make a judgment based on this. There's an awful lot of players further along," said Ted Heid, coordinator, special-projects international for the Seattle Mariners. "There would need to be an organization to continue the experiment."

Heid complimented former Atlanta Braves pitcher Tom House, pitching coach for the University of Southern California Trojans, for his work with the young men, who speak little English and know little about the game or American culture.

But, he said, "Major League Baseball is about winning at the major-league level, not social experiments."

Singh won the Million Dollar Arm contest, filmed by a promoter as a reality-type TV show for India's Zee Sports. Patel finished second, and they have trained with House since May. They are blogging about their progress at www.themilliondollararm.com. Former Arizona D-Backs pitcher Mike Fetters said such an experiment is more than

worthwhile.

"I'd give them a shot. They showed you they can pitch. The next step is can they get people out," Fetters said.

"If one of them made it, you open the door to India."

House said Patel and Singh are talented and more than a sideshow, even though India has more than a billion people and few ballplayers. On Thursday, Patel was clocked at 89 mph, Singh at 84.

Not bad. But it would take two years and a patient organization for them to learn the finer points of the game, such as covering first base, House said.

"Somebody is going to take a shot. There's too much upside," House said.

The players' U.S. sports experience hasn't been limited to the diamond. After attending a USC football game, Singh blogged about the huge players and his confusion about tailgating.

"Praise Allah that we have won a baseball contest and not a football one," Singh wrote. "I don't think we could even take a hitting once."

USA TODAY

Wednesday, November 9, 2008



Pitchers from India struggle in front of major league scouts
By Bob Nightengale, USA TODAY

They came to see for themselves, 38 major league scouts, trying to project whether two 19-year-olds from India with six months of experience could pitch one day in the major leagues.

LONG SHOTS: Teens arrive from India armed with raw talent

Dinesh Patel and Rinku Singh did not perform as they hoped during the workout, but still, their performance attracted the interest of three major league teams, according to Jeff Bernstein and Jeff Borris, their agents. Patel and Singh, who were scheduled to return to India and visit their families, have delayed their trip, with another workout scheduled Wednesday in Los Angeles.

This time, Patel and Singh vowed, teams will see their real talent. They offered no excuses, but during their workout last week in Tempe, Ariz., it was the first time they had pitched on mounds outside the University of Southern California campus. They slipped on the mound, struggled with the differences and know that if they ever make it to professional baseball, they'll have to make those adjustments.

"I could not pitch good," said Patel, whose fastball was clocked at 90 mph, about 5 mph slower than his best. "I was disappointed. The mound was not so good. Hopefully, I can still get people interested."

Singh also blamed nerves. He never threw harder than 84 mph, which is about 6 mph slower than how he was pitching during the workouts at USC.

"I won't be so nervous next time," Singh says. "I will throw better. They'll see."

No scout contacted was willing to speak publicly about their performance but in general terms said signing either pitcher would be a long-term project.

"You can't really make a judgment based on this," Ted Heid, a Seattle Mariners international scout, told The (Phoenix) Arizona Republic. "There would need to be an organization to continue the experiment. ...Major League Baseball is about winning at the major league level, not social experiments."

The Million Dollar Arm Media Recap

Tom House, the former major league pitcher and current USC pitching coach, says Patel and Singh simply need time. In two or three years, House predicts, they could be legitimate prospects.

"Somebody is going to take a shot," House says. "There's just too much upside."

MLB.com

November 9, 2008



India the next addition to scouting map?

Teenage duo audition in front of Major League scouts in Arizona

By Kevin T. Czerwinski / MLB.com

TEMPE, Ariz. -- What took place Thursday morning on a makeshift mound next to a parking lot not too far from the Arizona State University campus shouldn't be considered a seismic event as far as Major League Baseball is concerned. That a pair of teenagers threw off that mound didn't even rate a tremor on the scale, despite the fact that there were representatives of nearly each of the clubs present.

Yet, at some point, maybe in the not too distant future, what Rinku Singh and Dinesh Patel did Thursday morning will be viewed as a watershed moment for international scouting. Neither Singh nor Patel, both 19, had ever seen a baseball game, much less had visions of auditioning for scouts at this time last year.

Living in India, the pair was attending the Guru Govind Singh Sports College while preparing to go into the army. They were javelin throwers in their native country and occasionally played some cricket. Baseball, however, was a game with which they were not familiar. That is until the duo decided to enter The Million Dollar Arm contest, a program designed to see if a country of more than a billion people could produce a few viable professional prospects.

There were more than 30,000 entries, a group that was whittled down to 30 finalists, Singh and Patel among them. The idea was to find two winners between the ages of 15 and 25 who could throw faster than 85 mph consistently for strikes. The program was the brainchild of promoter JB Bernstein, who is also Barry Bonds' marketing agent.

Patel, a 5-foot-11 right-hander who consistently touches the low 90s on the gun, encouraged his teammate to join him in trying out, and the pair was victorious. Singh, a 6-foot-2 lefty, who also throws consistently in the lows 90s, was declared the winner and earned \$100,000 and a trip to the United States, where they would be trained by former Major Leaguer and current USC pitching coach Tom House.

That was back in May. They've been training with House since, achieving the first of many goals Thursday morning by progressing far enough to even warrant a tryout. Ray Poitevint, a long-time baseball executive and a staple in the scouting community went to India to help sort through all the contestants, and came away impressed with Patel and

The Million Dollar Arm Media Recap

Singh. He believes it could be the start of something big, not only for the youngster but for baseball as well.

"If you go back 25-30 years, tell me how many Dominicans were playing and being scouted," Poitevint said. "There are a lot of athletes in India, athletes that are equal to or better than the ones that Dominicans had 25 years ago. This is not a publicity stunt. When you're scouting you need to take all kinds of shots and use your imagination.

"And then maybe ... three, four, five years later you see a guy who reminds you of someone with whom you've had success in the past. We're in the business of trying to develop baseball players and eventually if it works, we'll be signing someone from India."

Several of the scouts at the tryout agreed with Poitevint's assessment and said that it was likely that one or both players could be offered contracts. By who and for how much remains to be seen, but a door was clearly opened Thursday morning. Whether a pipeline of players eventually comes through that door won't be known for years, if at all, but the possibility of such an untapped resource had the front-office folks in attendance smiling.

"I think they did well today," House said. "They didn't throw as hard as we've seen them throw, but they didn't embarrass themselves either. Scouts came to watch and the kids and I really appreciate that. I think I was worried more about today than they were. If I do this again, though, I think mentally and emotionally I would get them better prepared for today. "They were extremely nervous and that's not an excuse, but they were also having trouble with the mound. It was the first time they've thrown off a strange mound. It was a little loose and it gave way on their landing foot. I couldn't fix it but I did tell the scouts they were having trouble with the mound."

Singh, who also throws a split-finger, played some cricket back home and hasn't completely abandoned the mechanics used in that game when he's on the mound. His delivery has a bit of quirk to it, but one scout said that it adds deception so he'd just leave it alone. Bernstein likened Singh to Dontrelle Willis. Bernstein said Patel is more of a power pitcher but that he also throws a competent circle change.

The pair are headed back to India shortly to help promote the second Million Dollar Arm contest, but will likely be hearing from an interested Major League team or two. House is proud of what he's accomplished with both pitchers but has no delusions of them making a big splash right away wherever they play.

"They still have to learn how to play the game," House said. "Their talent is the upside but it's going to take them a while to learn how to play. It's not going to take much to get them to sign, either. If you're looking at it as an organization, you can really develop these kids.

"I know they can pitch, but we have to teach them how to play the game. It's well worth the risk."

The Million Dollar Arm Media Recap

Singh and Patel, who are learning English by watching *Baseball Tonight*, watched the World Series with *House* and have begun learning about the game's history. They've met Barry Bonds, Randy Johnson and Chan Ho Park in the last few months and are eager to continue their journey; a journey on which they could be considered pioneers.

"We've had discussions about [being pioneers]," said Ash Vasudevan, who is the managing director of The Million Dollar Arm program and the duo's translator. "They feel they are onto something novel and unique. They are the first of a kind."

And in a few years, who knows? This pair of teenagers from the other side of the world may be considered the start of something big.

Kevin Czerwinski is a reporter for MLB.com. This story was not subject to the approval of Major League Baseball or its clubs.



Dinesh Patel (left) and Rinku Singh have been training in the United States since winning India's Million Dollar Arm contest in May. (Matt York/AP)

USA TODAY

November 24, 2009



Novice pitchers from India sign with Pirates

By Bob Nightengale, USA TODAY

Dinesh Patel and Rinku Singh, cricket players who had not picked up a baseball until April, on Monday became the first athletes from India to sign professional baseball contracts, agreeing to deals with the Pittsburgh Pirates.

"This is very intriguing for us," Pirates general manager Neal Huntington said. "We are trying to broaden our horizons internationally and to get into some non-traditional markets. I've always been curious about India, knowing they have a cultural passion for cricket, which involves throwing, hitting and running. We want to see how that translates to baseball.

"This organization benefited in Latin America when we signed Roberto Clemente, and hopefully with their success, we'll see more athletes coming from India."

Patel, 19, and Singh, 20, said Monday they never heard of Clemente, let alone Pittsburgh, when the Pirates called last week. They went to the Internet, found the city on the map, and then spent hours exploring the Pirates' website.

"It's a dream come true," said Patel, whose fastball was clocked at 93 mph in a second workout last week, according to Huntington.

Jeff Bernstein, a promoter who discovered the pitchers in a Million Dollar Arm contest in India, said he took Patel and Singh to a nearby sporting goods store where they bought Pirates hats and shirts. They even went to a jeweler and purchased black and yellow watches, colors of the Pirates.

"We're very happy that we get to stay together," Singh said. "This will make it easier for both of us."

Their agent, Jeff Borris, said he told teams it wasn't a requirement that the pitchers be signed by the same team. "Pittsburgh showed the most vision of any club I spoke with," said Borris, who declined to divulge their signing bonus. "These guys are raw. Who knows where they'll be when they're 23.

"But ultimately, what I would like to see happen is they pave the way for other athletes to come from India to the United States."

Huntington said Patel and Singh are scheduled to report in mid-January to Bradenton, Fla., where they will work out with the Pirates' instructional league team. They realize they are years away from contending for a big-league job but refuse to let their lack of baseball acumen deter them.

"We will work every hard to make this happen," Patel said. "We want to make our country proud."

STAR TRIBUNE: MINNEAPOLIS - ST. PAUL, MN November 24, 2008

Pirates sign 2 Indian pitchers — and, no, not from Cleveland

By ALAN ROBINSON , Associated Press

PITTSBURGH - The Pittsburgh Pirates hope Rinku Singh and Dinesh Patel really do have million-dollar arms.

The two 20-year-old pitchers, neither of whom had picked up a baseball until earlier this year, signed free-agent contracts Monday with the Pirates. They are believed to be the first athletes from India to sign professional sports contracts outside their country.

Singh and Patel came to the United States six months ago after being the top finishers in an Indian reality TV show called the "Million Dollar Arm" that drew about 30,000 contestants. The show sought to find athletes who could throw strikes at 85 miles per hour or faster.

Both threw the javelin in India, a country best known for producing cricket players, and neither the right-hander Patel nor the left-hander Singh had left his small village before coming to the United States. Singh was born in Bhadoni, Uttar Pradesh, and is the youngest of nine children. Patel is from Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, and has four brothers and sisters.

The 5-foot-11, 185-pound Patel hit 90 mph on the radar gun during his tryout, and the 6-2, 195-pound Singh topped out at 84 mph. Each has thrown harder during workout sessions that weren't attended by scouts.

"Think of them as two Dominican kids," House told the scouts. "They're very raw. But I think this has a huge upside."

When they first came to the United States and began playing catch, the pitchers were mystified by the concept of gloves and had to be taught not to try to catch the ball with their bare hands.

Despite being more than raw, the pitchers were signed by well-known agent Jeff Borris, who was attracted by their potential after watching them work out at Southern Cal.

Borris estimates they will need three to four years of minor league experience before becoming major league ready.

Patel and Singh are learning English, most of which they have picked up from watching ESPN's Baseball Tonight and by taking online classes.

The Million Dollar Arm Media Recap

"These young men have improved a tremendous amount in their six-month exposure to baseball and we look forward to helping them continue to fulfill their promise," Huntington said.

The signings represent a shift in policy for the Pirates, who have mostly ignored nontraditional markets such as Asia for players.

While neither pitcher threw hard enough to earn the \$1 million prize, Singh made \$100,000 from the contest and Patel made \$2,500, plus his trip to the United States.

The contest was sponsored by a California sports management company that believed it could locate major league-worthy arms in a country of more than 1 billion. After working extensively with Southern California pitching coach Tom House since May, the pitchers staged a tryout in Tempe, Ariz., on Nov. 6 that was attended by 30 major league scouts.

"The Pirates are committed to creatively adding talent to our organization," Pirates general manager Neal Huntington said Monday. "By adding these two young men, the Pirates are pleased to not only add two prospects to our system but also hope to open a pathway to an untapped market. We are intrigued by Patel's arm strength and Singh's frame and potential."

Neither pitcher has taken the mound in a game situation, no doubt a first for a Pirates prospect. They have pitched in scrimmages against junior college competition.

THE BLEACHER REPORT

November 24, 2008

Dinesh Patel, Rinku Singh: "Million Dollar Arms" Worth Way More
By, Josh Lipman



On Monday, Nov. 24, 2008, the Pittsburgh Pirates made their best baseball decision since plucking Roberto Clemente from the Brooklyn Dodgers in the Rule Five Draft in 1954. And it might turn out to be even better than that.

In an unprecedented act of progressivism, the Buccos became the first MLB team ever to sign an Indian-born player. In fact, it is the first time in history an Indian-born player has signed a professional sports contract outside their home country, let alone in the U.S. And it gets better. There are two of them.

Dinesh Patel (a 20-year-old righty) and Rinku Singh (a 19-year-old lefty) were rewarded for their prospect-like performances in India's first "Million Dollar Arm" challenge and their ensuing training with invitations to this year's Minor League Spring Training.

Though neither projects to be a future Hall of Famer, the two reportedly have some respectable stuff: "the 6'2" Singh throws 89-90 mph and has a split-finger changeup pitch, [while] the 5'11" Patel throws a circle change and can reach 91-92 mph with his heater." (from MLB.com).

But this signing means so much more than just the individual talents of Patel or Singh. While it's not the first international (non-Americas) signing for the new management team of Neal Huntington and Frank Coonelly, it's certain to be the most valuable.

Though the Buccos signed South African switch-hitting shortstop prospect Mpho Ngoepe earlier this year, it pales in comparison to what Huntington just pulled off.

Baseball fans everywhere—especially Pirates fans—have about 1,129,866,154 reasons to like this acquisition—one for every potential new fan. While it may take a while for

The Million Dollar Arm Media Recap

baseball to catch on in India, if it ever does, the Pittsburgh Pirates are sure to be to the Indians as the New York Yankees are to the Japanese.

Not to mention it opens the floodgates for a virtually unlimited stream of potential talent, with the Pirates sure to be atop the list.

It will be some time before Patel and Singh make their major league debuts; but, if and when they do, it is absolutely critical that Pirates are fielding a competitive team if they have any hope of establishing a firm foothold in their new-found potential fan base.

But if they do ever successfully capture the hearts of the Indian people, the dividends will be plentiful in terms of both players and revenue.

It might even eventually lead to the Pirates becoming —GASP— a large market team!

PITTSBURGH POST-GAZETTE

November 25, 2008

Pirates sign pitchers from India; Global talent search adds contest winners

By Paul Meyer, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

The Pirates continue to travel the globe in hopes of finding players who will play at PNC Park.

Yesterday, they announced the signings of two pitchers from India.

"We're trying to be creative internationally," general manager Neal Huntington said.

These come on the heels of the Pirates signing shortstop Mpho "Gift" Ngoepe from South Africa a couple months ago.

What's next -- the North Pole?

Oh, wait a minute. The Pirates do have a player from the North Pole.

In June, they drafted (in the 15th round) and signed left-hander Christopher Aure from North Pole High School in Alaska.

Nobody knows for sure if any of these four players will reach the major leagues, but veteran scout Ray Poitevint is intrigued by right-hander Dinesh Kumar Patel, 19, and left-hander Rinku Singh, 20.

"With both these guys, it's imagination and projection," Poitevint said last night. "It's going to take time. Everything they learn is brand new. But once they learn something, they do not forget it.

"For the Pirates to be at the forefront with this is really a coup for them."

Kumar and Singh are the first Indian-born players to sign professional contracts with any team outside of India.

"I admire Pittsburgh for coming and taking charge," Poitevint said. "Usually it's Boston or the Yankees, but the Pirates took charge."

Patel and Singh emerged from more than 30,000 entrants in a "Million Dollar Arm" contest in India in March. The key part of the contest was to see who could throw the most pitches of at least 85 mph for strikes.

The Million Dollar Arm Media Recap

Patel and Singh, who had cricket backgrounds, came to the United States in May. Former major league pitcher Tom House, the pitching coach at the University of Southern California, worked with them through the summer.

Then Patel and Singh threw three scouting sessions -- the first in Arizona a couple weeks ago, then another at Southern California and a third for the Major League Scouting Bureau. A total of 60 scouts attended the first two sessions.

Joe Ferrone, a special assistant to Huntington, and Sean Campbell, the Pirates' area scout in southern California, attended the second session.

It's believed the Pirates signed the pitchers for bonuses of perhaps \$15,000 to \$20,000 each.

Is it worth what appears to be low risk?

"Oh, definitely," Poitevint said.

Poitevint likened Patel to a very young Joaquin Andujar, who pitched for 13 seasons in the major leagues, and Singh to Juan Nieves, who pitched a no-hitter for Milwaukee in Baltimore April 15, 1987, and had a promising career cut short by an arm injury.

Poitevint said if Patel and Singh had been high school prospects in the United States, they probably could have been picked in anywhere from the 12th to the 35th rounds in the June draft.

"Toss a coin," he said.

Huntington said Patel and Singh, who are represented by agent Jeff Booris, will report to the Pirates' spring training facility in Bradenton, Fla., in late January.

"They have potential, but they're very raw," Huntington said. "There are a lot of things to cover. They've only had six months of baseball experience. They probably wonder why they have to cover first base on a ground ball hit to the right side, but they love the game."

It's probable Patel and Singh will begin next season in the Extended Spring Training program following spring training, then pitch for the Pirates' Gulf Coast Rookie League team in Bradenton.

"We're opening the door to a new market," Huntington said. "It could lead to bigger and better things. We're the first ones in [India]. Who knows? In 25 years, these two could be blips on the radar or pioneers."

TRIBUNE-REVIEW

November 25, 2008

Bucs sign 'pitchers' from India

By Rob Biertempfel

By spending just a few thousand dollars, the Pirates hope they have come up with a pair of million-dollar arms.

Monday, the team signed two free-agent pitchers -- right-hander Dinesh Kumar Patel and lefty Rinku Singh -- who are natives of India.

Patel, 19, and Singh, 20, have no baseball experience, other than a stint on "Million Dollar Arm," a television reality show in India. The show rewarded anyone who could throw strikes at 85 mph or faster.

Although they were the top two finishers from among 30,000 entrants, neither Patel nor Singh won the million dollars. They did, however, get the chance to come to America, train with a pitching coach and work out for major league scouts.

Patel and Singh are believed to be the first Indian-born athletes to sign pro contracts outside of their country.

"There are a billion-plus people in India," Pirates general manager Neal Huntington said. "It's like China, which is a hot market for teams because it has a billion people.

"This was an opportunity for us to sign two players whom we like, and also to put our foot in the door in what potentially is a tremendous market of future players."

Cricket is tremendously popular in India. Huntington noted that cricket has similarities -- fielding, throwing, running and hitting -- to baseball.

However, both Singh and Patel were javelin throwers in their homeland. Until a year ago, neither had ever picked up a baseball or had any interest in the major leagues.

"I don't know anything about the Pirates, except that Barry Bonds played for them," Patel said last night by phone from the duo's personal training camp at the University of Southern California. "I never expected all this to happen. I'm very excited."

Patel and Singh have been training with USC pitching coach Tom House, a former major leaguer. They started at square one, having even to be taught how to use their mitts to catch a ball.

Neither spoke English when they arrived in the United States. They picked up the language by watching "Baseball Tonight" on ESPN and taking online classes.

"What they've done in six months is remarkable," Huntington said.

Two weeks ago, special assistant to the GM Joe Ferrone and area scout Sean Campbell watched Singh and Patel pitch during a workout at USC.

"They're not the biggest of guys," Huntington said. "But they showed arm strength and a base-level feel for secondary (pitches). We were intrigued by both pitchers."

The Million Dollar Arm Media Recap

Singh, 6-feet-2, 195 pounds, won \$100,000 in the "Million Dollar Arm" contest by consistently hitting 87 mph with his fastball. Huntington believes the left-hander has the potential to add velocity over the next couple of years.

Patel, 5-11, 185 pounds, got \$2,500 as the contest runner-up. His pitches touch 90 mph, but lack control.

The Pirates gave both pitchers signing bonuses comparable to what a low-round draft pick would receive. The team did not reveal the specific amounts.

BEAVER COUNTY TIMES

November 25, 2008

Pirates going global

By John Perrotto – Beaver County Times Sports Staff

The Pittsburgh Pirates, after 16 consecutive losing seasons, are going to all corners of the Earth in an attempt to improve their talent base. The Pirates signed two cricket players from India, who have been working out as pitchers under the guidance of University of Southern California pitching coach Tom House for the last six months, to minor-league contracts Monday.

The aspiring pitchers are Rinku Singh and Dinesh Patel, who participated on a reality television show in India called “Million Dollar Arm,” the brainchild of promoter Jeff Bernstein, marketing agent for all-time home run leader Barry Bonds.

Singh, 20, beat out more than 30,000 contestants to win the \$100,000 prize after reaching 87 mph in the contest, whose winner was determined by who could throw the most strikes at a speed of at least 85. Patel was the runner-up and was also invited to America to train by agent Jeff Borris on the recommendation of veteran international scout Ray Poitevint.

Both pitchers, who are hoping to become the first major-leaguers from India, worked out in front of scouts from nearly every major-league team earlier this month in Tempe, Ariz. Singh, a 6-foot-2, 195-pound left-hander, was clocked as high as 88 mph. Patel, a 5-foot-11, 185-pound right-hander, topped out at 93.

“It’s a fascinating story and we’re very interested to see where it takes us,” Pirates general manager Neal Huntington said. “We’re excited about bringing them into our organization and helping them try to reach their goal of pitching in the major leagues someday.

“There is no way of knowing how it is going to turn out but our scouts were impressed. We feel they both have outstanding young arms that give them a chance to be successful professional pitchers.”

Poitevint told USA Today earlier this month, “when I first saw these guys (in India), I thought they had maybe a 40-percent chance to pitch professional baseball. Now, after seeing them (in the U.S.), I think they’ve got an 85-percent chance to be in the big leagues.”

In September, the Pirates signed shortstop Mpho Ntshengwe from South Africa after scouting him at MLB’s new international training academy in Italy. Like India, South Africa has never produced a major-leaguer.

“A lot of fans have asked if we’re going to increase our scouting in Japan and if we are going to try to find players in China, which is a great untapped market,” Huntington said. “I’ve always believed India was an interesting possibility when it came to baseball scouting.

“It’s a nation with 1.1 billion people and the national sport is cricket, which involves throwing and hitting and catching and running. I’ve always felt there could be athletes there who could become good baseball players.”

ASSOCIATED PRESS

November 25, 2008

Pirates sign Indian pitchers from reality TV show

PITTSBURGH - The Pittsburgh [Pirates](#) hope Rinku Singh and Dinesh Patel really do have million-dollar arms.

The two 20-year-old pitchers, neither of whom had picked up a baseball until earlier this year, signed free-agent contracts Monday with the [Pirates](#). They are believed to be the first athletes from India to sign professional sports contracts outside their country.

Singh and Patel came to the United States six months ago after being the top finishers in an Indian reality TV show called the "Million Dollar Arm" that drew about 30,000 contestants. The show sought to find athletes who could throw strikes at 85 mph or faster.

While neither pitcher threw hard enough to earn the \$1 million prize, Singh made \$100,000 from the contest and Patel made \$2,500, plus his trip to the United States.

The contest was sponsored by a California sports management company that believed it could locate major league-worthy arms in a country of more than 1 billion. After working extensively with Southern California pitching coach Tom House since May, the pitchers staged a tryout in Tempe, Ariz., on Nov. 6 that was attended by 30 major league scouts.

"The [Pirates](#) are committed to creatively adding talent to our organization," [Pirates](#) general manager Neal Huntington said Monday. "By adding these two young men, the [Pirates](#) are pleased to not only add two prospects to our system but also hope to open a pathway to an untapped market. We are intrigued by Patel's arm strength and Singh's frame and potential."

Neither pitcher has taken the mound in a game situation, no doubt a first for a [Pirates](#) prospect. They have pitched in scrimmages against junior college competition.

Both threw the javelin in India, a country best known for producing cricket players, and neither the right-hander Patel nor the left-hander Singh had left his small village before coming to the United States. Singh was born in Bhadoni, Uttar Pradesh, and is the youngest of nine children. Patel is from Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, and has four brothers and sisters.

The Million Dollar Arm Media Recap

The 5-foot-11, 185-pound Patel hit 90 mph on the radar gun during his tryout, and the 6-2, 195-pound Singh topped out at 84 mph. Each has thrown harder during workout sessions that weren't attended by scouts.

"Think of them as two Dominican kids," House told the scouts. "They're very raw. But I think this has a huge upside."

When they first came to the United States and began playing catch, the pitchers were mystified by the concept of gloves and had to be taught not to try to catch the ball with their bare hands.

Despite being more than raw, the pitchers were signed by well-known agent Jeff Borris, who was attracted by their potential after watching them work out at Southern Cal.

Borris estimates they will need three to four years of minor league experience before becoming major league ready.

Patel and Singh are learning English, most of which they have picked up from watching ESPN's "Baseball Tonight" and by taking online classes.

"These young men have improved a tremendous amount in their six-month exposure to baseball and we look forward to helping them continue to fulfill their promise," Huntington said.

The signings represent a shift in policy for the [Pirates](#), who have mostly ignored nontraditional markets such as Asia for players.

Hindustan Times

November 25, 2008

By, Lalit K Jha

Million-dollar boys

Two Indian teenagers created history in the US sports Monday when they were signed up by prestigious baseball team Pittsburgh Pirates, five times World Series Champions, as professional players.

Rinku Singh, 20, and Dinesh Kumar Patel, 19, were signed up by the Pirates after the duo emerged winner of the "Million Dollar Arm" contest held in India, in which more than 30,000 Indian youth participated.

The person who could throw the most pitches 85 miles per hour or faster for strikes was adjudged the winner.

"Singh and Patel are the first-ever Indian-born players to sign a professional sports contract outside of the country, which has a population of more than 1.1 billion people," Pittsburgh Pirates said in a statement on Tuesday.

The club's vice president and general manager, Neal Huntington hoped that the success of these two Indian baseball players would lead the US baseball clubs into the untapped market.

"By adding these two young men, we are pleased to not only add two prospects to our system but also hope to open a pathway to an untapped market," he said. It is the inherent talent of both Singh and Patel in throwing baseball which attracted the attention of the club.

"We are intrigued by Patel's arm strength and Singh's frame and potential.

"These young men have improved a tremendous amount in their six month exposure to baseball and we look forward to helping them continue to fulfil their potential," Huntington said.

Singh and Patel, who were born in Bhadohi and Varanasi, respectively, in Uttar Pradesh, were brought to the United States in May after the contest and trained by the club's trainers.

Singh is the youngest of the nine children in his family, while Patel comes from a family of five brothers and sisters.

The Million Dollar Arm Media Recap

Neither of them knew English when they came to the US and picked up the language by watching Baseball Tonight and by taking online classes.

“For the both of us, it's a dream come true,” Patel was quoted as saying by USA Today.

"We're very happy that we get to stay together," Singh said. “It will make it easier for both of us that we are now staying together. It is indeed a huge honour and we are hoping to give our best,” he added.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

November 25, 2008

Indian duo sign for US baseball team

NEW YORK: India maybe non-existent in the baseball map but Rinku Singh and Dinesh Patel, both from Uttar Pradesh, made at least a beginning by signing for five-time World Series Champions Pittsburgh Pirates as "non-drafted free agents" for the team's Minor League Spring Training next year.

Both finds of a TV reality show, the UP duo would now learn the basics of the game and scouts here believe the colts would require at least four years of minor league toil before breaking into the major league.

Announcing the signing, Pirates general manager Neal Huntington said the move was aimed at reaching out to an untapped market that is India.

"The Pirates are committed to creatively adding talent to our organisation. By adding these two young men, we are pleased to not only add two prospects to our system but also hope to open a pathway to an untapped market," he said.

"We are intrigued by Patel's arm strength and Singh's frame and potential. These young men have improved a tremendous amount in their six-month exposure to baseball, and we look forward to helping them continue to fulfill their potential," he added.

Discovered during the Indian leg of the TV reality show "Million Dollar Arm", Ringku, who won the contest, and Dinesh, the finalist, have no previous baseball experience. Since their arrival here, both trained with University of Southern California pitching coach Tom House and in the tryout earlier this month, they hurled in the low-90s which was enough to earning a Spring Training invitation at the 'Bucs', as the Pirates are known as.

House, meanwhile, made it clear that the Indian duo are not finished products and it might take a while before they really shape up as quality pitchers.

"They still have to learn how to play the game," House said.

"Their talent is the upside, but it's going to take them a while to learn how to play. It's not going to take much to get them to sign, either. If you're looking at it as an organisation, you can really develop these kids.

"I know they can pitch, but we have to teach them how to play the game. It's well worth the risk," House added.

Both Dinesh and Ringku were javelin throwers in schools.

EAST WINDUP CHRONICLE

November 25, 2008

Scouting Reports on Rinku Singh and Dinesh Patel

We've been following the saga of Dinesh Patel and Rinku Singh since they won the Million Dollar Arm contest. Since they just signed with the Bucs, we thought it would be useful to readers to get some information on the players and their attributes, so here's a brief write up to get to know the players some. Keep in mind our opinions stem from scouting videos. Not live looks.

Dinesh Patel, RHP, 5'10/185

Aaron: Definitely the more polished of the two. Strong upper body, but the legs are a little thin. Throws from the stretch and starts in a crouched position. Nice tempo — quick, but not hurried. Leg comes in high and he's very aggressive to the plate. Call it a 3/4 arm angle. Has a very smooth and natural-looking delivery for someone who had never played baseball before last year.

Fastball is 84-85 and touches 87 with some tail down and in on right-handed batters, showing occasional sink. Delivery looks repeatable, but his release point is a little inconsistent, which will create command issues until he sorts it out. Due to his lack of height, he doesn't get great plane but nice movement on the fastball can compensate for it. The ball doesn't come out of his hand as easily as I'd like, but I he gets good extension on his follow-through. Nice aggressive finish.

Slider is 77-79. Doesn't always get a lot of depth, but, again, like everything else with both these players, you have to remember Patel has been playing baseball for a friggin' year. With that in mind the slider looks like it has the possibility of developing into a useful secondary pitch.

He looks polished and I find that somewhat shocking. It's difficult to project what Patel might become or if he's got the talent to be a pitcher in the majors, but I will say I don't think this is some gimmick signing. There's something there.

Rinku Singh, LHP, 6'2, 185 lbs.

Jackson: Rinku Singh is clearly the less polished of the two prospects and is more of a project, likely a more boom-or-bust type pitcher than his counterpart Dinesh Patel. He has poor command at this point and gives his bullpen catcher headaches, frequently losing his grip on the ball and struggling to find his form.

However, at 6'2 185, the ceiling is there and he's clearly an athlete. He's got long arms and legs, a nice, strong high leg kick and overall shows strength and flexibility in his unpolished delivery. He throws from a 3/4 arm slot, bringing his arm way down below his

The Million Dollar Arm Media Recap

waist and then letting go with a sort of catapult-like delivery where he pushes the ball a bit. He struggles to repeat his form, especially with the lower half, and his follow through needs a lot of work. His arm speed is average at best and he relies on leverage to generate velocity.

Singh's FB comes in 79-83 MPH, with a slow moving curve that ranges from 67-72. He currently lacks a real feel for the breaking pitch and his curve has little bite to it.

NEW YORK TIMES

November 27, 2008

Pirates Add Reality to Reality Show in India

By ALAN SCHWARZ

The Pittsburgh Pirates, whose 16th straight losing season in 2008 tied the major league record for persistent irrelevance, are not used to making news on at least three continents. Especially in November by signing two pitchers who even management knows will almost certainly never wear Pittsburgh uniforms.

But by making two young men from India the first from their nation to sign contracts with a major American professional sports team Monday, the otherwise nondescript Pirates found themselves flooded with interview requests from the likes of the BBC, National Public Radio, Indian newspapers and more. As Major League Baseball and individual clubs try to expand their reach, the Pirates' signing of two javelin throwers from an Indian reality television show was part baseball, part marketing and a good dash of whimsy.

"I'm not saying we've created the next Dominican Republic by any stretch," Pittsburgh General Manager Neal Huntington said. "But it's an intriguing market to get into, and who knows where it's going to lead? We figured there was no cost, and it's worth a shot to see what might develop out of it."

Dinesh Patel, a 19-year-old right-handed pitcher, and Rinku Singh, a 20-year-old left-hander, have never played in a competitive baseball game yet have become overnight symbols of India's possible baseball promise. Patel has thrown as hard as 93 miles per hour, and while Singh throws with less force, he has a strong body and is left-handed, all but guaranteeing him employment in baseball somewhere.

In a sport that cherishes tales of youngsters being discovered throwing tattered balls against barn doors, Patel and Singh got on baseball's radar in a more modern way — via television.

J. B. Bernstein, a sports marketing agent based in Miami, created the "Million Dollar Arm" competition show that aired on Indian television last winter. Young men aged 16 to 21 tried to throw a baseball faster than 85 m.p.h. with at least slightly more accuracy than the average Mets reliever. The winner received \$100,000 and a trip to the United States to train with Tom House, the former big-league pitcher turned instructor.

Singh won the contest, and Patel was intriguing enough to also be invited to Southern California in May. Both had barely seen a baseball before — they specialized in throwing javelins and played only a little cricket in India — but House spent six months working with them on pitching, hitting and fielding. The circle changeup came later.

The Million Dollar Arm Media Recap

Sufficiently leavened, Singh and Patel auditioned in front of about three dozen major league team scouts this fall. The Pirates signed both Monday for bonus amounts not exceeding \$10,000, indicating scant competition from other teams, according to two people familiar with the deals. The two pitchers will report to the Pirates' training complex in January to prepare for their first spring training.

"We are very proud Pirates," Singh, who grew up in Bhadohi, said in a conference call from California on Wednesday afternoon.

Patel, from the city of Varanasi, added: "Baseball is a very hard game. But I love baseball."

Monday's signing of Singh and Patel added yet another nation to baseball's growing global footprint. Players from more than 16 countries were on major league rosters last year; even more were represented in the minors.

The Pirates are not known for mining international talent; the team was once a pioneer in scouting Latin America, particularly Panama, but their player-development pipeline has dried up in recent decades.

One year into running the team's baseball operations, Huntington said that the Pirates wanted to shake up the old paradigm by trying some new avenues. The team recently signed a 16-year-old shortstop from South Africa, and figured that Singh and Patel could give them a leg up in marketing the organization to future Indian prospects.

That type of strategy has been shown to pay dividends — and might again next week if the Boston Red Sox sign the Japanese pitcher Junichi Tazawa, whose idol is the current Boston pitcher Daisuke Matsuzaka.

"We do know the benefits of a billion people that are going to take a curiosity in, if nothing else, what these two young men do," Huntington said. "It sends a message internationally."

He added: "I've been greeted with a heavy dose of cynicism. Some people have asked how we can tell our fan base that we're taking away jobs from U.S. kids, that this reeks of desperation. But it's just a chance to spread our wings a little and see what happens."

Some of baseball's more exotic roads to talent have turned out to be dead ends. In 1992, the California Angels traveled to the former Soviet Union to look for players and signed three: infielders Yevgeny Puchkov and Ilya Bogatyrev, and the left-handed pitcher Rudolf Rzhigaev. None made much progress in the low minor leagues and were soon released; despite its size, Russia is now all but a scouting afterthought.

China has had more recent intrigue, with the Yankees taking the lead.

The Million Dollar Arm Media Recap

The team signed two Chinese players in June 2007, the left-hander Kai Liu and catcher Zhenwang Zhang, hoping to establish a talent and marketing presence in the country. But neither player has played even one minor league game, let alone reached the majors.

Both Singh and Patel will probably spend next year in extended spring training, hoping to improve enough to be assigned to the rookie-level Gulf Coast League when that circuit starts in June.

It will be a far different life than serving in the Indian armed forces, which they said they would have volunteered for had baseball not beckoned. That decision became even more poignant during Wednesday's conference call, when they learned of that evening's terrorist attacks in Mumbai. "I'm here safe, but I'm thinking about my family and friends in India," Singh said.

Singh and Patel said they would travel home briefly before returning to start climbing baseball's ladder. As they do, they will help introduce millions of young men in India to a game they are growing to love in California.

Asked if their friends had rushed out to stores to buy Pirates hats, they said no, those were not available yet. But their marketing agent, Bernstein, stepped in.

"MLB.com ships international," he said.

Hindustan Times

November 27, 2008

By, Anuraag Singh

From UP villages to US baseball fields

It reads like an impossible Bollywood fantasy: a teenager who speaks no English and four years ago worked at construction sites to fund a javelin-throwing career is now worth crores of rupees in flood-lit US baseball arenas.

Except, it's true.

Four years ago, Dinesh Patel, then 15, worked for 25 days at sites near his dusty village of Khanpur on the outskirts of the holy city of Varanasi to collect Rs 3,500 as admission fees to the Guru Gobind Singh Sports College in Lucknow.

How things change.

Dinesh Patel and Rinku Singh — a sports college batchmate — created history on Monday by becoming the first Indians to sign a professional baseball contract outside the country.

Both have been signed by five-time World Series Champion club Pittsburgh Pirates for an undisclosed sum that may be in crores of rupees, their families indicated, and in doing so have sparked a remarkable interest in the hitherto unknown American sport of baseball in their backward, dusty Uttar Pradesh villages.

Patel and Singh were selected from a field of over 30,000 throwers at the Million Dollar Arm Contest in Mumbai in March 2007.

Singh, a truck driver's son, claimed the top prize of \$1,00,000 with a powerful throw. Patel threw further than Singh but fouled his throw. He was still invited for a six-month exploration in Baseball.

Patel, a former national javelin gold medalist, was brought up in a hut by his landless maternal uncle Lalji and granny Kalawati at Khanpur village. His mother and mentally challenged father couldn't afford to raise him in their village, Chuppepur, in Varanasi.

“Handloom units across Banaras are closing,” said Lalji. “But Patel's success has ensured my two looms will not close.” He said his inspiring tale has started a baseball mania in the village.

Patel is from the same village as Santosh Patel, who won the Rs 10 lakh top prize at the Chennai Half Marathon on August 31. Before joining the Lucknow Sports College,

The Million Dollar Arm Media Recap

Dinesh trained in javelin at Bariyasanpur College, a nursery of marathoners and distance runners, including Arjuna Awardee Gulab Chand.

“Gulab Chand is passe,” said Bala Lakhendra, ex-state champion in 800 metres and Dinesh’s senior.” Dinesh is our new star.”

While villages in Varanasi, await Patel’s return to usher in a “baseball revolution” — as he’s promised to do over telephone — Singh’s village of Holepur has already started adopting baseball.

“Rinku switched from cricket to javelin before cross-over to baseball,” said his father Bramhadin Singh. “But with telephonic guidance from Rinku, youths here have already started practising.”

“He was often dubbed a loafer because he played sport,” said his mother Antaraja Devi. “Now every villager prays for a loafer like him.”

THE JAPAN TIMES

November 27, 2008

Pirates sign pitchers from India

PITTSBURGH (AP) The Pittsburgh Pirates hope Rinku Singh and Dinesh Patel really do have million-dollar arms.

The two 20-year-old pitchers, neither of whom had picked up a baseball until earlier this year, signed free-agent contracts Monday with the Pirates. They are believed to be the first athletes from India to sign professional baseball contracts outside their country.

Singh and Patel came to the United States six months ago after being the top finishers in an Indian reality TV show called the "Million Dollar Arm" that drew about 30,000 contestants. The show sought to find athletes who could throw strikes at 135 km per hour or faster.

NEWSDAY

December 12, 2008

Contest lets two Indians become Pirates

By John Jeansonne

Free agency and baseball's winter meetings have nothing to do with this historic contract deal: Two Indians have signed with the Pittsburgh Pirates.

They are 20-year-old Rinku Singh and 19-year-old Dinesh Patel. Not from Cleveland. From India. They are the first from their nation ever to be under contract to an American Major League organization and will be assigned to the Pirates' minor-league roster for spring training in February.

They never had seen or played baseball before finishing one-two in a strangely logical contest/reality TV show called the Million Dollar Arm, the creation of Long Island native Jeff Bernstein (Greenlawn, John Glenn High School) and his business partner at Seven Figures Management in San Mateo, Calif.

Bernstein's colleague, Ashok Vesuvedan, grew up in India, and during a cross-cultural discussion -- Vesuvedan was trying to educate Bernstein about cricket and Bernstein attempting to explain baseball's nuances to Vesuvedan -- Bernstein asked, "Hey, do you think any of these cricket guys can pitch?"

Cricket is India's baseball. A cricket ball is the same size as a baseball, and only slightly harder and heavier (by roughly half an ounce).

"I said, 'What if we do an American idol thing but we substitute baseball for cricket and pitching for singing?' " Bernstein asked.

"We thought, 'Yeah, there's a lot of kids out there.' When you look at the numbers -- 300 million men between 16 and 25 and, when we came up with the idea two years ago, only 15 professional cricket jobs in all of India -- it seemed, from a probability standpoint, there were thousands who'd have the ability to pitch.

"And if you actually found somebody who could play in the majors, you could be broadcasting games back to a hundred million people in India, a Yao Ming kind of situation."

Bernstein -- whose school sport was lacrosse and who described his own pitching ability as "I couldn't throw 70 miles per hour riding in a car going 70" -- hired an agency to sell the idea to Indian television and last spring, the first "The Million Dollar Arm" aired, attracting 30,000 contestants. Among them were Singh and Patel, two rural lads whose athletic background, it turned out, was as javelin throwers.

The Million Dollar Arm Media Recap

"Dinesh had played cricket growing up but both happened to be training with the javelin," Bernstein said. "Rinku never played cricket. We knew there were thousands and thousands of great athletes in India and kids who could throw hard. But the biggest anomaly is that we would find anybody in India who never played cricket!"

The show/contest was set up similar to those interactive kid events at some Major League ballparks -- an oblong, netted cage from pitcher's mound to home plate, with a motorized catcher, a motorized batter who can stand in as a righty or lefty, and a speed gun.

Contestants trained for a week on the gizmo, then had 10 throws to see who could produce the most strikes over 85 miles per hour, earning 10 more pitches to go for a million dollars by throwing three strikes at 90 mph-plus.

Neither Singh -- a southpaw -- nor Patel -- a righthander -- won the million, but Singh's first-place prize was \$100,000 and Patel, who placed second, was invited to join Singh for six months of training in Los Angeles with Southern California pitching coach Tom House. Both have begun to surpass 90 mph on a regular basis.

Thirty-eight big league scouts, representing 28 teams, showed up at the two Indians' first open tryout, and another 20 or so came back a second time. The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette reported that both were offered contracts in the \$10,000 range and an invitation to spring training.

"We found two guys," Bernstein said, "when we'd have been happy to find just one, and happy if someone completed the training and didn't embarrass himself. They've been great. These kids are living at my house in L.A., walking distance to the university.

"They're from rural India. They didn't speak any English when they got here, but they've got computers, a Hindi dictionary, they watch Baseball Tonight every night on TV and watch action movies." Their English shows itself to be remarkably competent in their current blogs posted on themilliondollararm.com as they describe their dream to "play pitcher" for a professional U.S. team.

When they originally telephoned home, their parents were unable to grasp that it was daytime in California while it was night in India. The first time they watched a baseball game they wondered whether the shortstop was being penalized, since every other infielder had his own base. They were instructed that what cricket calls a bowler is a baseball pitcher, that a wicket-keeper is a catcher, a skyer is a fly ball, a pitch is a diamond, a beamer is a beanball.

And now, two Indians are Pirates.

PITTSBURGH POST-GAZETTE

February 8, 2009

Spring Preview 09: Young pitchers from India hope to impress in camp **By Colin Dunlap**

This much both sides have agreed on: The Pirates signing two pitchers from India in November was about talent, not publicity.

Now, what Rinku Singh and Dinesh Patel -- and probably more important, Pirates brass -- do with that talent in the next few months remains to be seen.

Training Camp

Pirates pitchers and catchers report to Bradenton, Fla., Friday to begin the journey that is the 2009 season. Before that happens, check out the Post-Gazette's spring training preview in Friday morning's editions. It will include a camp roster, spring schedule and story lines fans will want to follow during the countdown to opening day.

"This is not a joke," Singh said. "We are going to work hard."

Of the move, which spawned from Patel and Singh emerging from more than 30,000 entrants in a "Million Dollar Arm" contest in India in March, Pirates director of player development Kyle Stark said, "It falls in line with the decisions we have been making. We are not focused on making decisions to appease people, but to make this organization a consistent winner. Whether it is our trades, or the free agents we pursued, we have proven that the decisions we've made are to make the Pittsburgh Pirates a winning organization. Making this decision, we have that same goal in mind."

On Thursday, Singh, a 20-year-old left-hander, and Patel, a 19-year-old righty, got their first look at Pirate City in Bradenton, Fla., spending the morning touring the facility. The pair has been in the United States -- mainly in California working with University of Southern California pitching coach Tom House -- since May 5.

But Thursday provided their initial look into where they hope to impress Pirates officials when they take part in minor league camp this spring.

"It was very good, the Pirate City was very good," said Patel, who says his fastball has topped out at 93 mph in recent workouts in California. "The grounds were beautiful."

Beautiful, yes, but Pirate City for Patel and Singh will be a place to work as hard as they can to get noticed, in a baseball sense, even if it will be

The Million Dollar Arm Media Recap

impossible for people to not notice them by virtue of being the first Indian-born players signed by a Major League club.

Don't expect the pair to rocket through the organization. More than likely they will participate in extended spring training once camp breaks and, perhaps, participate with the Gulf Coast League Pirates of the Rookie League.

"It is the same as if we signed two guys out of the Dominican [Republic] or Venezuela," Stark said. "It is going to be a long process, just as it would be for any young pitchers."

There is a little something more to it, though, because of the media attention Singh and Patel have received. Anyone would be hard pressed to find a pair of baseball players -- who have never played in a game in their lives -- who have had features done about them on ESPN's "Outside the Lines", in ESPN the Magazine, on CNN, in The Wall Street Journal, Newsday, The Australian newspaper and on SBS Sport in Australia.

There has been a request by the Associated Press to do something for the television arm of its operation, and ABC News is in the process of lining something up next week.

That said, there won't be a throng of media following Singh and Patel around, documenting every windup, delivery or step off as is commonplace when Japanese players make their way to America. The reason is simple: The two Indian players have a long way to go, and their interaction with major leaguers will be limited.

"We have received some requests," Pirates' media relations director Jim Trdinich said. "But, a lot of people think they are in [the] Major League camp and that is not the case. We've kind of told people that the best time to do something on these guys would be the first week of March, when everyone has a better feel for everything."

Patel and Singh are also going to spend the immediate future trying to get a better feel for everything.

"Right now, we are learning about everything," said Singh, who says his fastball been clocked at 90 mph. "We are playing the game and learning about everything. It will take more practice and more learning about baseball."

And then, just maybe ...

"I want to reach my goal of pitching for the Pittsburgh Pirates," Patel

The Million Dollar Arm Media Recap

said. "For these next years, it will be single-A or double-A and we will be learning.

"But we have developed already in just a short time and we didn't know anything about baseball. I think we can both do it, I think we can both, some day, pitch for the Pittsburgh Pirates."

INDIA EMPIRE

February 2009

Playing Hardball

By Rakesh K. Simha

Pitchforked from obscurity in Uttar Pradesh into the fairytale world of the Pittsburgh Pirates, pitchers Rinku Singh and Dinesh Patel are creating a minor frenzy – both in the US as well as back home. But are they good enough to hit the major league or just props in an American publicity stunt?

Even credibility-stretching Bollywood screenwriters would have found this obscurity-to-fame, rags-to-riches story hard to pitch. Twenty-year-old Rinku Singh, the son of a lorry driver from Bhadohi, Uttar Pradesh, and the youngest of nine children, wins the “Million-Dollar Arm”----- competition by throwing a baseball faster and more accurately than 30,000 other contestants. The feat earns him a \$100,000 cash prize, six months intensive coaching and the opportunity to try out for America’s leading baseball teams.

Young Bucs: The real test for Dinesh Patel (left) and Rinku Singh will begin in April when baseball season starts. When veteran major league scout Ray Poitevint comes to India to see whether Singh has potential, he spots Dinesh Patel, who had earlier fouled his competition throw. Patel throws harder but isn’t as accurate but still manages to impress Poitevint, who signs him up. Brought up in Varanasi by his uncle and grandmother after his parents found they could not afford to raise him, the strapping 19-year-old gets \$2500 and six months training in southern California.

Singh and Patel are the first Indian players to be signed by a major US baseball team, but amazingly they hadn’t heard of baseball until last year. Today, they are undergoing intensive training to become pitchers for the Pittsburgh Pirates, a team that has seen better days in the highly competitive Major League Baseball but now wants to return to its winning ways.

The players, with shoulder strength gained through their initial training to become javelin throwers, are minor celebrities in the big boisterous world of baseball. They have a loyal fan following, a busy blog, and they run into celebrities that most people only read about. And, of course, the American media can’t have enough of them.

Young Bucs: The real test for Dinesh Patel (left) and Rinku Singh will begin in April when baseball season starts. Their success has already sparked a small-scale frenzy for baseball in India. J.B. Bernstein, managing director of The Million Dollar Arm, described the contest as an Indian baseball version of American Idol, the popular US television show where contestants compete to be the next new music star. The official Major League Baseball website, MLB.com, reports 500,000 to 1 million participants are expected to compete in the second season of The Million Dollar Arm.

The Million Dollar Arm Media Recap

Says Brahmadin Singh, Singh's father from Bhadohi: "With telephonic guidance from Rinku, youths in our village have already started practising seriously to become million-dollar pitchers like Rinku." Adds his mother Antaraja Devi: "He was often dubbed a loafer because he played sport. Now every villager prays for a loafer like him."

Their transformation from struggling javelin throwers to assimilation in America is nothing sort of miraculous. The first thing that the pair did on learning they had been signed up by the Pirates was to go online to find out where Pittsburgh was! They brushed up on their English by watching baseball games on cable TV – through which they encountered key terms such as "curveball" and "strike" for the first time.

Young Bucs: The real test for Dinesh Patel (left) and Rinku Singh will begin in April when baseball season starts. America was virtually like another planet for the plucky pitchers. They talk about the first time they encountered a water fountain. They turned the knob and tried to catch the water with their hands; they had no idea you could put your mouth over it. Their coach taught them how to operate the washing machine and dishwasher. Patel still has trouble fathoming the idea that you can pick up the telephone to order pizza delivered right to your door. "We like Chinese food, pork ribs, banana pancakes, turkey franks, soup, the choice of food is amazing," they say.

Singh, a 6-2, 195-pound left-hander was a month away from joining the army. His entire family – he is the youngest of eight children – worked in agriculture, where his dad drove a vegetable truck. Now, Singh says, his father pays someone else to drive the truck while he stays home.

Patel, a 5-11, 185-pound right-hander isn't sure whether his family – he has two brothers and one sister – quite understands what's happening. "I miss my family," says Patel, who, along with Singh, learned English watching *Baseball Tonight* while also taking online courses.

There are a million distractions in Los Angeles, yet they refuse to let anything deter them from their dream. Instead of accepting any invitations to campus parties they have asked for earplugs so they can sleep. "We want to pitch, and hopefully one day make the major leagues," Patel says. "That's why we're here. We'll do everything in our power to make it happen."

They remain a humble pair and haven't lost any of their rustic charm. Most urban reporters would roll their eyes, but I didn't recoil when they addressed me as 'Rakesh Sir'. I figured I was in excellent company—Barry Bonds Sir, Mark Ciardi Sir, JB Sir, and even the bizarre Santa Sir!

"This is the most amazing thing I've been part of," says Tom House, University of Southern California pitching coach, who has spent the last six months training the pair. "This is like medical science. It's turning raw athletes into pitchers. You wouldn't believe how far they've come."

The Million Dollar Arm Media Recap

However, the hype and the hoopla haven't translated into any major moves professionally. While 30 talent scouts turned up to see them pitch after they completed training, they were signed by the Pirates as free agents for just \$10,000 each, suggesting that nobody expects the pair to play any Major League games in the near future. A Pirates representative says the two players are likely to spend the next few years in the minor leagues honing their skills. Coach House is cautiously optimistic: "I know they can pitch, but we have to teach them how to play the game. It is well worth the risk." Indeed, the entire exercise seems like a shrewd marketing gamble. Ever since signing the two Indians, the Pirates, who won their last World Series title 30 years ago, have been besieged by the media from around the world, including India. Singh and Patel will now take part in the Pirates' Minor League spring training next year. Their promoters hope they can make it as professionals, saying such success would boost baseball in cricket-mad India in the same way that Yao Ming's move to the NBA created a fan base for basketball in China.

"The Pirates are committed to creatively adding talent to our organisation," Pirates general manager Neal Huntington said in a statement. "By adding these two young men, we are pleased to not only add two prospects to our system but also hope to open a pathway to an untapped market."

Singh and Patel are hopeful they can play hardball with the big boys. They say they'd like to win the World Series for the Pirates. "We are extremely proud to represent India in the US. No Indian has ever done this before so we are trying very hard to show the USA that India has good athletes too; that Indians can do anything."

The pitchers want their dream run to continue. "It's hard to put in words what all of this has meant to us," Singh says. "This is a world we didn't even know existed. We're living it now. "We don't want it to end."

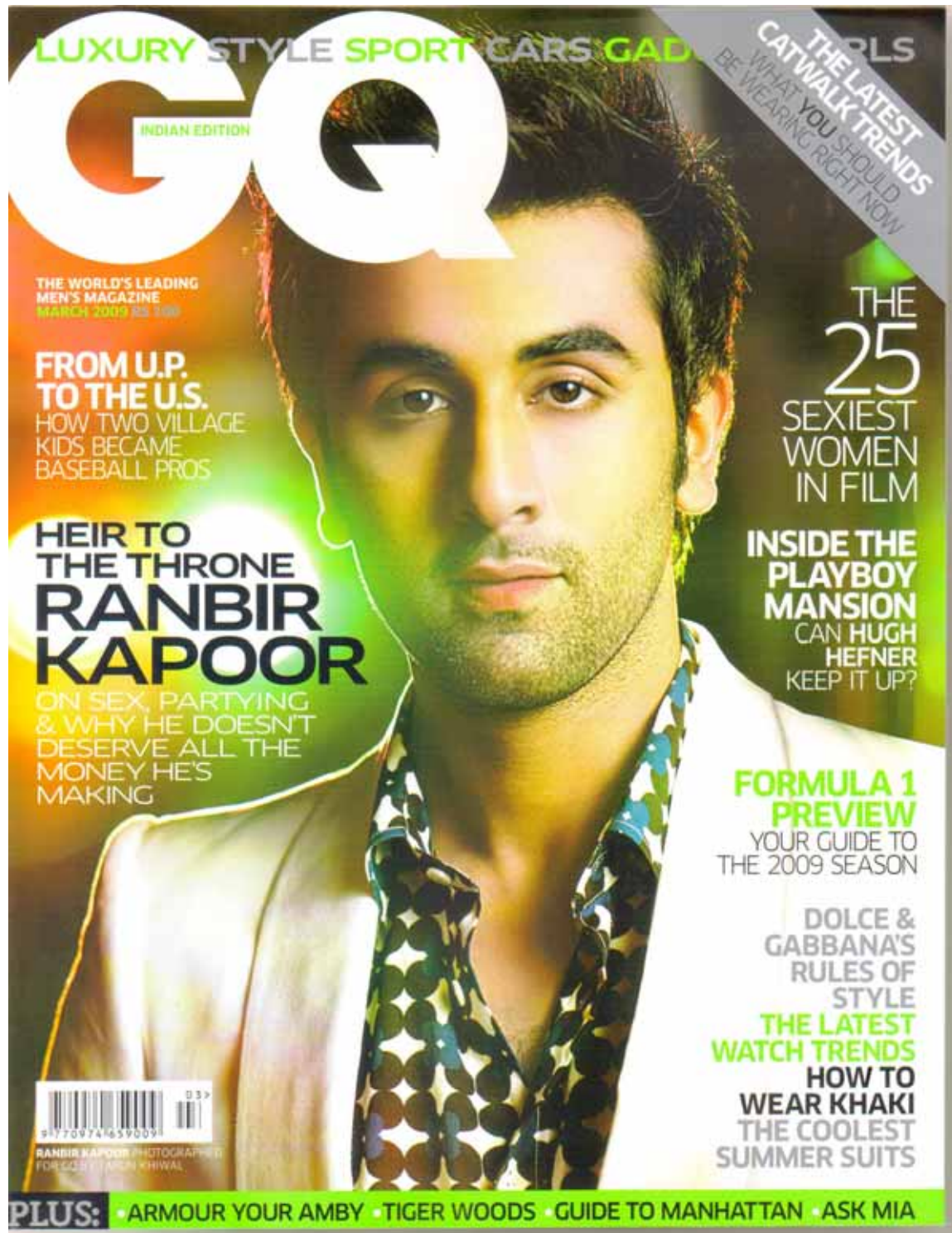
BASEBALL, THE NEW CRICKET?

Baseball will have a hard time running against cricket in India, but there are similarities:

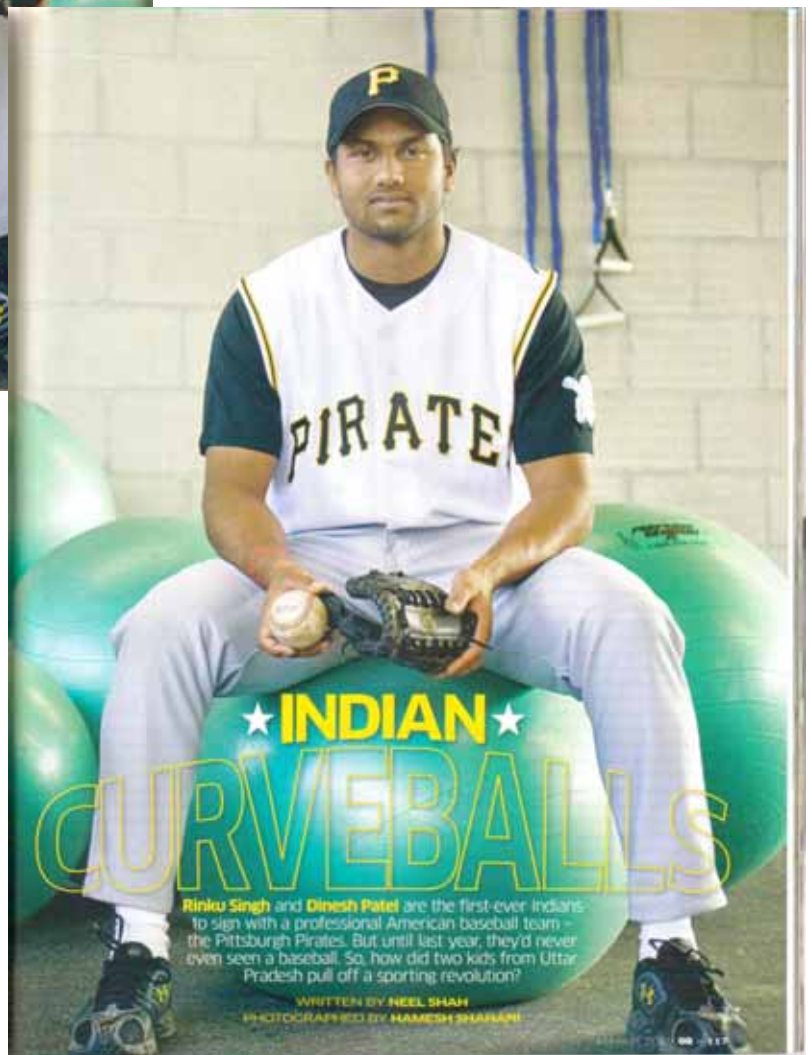
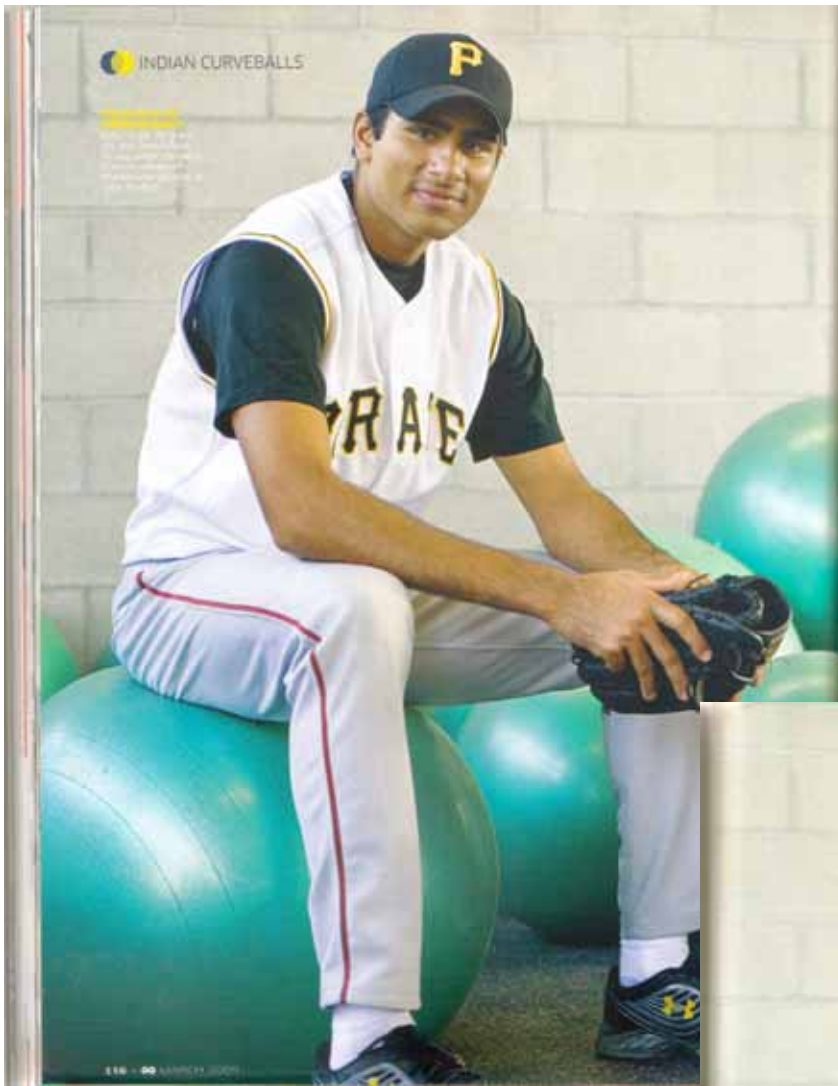
	Cricket	Baseball
Players	11	9
Thrower	Bowler	Pitcher
Hitter	Batsman	Batter
Backstop	Wicketkeeper	Catcher
Scoring	Runs	Runs
Duration	Innings, 1-2 (can last 5 days)	Innings, 9
Guidelines	Laws	Rules
Umpires on field	Two	Four
Field shape	Oval	Diamond
Equipment	Leather ball, wooden bat (flat)	Leather ball, wooden bat (round barrel)

Source: International Cricket Council

GQ Magazine – Indian Edition March 2009



The Million Dollar Arm Media Recap



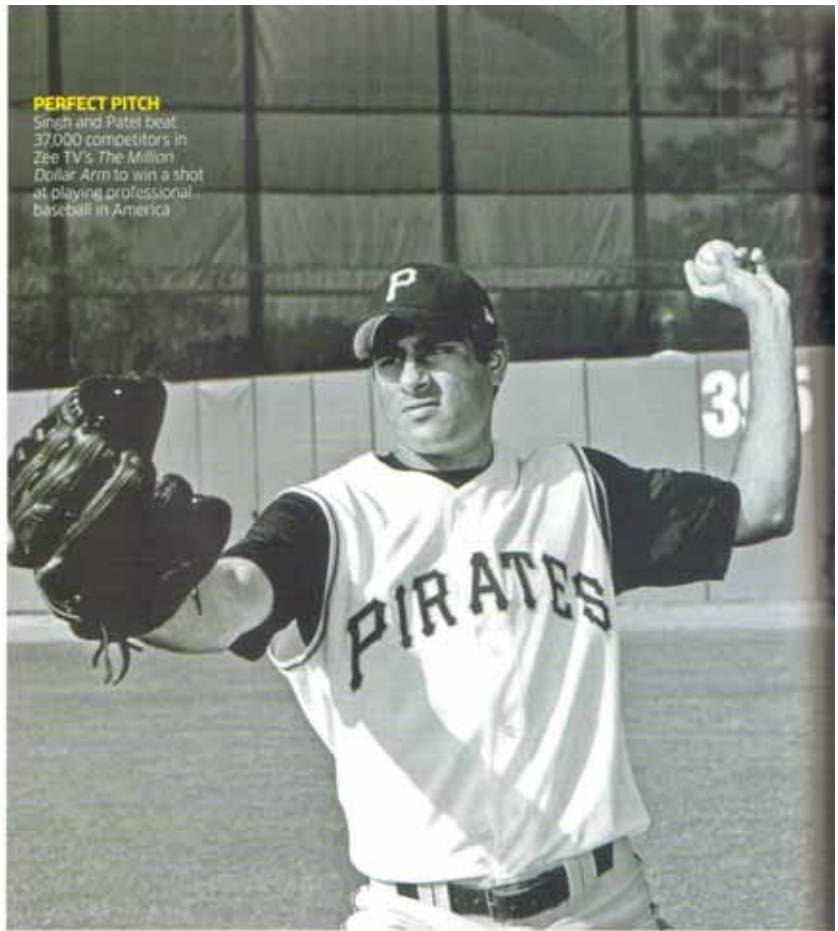
 INDIAN CURVEBALLS

IN THE REST OF THE world, India has a reputation as a great sporting nation – as long as that sport is cricket. In many other sports, our athletes tend not to do so well. Our FIFA ranking, for example, currently stands at 143 (below Kazakhstan and Latvia), and our rugby team hovers somewhere around 81 (below Kazakhstan and Latvia).

But Jeff Bernstein, a brash, affable sports agent who runs the Pro Access agency in Miami Beach, is gambling that his newest clients will start to change all that – even if they have to do it thousands of miles from home. Their names: Rinku Singh, 20 years old, and Dinesh Patel, 19, two unassuming village kids from Bhadohi and Varanasi, respectively, in Uttar Pradesh. They're both amateur javelin throwers, though Bernstein didn't sign them for their ability to hurl a fibreglass spear across a field. Nor, for that matter, does he want them to play cricket, Singh's favourite pastime. No, Jeff Bernstein's plan for turning Singh and Patel into India's next sporting icons has a twist: he wants them to play professional baseball, a sport virtually no one in India knows anything about. Even more bizarrely, he's already found them a home.

Eight months ago, Singh and Patel didn't know a baseball from a bowling ball. Back in the winter of 2007, Bernstein, who represents the marketing interests of a coterie of high-profile athletes, including baseball slugger Barry Bonds and American football stars Barry Sanders and Emmitt Smith, was sitting at his home in Miami Beach with his business partner, Ash Vasudevan, watching the Indian cricket team play Australia on satellite TV. "Ash was trying to explain what was going on, but I had no fucking clue," Bernstein says, as we sit on a couch in the baseball fieldhouse at the University of Southern California, where Singh and Patel have been training for the past eight months. "But the guys were throwing pretty hard, despite the totally different motion." The proverbial light bulb turned on. "I kind of wondered out loud to Ash, 'Could these guys throw a baseball? How fast?'" (In fact, the fastest-ever cricket bowl was recorded at a shade over 100mph, roughly the same as the fastest-ever baseball pitch.)

A born marketer – Bernstein has



PERFECT PITCH
Singh and Patel beat 37,000 competitors in Zee TV's *The Million Dollar Arm* to win a shot at playing professional baseball in America

"I mean, these guys didn't even know how to play catch. They seriously came in thinking that the glove was there to keep their hand warm"

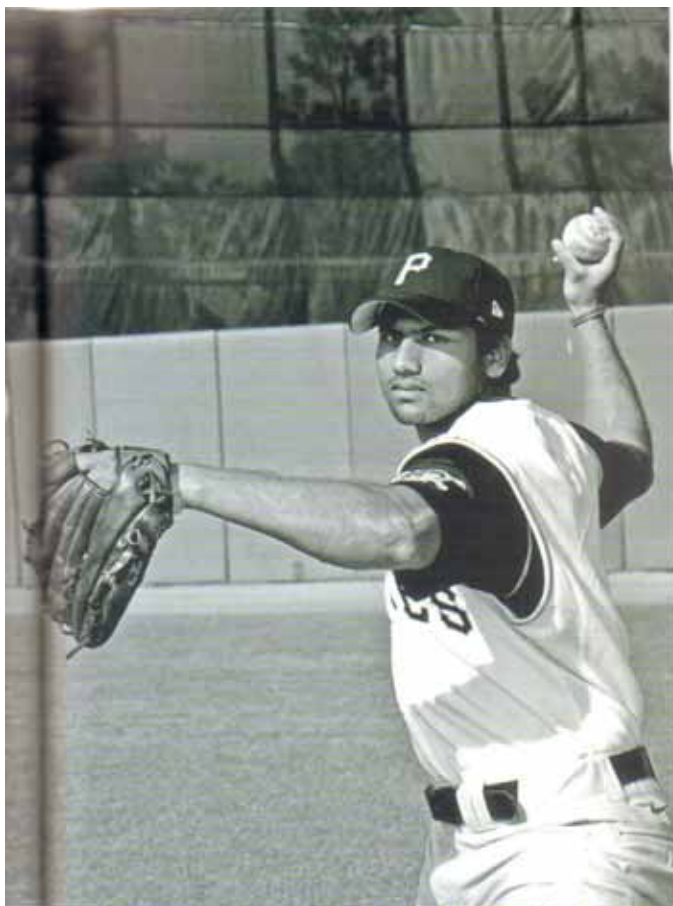
Entourage antihero Ari Gold's verve, but favours flip-flops and coral necklaces over Armani suits – he quickly sprung into action. Within six months, Bernstein and Vasudevan successfully pitched a baseball reality show to a Mumbai-based production house and secured a broadcasting deal with Zee TV. (He declined to discuss the financial terms of the deal, but insists he's not getting rich: "Trust me, if this was a lucrative venture right now, the deal would be public.") The premise of the show, *The Million Dollar Arm*, was simple: throw a ball faster and more accurately than everyone else, and win cash – plus the opportunity to go to America and train with a professional baseball coach.

Filming began in November 2007

and ended in March 2008. Over the show's 11-episode arc, 37,000 kids from 30 different Indian cities tested their arms against a speed gun. The vast majority of contestants had never seen someone throw a baseball, which led to some fairly unorthodox deliveries. "Kids were running up to the mound cricket-style and then jumping, their arms coming in at all these crazy angles, but they were actually generating velocity," Bernstein recalls with a chuckle. "To throw in the mid 80s with no training or coaching, it really made me realize that we were dealing with some very raw, but real, athletes."

The most real of the lot – or at least the most real of the eligible lot; the best prospect was ineligible because he didn't have a passport – turned out to be the 6'2", 88-kilo Rinku Singh. Coiling his arm back and slinging the ball forward while keeping his elbow almost entirely straight, the south-paw Singh ended up taking home the \$100,000 (nearly Rs 50 lakh) grand prize, after throwing a strike at a respectable 87mph. (The "million dollar" prize, while a sexy marketing ploy, was never really within reach: to win it, a contestant would have had to hurl three

The Million Dollar Arm Media Recap



THE AGENT

The revolutionary - some might say crazy - idea of scouring India for new baseball talent came from Jeff Bernstein (below), a brash sports agent from Miami



consecutive strikes above 92mph - not easy for your average major leaguer and effectively Mission Impossible for any neophyte ballplayer.) Ray Poitevint, the former general manager of international operations for the Chicago White Sox and a consultant on *The Million Dollar Arm*, also saw potential in the 5'11", 84-kilo Dinesh Patel, who threw harder than Singh, but who couldn't place the ball within 10 feet of the catcher's mitt. Nonetheless, he recommended Patel be invited to train with Singh as well. Patel netted \$2,500 (Rs 1.23 lakh).

It is a literal rags-to-riches tale for them both. At the time, Singh's dad was supporting his family of nine by driving a vegetable truck for Rs 1,200 a month in Holepur, a small village near Varanasi; his son's windfall made them

the richest family in a 100-mile radius. Patel's parents were so poor that they had sent him to live with his uncle. After learning of her son's victory in a sport she'd never heard of, Singh's mom, Antaraja Devi, told the *Hindustan Times*, "He was often dubbed a loafer because he played sport. Now every village prays for a loafer like him."



"LET'S BE HONEST: IT'S NOT like these guys are throwing 105mph. The chances that they'll ever play in the majors are slim. But say they just end up becoming nobody, run-of-the-mill relief pitchers in Triple A? That would be huge." That is Marty Butterrick, director of the Rod Dedeaux Research and Baseball Institute (RDRBI) at the University of

Southern California. It is RDRBI that has been tasked with transforming Singh and Patel from a novelty act into real pro prospects. Butterrick, a graduate of USC's Marshall School of Business, started the institute in October 2007 with his friend Tom House, a former baseball player and now a well-respected pitching coach for USC.

RDRBI is situated in a Rs 7.3-crore, 9,000-sq-ft facility that overlooks the third-base line of USC's baseball field. Butterrick, who also serves as the head of the university's baseball operations, describes the institute's goal as helping athletes with "injury prevention and rehabilitation while also improving performance"; to that end, he's enlisted personnel from the school's medical centre, Kinesiology department and Sports Medicine department to help with training. In short, it's the perfect laboratory in which to start the labour-intensive process of building a ballplayer from scratch.

Scratch might be an understatement. "I mean, these guys didn't know how to play catch," says 62-year-old House, who has the easy-going wisdom of a grandfather. "They seriously came in thinking the glove was to keep their hand warm." Not to mention that they didn't speak a word of English. "It wasn't like you could bark orders," House explains. "We figured out very early on that we needed to come up with a very hands-on teaching method."

Singh and Patel might not have been ballplayers, but they were decent athletes: they'd both spent the last four years training to qualify for the London Olympics in javelin at the Guru Gobind Singh Sports College in Lucknow, where annual tuition costs Rs 3,500. After running the duo through a battery of physical tests, House concluded that they had enough potential to give it a serious go. "You can't make chicken salad out of chicken shit, even with a ton of mayo," he explains. Still, he had no idea what to expect. "My initial guess was that it would take about a year to get them to the point where we could put them in front of scouts," he says. "Not to teach them everything there is to know about baseball, mind you - just to get them proficient in the art of pitching. But that was just a guess."

Indeed, there wasn't really a template for what RDRBI was trying to

 INDIAN CURVEBALLS

do. Legendary Houston Rockets centre Hakeem Olajuwon, from Nigeria, famously didn't pick up a basketball until the age of 15, but he was also a genetic freak playing a sport that put a premium on sheer athleticism. Singh and Patel aren't genetic freaks. But in House's mind, that didn't matter. They had innate physical competence, and that was enough. What was more important was whether they were coach-able.

"To be honest, it was actually a positive that they had no idea what they were doing," says House. "It's far easier to start from zero than to 'unteach' years and years of bad habits. It's harder to overcome that bad wiring. If a guy has had success with bad delivery, he's gonna have to trust that what you're doing will work. A lot of times, those cases are harder to crack."

Singh and Patel proved eminently mouldable from the get-go. "It was honestly the perfect set-up for a coach," says Pat Ahern, a born-and-bred Southern Californian and former major leaguer who now works at RDRBL. "You'd tell them to run to Santa Monica, and they'd go. They wouldn't know how to get back, of course, but they'd go. Their work ethic was as good as any I'd seen."

For six straight months, Singh and Patel stuck to the same ascetic schedule: Roll out of bed at 6am in their "dorm", a four-storey, 19th-century Victorian house owned by Bernstein and located a few blocks from campus, and schlep downstairs for an hour of yoga and meditation. On-field warm-ups at 7.30am, followed by an hour and a half of conditioning, long toss and arm-strengthening drills. Then a bullpen session (pitching and catching) until 10.30am, followed by an hour of leg workouts. Lunch – usually Chinese from a USC foodcourt washed down with mango iced tea, or else a half-pound of sliced deli meat and cheese smothered in spiced mustard and chased with a big bowl of diced raw red onion – at noon. Core strength training from 1-3pm; media requests and English practice (they love picking up phrases from *Baseball Tonight*) until 5pm; and dinner at 7pm sharp. Afterwards, they pop in a movie – typically an action flick, preferably starring their hero, Dwyane "The Rock" Johnson – though they have

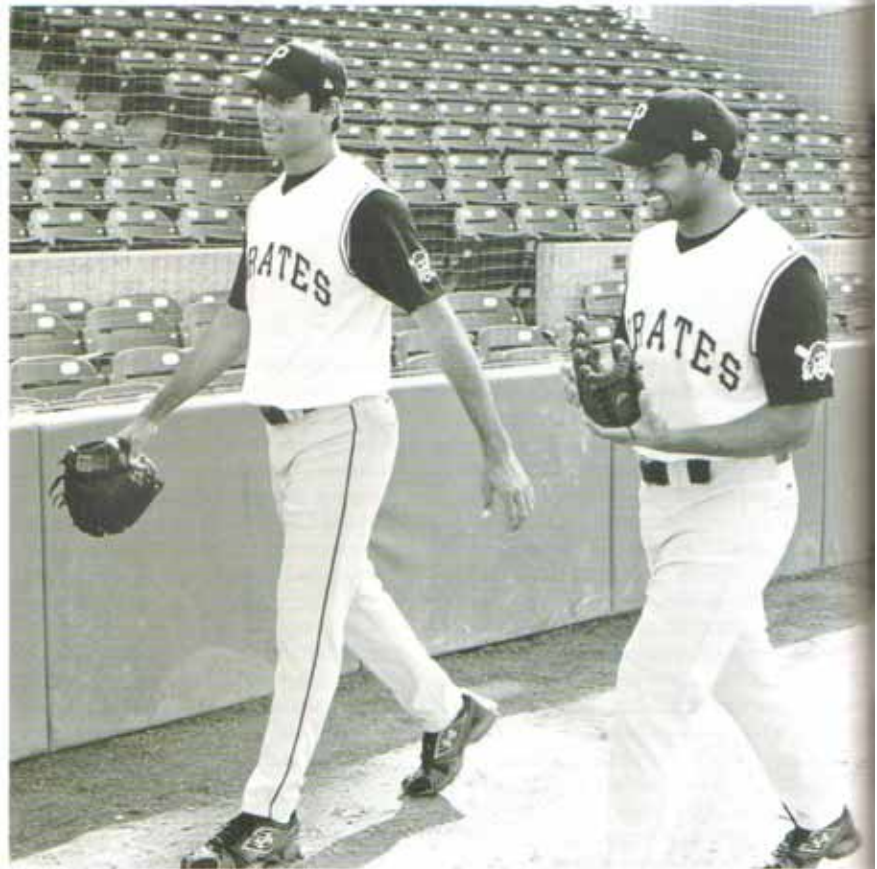
expanded into comedies as their English has improved. (A recent entry from their highly enjoyable "Million Dollar Arm Blog", which they've been keeping – in English – since arriving in L.A., reads: "We also watching *The Cable Guy*. The movie actor very good faces. He very crazy man, doing many crazy things in movie. End not so good." Pretty accurate.) Lights out at 10pm.

No parties, no booze, no USC sorority girls. "I've worked with Japanese, Korean, Taiwanese and Chinese kids, but Rinku and Dinesh have definitely been the most focused," says Bernstein. "You should've seen the Taiwanese kids. They couldn't walk to practice

"I've worked with Japanese, Korean, Taiwanese and Chinese kids, but Rinku and Dinesh have been the most focused"

without chasing after girls. These guys had blinders on."

A month into their stay, Bernstein took the kids over to Barry Bonds' house, a sprawling estate perched on top of a mountain bluff in Beverly Hills. (Singh and Patel are probably the only two individuals in Los Angeles who consider driving in the city to be an orderly affair; "If you hit somebody at home, nobody stops," Patel says.) Patel's eyes get as wide as saucers when he discusses the home of "Mr Bonds sir". "A very fine house. Swimming pool, movie theatre, gym, a mirror that turns into a TV. And lots of animal heads," he says with a grin, referring to Bonds' sizable taxidermy collection. When Bonds told them that he thought that a good time for a man to start a family was in his mid-thirties, "we almost fell out of our chairs, we were laughing so hard," recalls Patel. All of their friends back home are married with kids. Yet, when a brave Indian girl came around to the house with a tin of *mithai*, "we told her



thank you but we weren't interested," says Singh. "We only focus on baseball."

That much was evident to House. "You need that baseline of talent. But you also need the work ethic to develop it, and to be sociable. Testosterone can turn teenagers into assholes. But from the beginning, these kids got along with everyone. It made for a complete and unconditional acceptance of what we were teaching." (Perhaps too unconditional: late one night, within the first few weeks of the kids' arrival in LA, Bernstein received a phone call from the front desk at the local Radisson Hotel, where they were staying at the time. The concierge told him that a guest had complained that it sounded like someone was getting "beaten and whipped" in Singh and Patel's room. When Bernstein went to investigate, he found the half-dressed Singh and Patel taking turns whipping rolled-up towels into baseball mitts as hard as they could – a drill House had taught them. "Whap! Whap! That's what they were

doing all night," laughs Bernstein.)

Slowly but surely, they started to resemble actual baseball pitchers. Singh and Patel arrived in LA at around 20 per cent body fat; after six months of intense workouts and creatine shakes, they'd cut that number by more than half. After six months – half a year ahead of schedule – House felt he'd got them to the point where they could throw in front of scouts with a degree of respectability. During practice, Patel's fastball hovered at around 92-93mph and had touched 95mph, a benchmark House calls "elite". Singh mixed up his 90mph fastball with a split-fingered changeup. Both had control issues, but "they were probably 70 per cent there, in terms of mechanics and delivery," says House. (The other parts of their game didn't progress as quickly. "In the field, well, we at least got them to where they can defend themselves from getting hit in the chops," says Ahearne. As for hitting a ball with a bat, "currently, they're what you'd call an out in the line-up," he says, diplomatically.)

Bernstein scheduled the tryout for the first week of November 2008, in Tempe, Arizona. Thirty-eight scouts from 20 teams made the trek, most out of curiosity. "It's not like you're going to send all of your scouts over there to watch, but you never want to be left out, either," Cleveland Indians general manager Mark Shapiro told *USA Today*. "You never know what will happen. It's a country that's been unexplored."

The results were less than spectacular. Until Tempe, Singh and Patel had never pitched in front of anyone other than their coaches, or anywhere other than the pristine mound at USC. They were rattled. A number of their early pitches sailed wildly over the catcher's head and into the backstop. "After six balls, Dinesh looks over at me and goes, 'Coach House, mound no good!' They were slipping in the landing area and just not comfortable. It was the first time I'd seen them spooked."

"We didn't throw as hard as usual," Singh says solemnly. "We were very disappointed."

Singh topped out at 84mph. Patel clocked 89mph. Neither demonstrated much by way of command or movement. The majority of the scouts left unconvinced of the viability of India to be a conduit of top-level talent. "Major

League Baseball is about winning at the major-league level, not social experiments," a scout for the Seattle Mariners told *The Arizona Republic* after the botched tryout. "There are an awful lot of players further along."

A week went by without a single inquiry from a team. Realizing that his two clients were about to die on the vine, Bernstein quickly went about patching together a second tryout. Eleven days later, he had convinced reps from the New York Yankees, Texas Rangers, Toronto Blue Jays and Pittsburgh Pirates – none of whom had been in Tempe – to come to USC to watch the kids pitch in a more comfortable environment.

His persistence paid off. Throwing on their home turf in front of fewer spectators and cameras, Singh and Patel found the rhythm that had been missing in Arizona. Their pitches were crisper and had more pop, with Singh hitting 93mph and Patel 90mph. A week later, House called them into his office and told them the good news: the Pittsburgh Pirates had offered both of them contracts. Singh and Patel were officially the first-ever Indian-born athletes to sign with a professional American sports team. (Their first celebratory move? Getting on Google and figuring out where, exactly, Pittsburgh is.)



PITTSBURGH DIDN'T DISCLOSE THE TERMS of the deals, but the *New York Times* reported that Singh and Patel each signed for less than \$10,000 (Rs 4.9 lakh), meaning their tryout didn't exactly start a bidding frenzy. Whether or not they're ultimately successful doesn't really matter, though. "We're planning on having 70,000 contestants when we film the second season of *The Million Dollar Arm* later this year," says Bernstein – twice as many as before. "There's tons of talent in this country that's being passed by because professional leagues, even in cricket, really aren't developed. And all you need is one break-out star – a Yao Ming – to really kick-start things."

Singh and Patel are still hoping it'll be them. They started spring training in Florida in February, the beginning of the real battle. "We just looking to work hard and play baseball," says Patel, in English. "We love the baseball." ☺



THE PIONEER
Yao Ming, from Shanghai, China, topped the US NBA draft in 2002 to become a highly successful basketball player with the Houston Rockets. Can an Indian do something similar?

USA TODAY

March 3, 2009

Pirates pitching imports from India are a work in progress

By Paul White, USA TODAY



BRADENTON, Fla. — Every team is looking for the million-dollar arm. The Pittsburgh Pirates signed one — and he brought along a friend who throws even harder.

Pitchers Rinku Singh and Dinesh Patel are trying blend in among the nearly 200 players at the Pirates minor league camp. Easier said than done when you're the first two players from India to come to a major league organization and are learning the language and the rules of a game you'd never heard of a year ago.

"Sometimes it's easy, sometimes it's hard," says Patel, a 20-year right-hander with a 90-mph fastball. "To throw a strike is really hard."

Patel finished second to Singh, 19, among more than 30,000 entrants on a reality show in their homeland called "Million Dollar Arm." The actual prize for who could throw a baseball the hardest was \$100,000, plus the opportunity to come to the USA for coaching, after which the show's promoters hoped to showcase the winner for major leaguers.

Singh got the money — his first purchase was a truck for the family in which he is the youngest of nine children — but Patel also was invited to come along to the USA. They spent six months working in California with former major league pitching coach Tom House and the Pirates signed them to minor league contracts after watching them throw last November.

"There were enough things to like," says Kyle Stark, Pirates director of player development. "They're unbelievably eager, unbelievable learners."

The Million Dollar Arm Media Recap

And there's so much to learn.

Patel says one term he has down after hearing it so often is "release point."

"The goal this year is to get a foundation established," Stark says. "We have a program in place (for all minor leaguers) on the rules, history, the history of the organization, situational play. We've backed it up for them."

They don't look out of place going through basic drills. Their previous athletic experience amounts to throwing the javelin for their secondary schools in India. Patel throws harder, Singh has better control. Singh regularly outruns most of the rest of the camp in distance runs around the minor league complex.

They're also not out of place in the clubhouse and rec room at Pirate City, where minor leaguers live in a dormitory.

"They're all my friends," says Singh, who like Patel spoke no English when they arrived in the USA. "They're all my brothers. They teach me English."

Stark hopes they can progress enough this spring to get into a game or two this summer in the Gulf Coast League, and come back next spring on a par with the other rookie-leaguers.

Now that they've seen the competition for a job in professional baseball, Patel says, "Yes, we can do this."

CNBC.COM

March 9, 2009

Movie In The Works For Indian Pitchers

Posted By: Darren Rovell



The Million Dollar Arm

A couple weeks ago, I told the story of Rinku Singh and Dinesh Patel, the two pitchers that the Pittsburgh Pirates signed from India after they competed in a reality show called “The Million Dollar Arm.”

We’re not sure how this story is going to end, as the two are likely headed to extended Spring Training before potentially getting assigned to Single-A ball, but it’s already a great story when you think about the fact that the kids had never picked up a baseball before this contest.

It’s such a good story that former pitcher and Hollywood producer Mark Ciardi is now shopping their tale.

“The bar is set really high, but there are unique elements to their story that are very compelling,” said Ciardi of Mayhem Pictures, which produced “Miracle,” “Invincible,” and “The Rookie.”

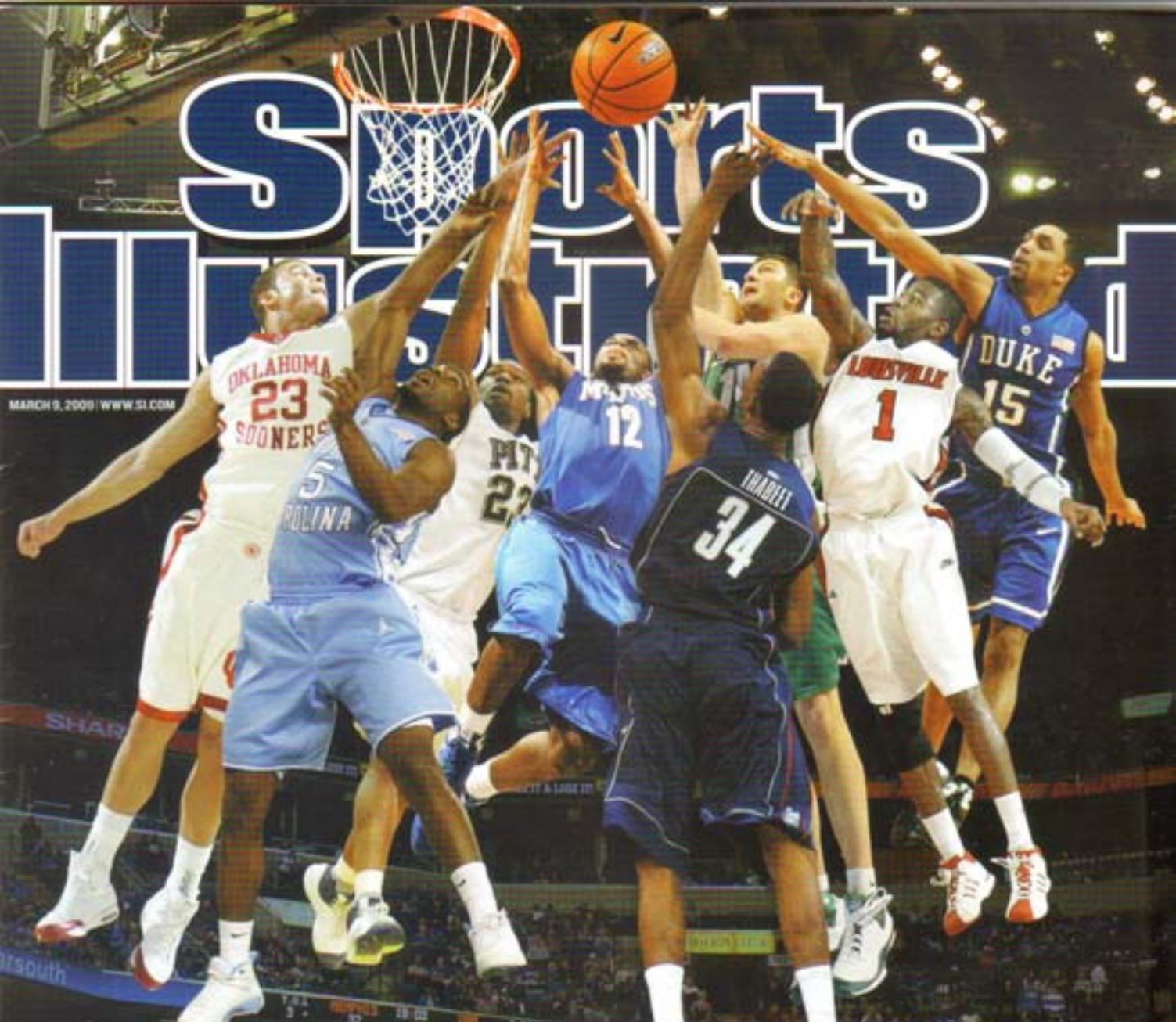
Ciardi said he’s shopping the film rights first to Disney [DIS 16.1699 0.5799 (+3.72%)] and Miramax, but also will pitch to financiers and smaller studios. Ciardi said that it’s in the preliminary stages, but that he already has a writer committed to the project.

Marketing agent Jeff Bernstein, who came up with “The Million Dollar Arm,” said he’ll be looking to secure product placement for the film once there is a taker.

In a tough economy, Bernstein hasn’t had any trouble signing up brands to be affiliated with Singh and Patel. So far, they have deals with Under Armour [UA 13.75 1.31 (+10.53%)] (shoes, batting gloves, apparel), Wilson (glove), Upper Deck and Playoff (autographed cards) and Ethnic Kitchens (frozen Indian food). Bernstein said Rinku and Dinesh also will be in an instructional book and DVD.

Sports Illustrated

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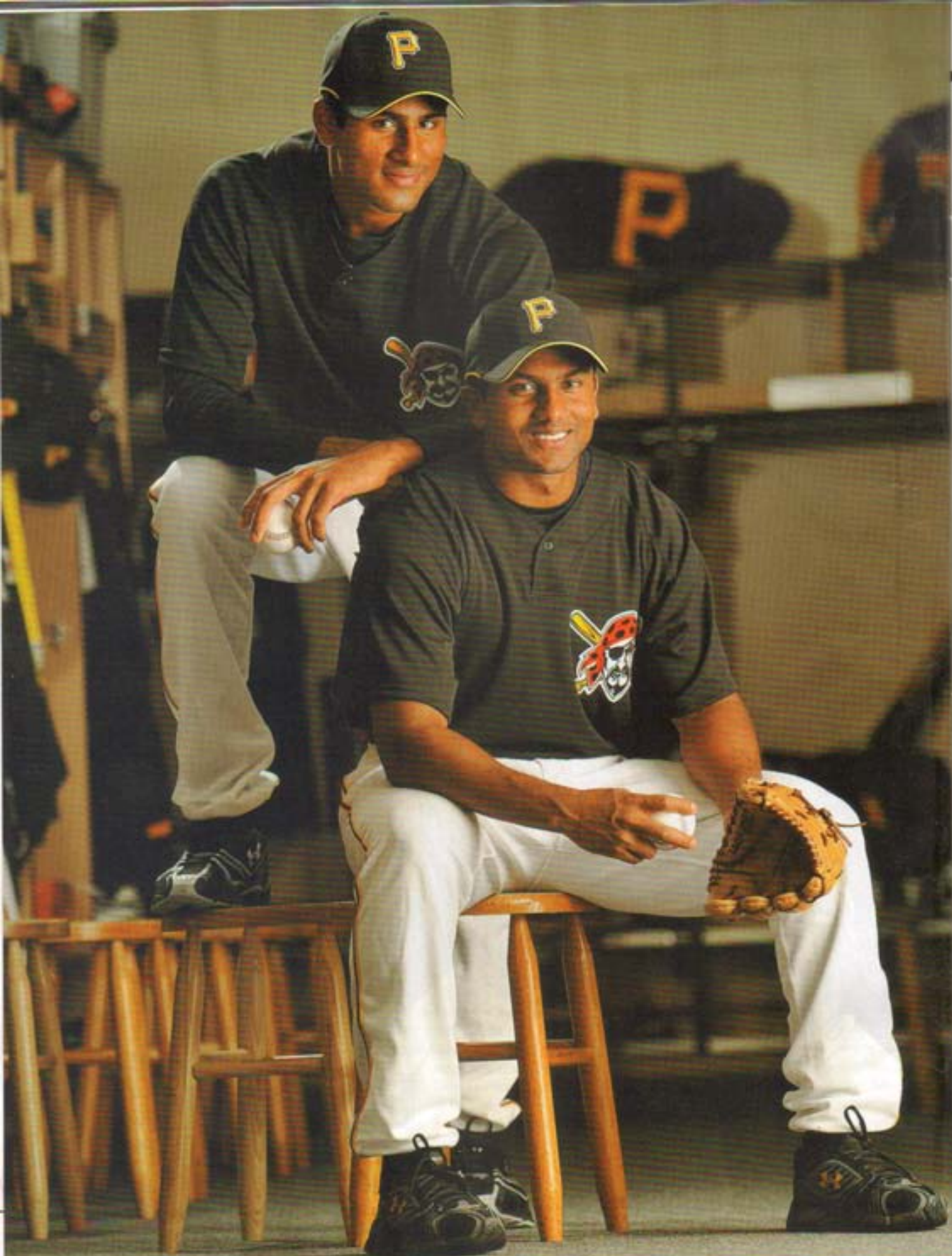
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The Original Amazing Indian Reality Show

Nine months before *Slumdog Millionaire* hit theaters, two teens who had never picked up a baseball undertook their own remarkable odyssey. Now as they pursue the majors, kindly refrain from any further comparisons to the Oscar-decorated movie

BY BOBBY GHOSH | Photographs by Al Tielemans

RINKU SINGH and Dinesh Patel have had it up to here with *Slumdog Millionaire* analogies. Yes, O.K., they get it: They come from impoverished Indian families. Their path out of poverty began with a reality show called *The Million Dollar Arm*. If you must know, they've seen the Oscar-winning Bollywood-inspired blockbuster, and they loved it. *Loved* it. But the two youngsters wish the Americans they meet—journalists, teammates, the kindly lady at the Walmart checkout line in Bradenton, Fla.—would get over it already. Trouble is, Singh and Patel can't explain this to those people. One reason is that they speak very little English and worry about being misunderstood.

The other is that they are culturally conditioned to treat their elders with a diffident deference, which explains why they say, "Yes, sir," more often than GIs at the officers' mess. When a CBS reporter recently asked them about the parallels between their lives and

FOREIGN GAME Before 2008, Singh (far left and top right) and Patel were javelin throwers who hoped to join India's army.

Slumdog, they smiled kindly and shook their heads. "No, sir," they replied. "Not like our life, sir." A few days later, when an NBC reporter asked the same question, they again smiled kindly and shook their heads. "No, sir. Not like our life, sir."

But speaking with me, a fellow Indian who speaks their native Hindi, they could be more candid. Minutes into our first conversation, Singh, the taller and, at age 20, the older of



the two, preemptively asks, "You're not going to compare us to those kids in that movie, are you?" As I begin to answer, the 19-year-old Patel interrupts. "We're not from the slums, and we're not millionaires," he says, softly but firmly. "We are not characters from a film. We want to be taken seriously, as baseball players, as professional pitchers."

Singh finishes the thought: "Yes, sir. Nothing less, nothing more."

BY THE BOOK There's no resource the two pitchers won't explore in order to make up for their late introduction to the game.

After spending a couple of days with them, after they've told me their life stories, I better understand their aversion to *Slamdog* comparisons. Singh's father was a trucker who raised eight children on \$30 a month until a bad back cost him his job and forced him into sharecropping. Patel was raised by his uncle, a construction worker, because his dad, an intermittently employed tailor, didn't make enough to raise three kids. Both boys spent time working on farms in the punishing 130° summers of their native Uttar Pradesh state, located in the Indian north, to supplement their families' income. But as poor as they were, the Singh and Patel families were at least one step removed from panhandling—and that is a matter of honor vital to their self-image. "We missed a meal now and again, but we always had a roof over our heads," says Singh, stiffening his back in pride. "We never had to steal or beg or forage in garbage dumps."

BASEBALL LORE is littered with stories of kids who overcame seemingly insurmountable hurdles—physical, cultural, linguistic—to make it



Patel giggles as we watch the video from the reality show. "Nobody told us how to [throw a baseball] right," he says. "WE NEEDED LESSONS."

to the majors: the Dominican teens who used milk cartons for gloves or the Cuban youths who used broomsticks for bats. But Singh and Patel are attempting a whole new kind of leap. How many youngsters, after all, arrived in this country with dreams of baseball greatness without having ever played a *single game*?

Around this time last year neither Singh nor Patel had so much as laid eyes on a baseball. They were both training to be javelin throwers at a state-run institute in Uttar Pradesh for promising young athletes. Their game plan was simple enough: to win enough medals at national meets to draw the interest of recruiters from the Indian army. That would lead to a career in uniform, starting at the same relative economic level as a U.S. Army GI. That would bring job security—or at least as much security as can be expected from a job that includes tours in

insurgency-racked Kashmir, where India and Pakistan have fought three wars since 1947. "If we were in India now," says Singh, holding his hands up as if wielding a machine gun, curling his left forefinger around an imaginary trigger, "we'd be fighting terrorists." (Two of his three older brothers are in the armed services.)

Last winter, however, a javelin coach told them about a reality TV show in which the winner could earn big bucks by throwing a ball, *hard*. With their powerful shoulders, the coach reasoned, Singh and Patel might have a chance. "We didn't know it had anything to do with baseball or America or anything like that," says Patel. "We agreed to compete because of the money."

The Million Dollar Arm was the brainchild of J.B. Bernstein, a sports agent based in Northern California who figured that, by the law of averages, a nation of 1.1 billion

people—most of them nuts about cricket—must have plenty of young men capable of throwing 90 mph. More than 30,000 Indians signed up to compete across 30 cities. After three rounds of competition, Singh was declared the winner last March, with a top speed of 89 mph. That earned him \$100,000 (a king's ransom in his hometown of Bhadohi), a Gatorade shower ("I thought, Why are they pouring juice over me?") and a shot at another \$1 million if he could throw three consecutive strikes at 90 mph. (He could not.) Patel, who came in second with an 87-mph pitch, received \$2,500, and both entrants earned a trip to L.A., where they would live and train on the USC campus for the next six months before auditioning for major league scouts.

From footage of the two teens on the TV show it's hard to imagine how they generated that kind of velocity. The lefthanded

too far forward, leaving him slightly off-balance; Bonilla steps in and mimics (with some exaggeration) his mistakes. "Like this, like this," he says, displaying a more compact windup and motion. Singh watches intently and says, "Yes, sir." Then he copies his coach, throwing with less velocity but more correctly—and accurately. Banister, the day's catcher, shouts encouragement. Five or six throws in, Singh begins to turn up the heat. The ball thwacks into the glove of Banister, who nods approvingly. Bonilla arches his eyebrows. "He's ready to bring it, baby!" he exclaims. "Oh, yeah," Banister grins.

"Yes, sir," says Singh, politely. But there's triumph in his eyes.

It's Patel's turn. With his shorter, more muscular frame, he looks less like a natural pitcher. But his arm speed seems to compensate for any physical disadvantages. Having watched Bonilla direct Singh, he's better prepared than his countryman. *Thwack, thwack, thwack.* Banister grunts as each ball smacks the glove. Bonilla stands back, satisfied. "Goooooooooooood," he says. "Goooooooooooood."

IN THE evening after the grueling running drills, Singh is showing off his pool skills in the Pirate City rec room. He's already hustled a member of the clubhouse staff into believing that he

INDIAN SUMMER The Rookie Gulf Coast League is a realistic destination for Singh and Patel (left) this season.



want to learn from him to do that." What, kill a bird in mid-flight? "No, I want to pitch like that."

They also instruct and test each other from a well-thumbed copy of *Baseball for Dummies*. "Single to the right," Patel asks. "Runners on first and third. What do you do?"

"Back up third base," Singh replies.

"Single to the left, runner on first," says Patel.

"Follow flight of the ball, then decide... usually [back up] third."

In any sport, there's only so much you can learn from books or videos. Even Bernstein concedes that his clients have "a 12- to 14-year deficit" relative to their peers. If they were hitters, House says, they'd stand no chance of closing that gap. "But a pitcher, if you have a good delivery, you can learn to strike people out pretty quickly," he says. The Pirates will likely keep Singh and Patel in extended spring training, get them into the Rookie Gulf Coast League and give them lots of short bursts as relief pitchers—at this point, frequency is more important than duration. If the Pirates stick to this plan, House reck-

House found that their **INEXPERIENCE WAS AN ASSET**. "Because they hadn't played before," he says, "they didn't have any bad habits."

Patel bumps fists with Singh. They're learning American hand gestures almost as fast as the language.

The next day Banister watches as a Pirates coach puts six young pitchers through running drills. Singh and Patel are constantly sprinting ahead of the pack, forcing the others to pick up their pace. During breaks between laps, Singh stands ramrod erect while the others collapse onto the turf. "Damn, you're a *ma-chine*," gasps Michael Felix, a minor leaguer who's in his third spring training with Pittsburgh. Singh, not understanding the reference, looks away, embarrassed.

Banister is satisfied with what he's seen so far. "The fact that they have to be first, even in [running drills], tells me these guys want to compete," he says. "They know they have a long way to catch up to the others, but they're not worried about that."

didn't know the game—and promptly beat him. His thunderous break sends balls scattering. "Sometimes, I hit the white ball so hard, it flies off the table," he says, grinning. Clearly, he hasn't yet grasped all the objectives of this game.

With baseball, on the other hand, he and Patel are developing a firm command. In their hostel room they spend hours watching the great pitchers on YouTube—Randy Johnson, a USC alum whom they met briefly in L.A., is a favorite. (They've met Barry Bonds, too, but know next to nothing about A-Rod, and I had to explain the whole sorry steroids scandal to them.) I help them find the video of that Johnson pitch that obliterated a dove during a 2001 spring training game. "That's amazing," Patel says. "Add it to my favorites. I

don't want to do anything else."

Do Singh and Patel have a realistic shot at the majors? It's a long shot, and they're smart enough to set realistic goals—for now. Patel says the low A squad may be within their reach this summer; Singh thinks high A is feasible. But that's still months away. For now, these two farm boys from Uttar Pradesh are content to push themselves harder and harder at Pirate City. "Learning, learning, learning... all the time," Singh says. "We don't want to go out, don't want to do anything else."

Before I leave, they ask me if I can help them learn a few phrases of Spanish, the better to communicate with Bonilla. The first phrase they want to learn?

Si, señor. □

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