Fox Alumnus a Major Player in Inspiring Disney’s Million Dollar Arm Movie

Ash Vasudevan, PhD ’96, describes himself as being driven to make a difference and drawn to the unknown.

Case in point: He co-founded a nationwide talent search in India to find the next big-league-caliber baseball pitcher in a country where cricket dominates sports. Launched in 2007, that reality TV competition spanned a dozen cities and attracted 35,000 participants.

The theory behind the competition is that innate athletic ability can be applied across sports requiring similar skills, such as from cricket to baseball. It culminated in 18-year-olds Rinku Singh and Dinesh Kumar Patel—javelin throwers who disliked cricket and had never heard of baseball—becoming the first Indians to sign professional sports contracts in North America (both with the Pittsburgh Pirates).

By now the story might sound familiar. Disney’s Million Dollar Arm—based on the competition of the same name—premieres nationally May 16 with Vasudevan being played by Aasif Mandvi of The Daily with Jon Stewart.

The movie chronicles the first season of Million Dollar Arm, which Vasudevan launched with sports agent JB Bernstein (portrayed by Jon Hamm) and Will Chang, who has ownership stakes in a number of professional teams, including the San Francisco Giants and the D.C. United. Vasudevan, who co-founded Seven Figures Management with Bernstein and Chang, is managing general partner of San Mateo, Calif.–based Edge Holdings, which creates and funds ventures in technology, media and entertainment.

“Life really would be boring if you didn’t take risks . . . I’m drawn to the uncertainty. It’s the tried-and-true methods I don’t find particularly appealing. I like trying something nobody has tried before.”

Vasudevan has been involved in ventures ranging from reQall, a global business focusing on personal-assistance technology, to Gigante, a documentary about Major League Baseball player Andres Torres, who has attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.

Going to India to find a star pitcher did not resonate with many of Vasudevan’s friends. Some suggested he and his colleagues should recruit in markets such as Japan or South America, which have produced numerous big leaguers, but Vasudevan countered that established scouting systems in those markets are much more likely to identify premier talent, leaving fewer gunslingers available to compete for reality TV.
Production of Season 3 of *Million Dollar Arm* is expected to start in the fall. Before that, of course, Vasudevan and colleagues will experience what it is like to inspire a feature film and to be portrayed in a movie shown around the world.

“The first time I watched myself on the screen, it was weird,” Vasudevan said of Mandvi’s performance. “To see Jon Hamm addressing my character, and reliving some of those conversations, is a lot of fun. We never imagined we would have such a wonderful global platform to tell our story.”