

BrandLine

Lord of the drinks

Pepsi's First Ball ka Captain built on cricket-crazy fans' wildest dreams coming true.



Living his dream, the Pepsi way: Gaurav Khetpal (right) with Ravi Shastri at Lord's

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For Gaurav Khetpal, an 18-year-old B.Com student of Lucknow Christian College, it was a huge day. Here he was at cricket's most hallowed venue, the Lord's cricket ground. The India-England ICC T 20 super eights match is going to start shortly. The highly-charged atmosphere resembles an Indian cricket stadium with the tricolour being waved all over the stands. Only the view of the historic pavilion of Lord's lets you know that you are, indeed, at the home of cricket.

Khetpal steps out on to that historic turf along with Indian cricket legend Ravi Shastri. He is to bowl a ball to Shastri, which will be telecast live by ESPN into millions of homes in India. Khetpal would be a hero in his community in Lucknow and in his college. The stage couldn't get any bigger. And, no, he wasn't dreaming. Shastri smacks the ball back smartly and signs it for the over-awed teenager.

Beverages major Pepsi's promotion, 'First Ball ka Captain' (FBKC) has enabled Khetpal and 11 other winners of this contest to live out this fairy tale - being flown to London, all expenses paid, and actually get on to a cricket field and bowl to cricket legends such as Dilip Vengsarkar, Wasim Akram, Nasser Hussain, Jonty Rhodes and Shastri. Later Khetpal tells *BrandLine* that getting to Lord's and stepping out on to the turf is like a dream come true.

The contest required participants to buy eight bottles of Pepsi and exchange it for a scratch card. Khetpal was optimistic he would win - and bought 80 bottles of Pepsi and struck paydirt on his ninth scratch card and a trip to London beckoned. Of the 16 winners in this contest, only 12 could make it to London for the event after some bowling training with Ishant Sharma.

The majority of the winners (six) who got to bowl are from Delhi, a skew, which Punita Lal, Executive Director (Marketing) Pepsi-Co India, says is understandable as the North is more of a cola market than the South and two-thirds of cola sales come from northern markets while the South is more a flavours market.

The campaign itself, she says, proved to be a huge success for brand Pepsi. It helped cut through in a cricket-cluttered environment. "For a country of cricket enthusiasts, this was a lifetime opportunity for many. The overall experience elevated the consumer from being a mere spectator to an active participant of the game. The campaign went beyond just generating sales to building a stronger connect for the brand with the consumer," she explains.

The FBKC was Pepsi's key programme for the first half of the year and claimed the bulk of Pepsi's spends in the period both for above- and below-the-line, adds Lal. The end result of the huge promotional for Pepsi would, of course, be an uptake in volumes and it expects a big percentage of those who have come into the brand lately to stick to it. "Such events help build brand affinity and we expect consumers to have a warm, fuzzy feeling for the brand," says Lal, adding that these kind of promotionals score over one-for-one or discount offers which, while possibly helping volumes surge, in the long term cheapen the value of a brand.

Lal says Pepsi has its weekly consumer tracking score to check on brand salience which will track the effect of a major promo such as this one on the brand. "It's about consumer relevance; if they warm up to a promo then brand salience goes up," adds Lal.

All in all it's been a glorious summer for Pepsi as it's one company that has escaped the recessionary trends with its brands in all categories registering growth upwards of 25 per cent. "What's good is that we are seeing balanced growth across categories unlike earlier where we used to see ups and downs across," Lal elaborates.