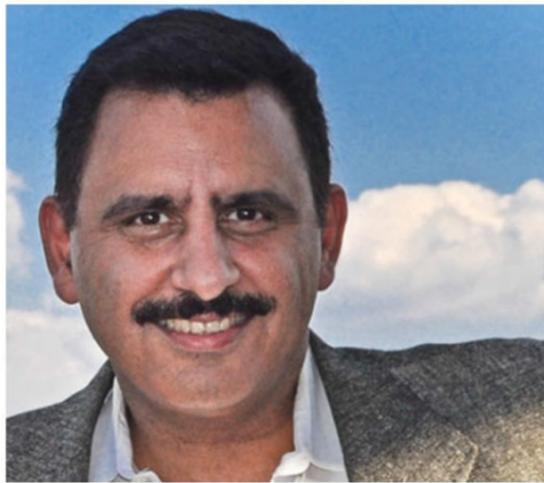


Opinion: 'From Super-kid to Superstar'

'GOD-BYE', 'AN ICON DEPARTS', 'THERE WILL BE ANOTHER YOU', 'END OF AN ERA'



The headlines screamed all across the country. And all across the cricketing world. Even hardnosed American news brands like the WSJ and CNN stood up and applauded the genius.

Well by the time this is out in print there would have been more articles on Sachin than the 33000 odd runs that he has scored in Tests and ODIs. The numbers would be a statistician's delight, and would make for another record of sorts.

But for me Sachin is the little fellow I met when he was the brand ambassador for Boost, stepping into the big shoes of a legend called Kapil Dev. This was nearly 20 plus years ago, and during the shoot, Kapil had his booming, heavy accented voice urging consumers to believe in the Secret of his energy, while Sachin tried his best to emulate the boom and bang of kapil with just about a soft, shrill sound emanating from the shy boy.

He was the little kid who watched kapil, idolized him, and wanted to grow up to play for India. The same came true for Sachin when he became the youngest Test debutante for the country. At 16 years and 205 days, even the big burly Pathan, Imran Khan, felt a bit of kindness (or that's what he claims now) looking at the 16 year old walking out, looking more like a 14 year old.

Well Tendulkar impressed not just the Pakistanis, but the whole world with his arrival, though he did take his time to score his first century.

So was it the case with his brand endorsements.

He was never in any hurry, just grabbing any old brand that came and plonked a cheque on his table.

From Action Shoes, to Band-Aid, to Boost, to MRF, to TVS, to Adidas, to Pepsi, (and now to Coke) , to canon, to Sunfeast, to Castrol to BMW..... the list is a long long one. The funny part is that each brand found something to latch on to that the genius of Sachin had to offer. But then hindsight is the best sight they say.

Let me share with you a little story.

The advertising agency was invited to a 'research presentation ' by one of India's leading research companies, to evaluate whether the brand should continue with Sachin as a brand ambassador or not. The Research agency, after a few hundred slides recommended: " DROP SACHIN" .

Drop Sachin Tendulkar? Even the BCCI and the Selection Committee thinks a million times before that buddy.

The marketing team at the client's end almost totally agreed with the research report, and Sachin was on his way to being caught out of his crease. Stumped.

And so was I. Stumped.

But some how I didn't agree with the findings. Over the next 5 days, long meetings, heated arguments, and umpteen cups of tea, one finally got the brand to renew the Sachin contract. Luckily for both, Sachin and the brand, this would become one of the longest ever partnerships that have been forged in advertising and marketing by a brand and its ambassador.

Whenever I bump into Sachin, and we recount this anecdote, he has a shy almost apologetic smile on his face. But then that's the guy he is.

A colleague who was involved in a TV commercial shoot with Sachin recounted a tale. As a security precaution a guard was always stationed at the door of Sachin's room, who sat on a small plastic chair. As soon as they all walked down the corridor, guard in tow, Sachin looked back, went to his room, opened the door, and placed the chair left behind by the guard outside. No fuss. No frills. The guard ran back to help, but was shooed away by ST.

From the little wonder-child, the super-kid to the superstar ST became a brand himself.

Initially he was the perfect symbol for 'middle-class India' where people dream and people do, and brands from the FMCG sectors, tyres and other categories latched on to what ST offered. The realization of the Indian dream. But Tendu to Suave Sachin was an evolution, and top of the line brands engaging high-net worth individuals, found the boyish charm transforming into a mature business minded leader, as RBS and BMW found ST the right fit.

I may not be the biggest fan of Tendulkar, but I do realise the game will be poorer without him on the field. But I am sure he too realises that its best to go when the folks say "why" and not "when?"

Will retirement mean the end of brands looking for the ST magic?

Post retirement, there will be another set of brands that will line up outside his door, as we are starved of icons that have staying power. The second innings beckons and Sachin Tendulkar is more than ready to take fresh guard. Go well ST.

(Navroze D Dhondy is founder and MD at Creatigies Communications and an avid sports nut. This article appears in the issue of Campaign India dated 18 October 2013. The author blogs at Crocodiledhondy.blogspot.in)

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