

EXCLUSIVE

Field of Dreams

The story of how Rinku Singh and Dinesh Patel came to be all-American Minor League baseball players to be made into a Hollywood film, Joanne Flynn Black reports



Dinesh Patel pitches during the game against the Gulf Coast League Yankees. He pitched a scoreless inning with a strikeout. Below right, Singh, left, and Dinesh Patel proudly show off their Pirates caps. The two were signed on by the Pittsburgh Pirates in November 2008 and recently made their pitching debut for the rookie-level Gulf Coast League Pirates.

It is less than a year and half since the two men have been back to their villages in India.

During this time, they have soaked in their first hot tub, eaten their first slice of pizza and, most importantly, learned to play baseball. Oh, one other thing – their lives are going to become the stuff that Hollywood dreams are made of, literally. Columbia Pictures, part of Sony Studios, has bought the rights to make a movie based on their lives.

When I interviewed them, they shared their thoughts with me. Rinku Singh says, “We cannot believe this is happening. The whole experience has been a dream.”

Dinesh Patel adds, “Our families are excited our story is going to be made into a movie.”

Prior to coming to the United States Rinku and Dinesh had never seen a baseball. They were

two of over 30,000 who tried out for a reality TV series called The Million Dollar Arm. The person who threw the baseball the fastest would win the contest. Since both Rinku and Dinesh were javelin throwers, they used their strength to reach speeds up to 90 mph. Rinku came in first, Dinesh the runner up.

They recently finished their first season playing for the Pittsburgh Pirates a Minor League in Bradenton, Florida. Rinku made baseball history by being the first pitcher from India to earn a win in Minor League baseball game. In addition to learning the game of baseball, they had to adapt to a new way of living.

Ash Vasudevan of The Million Dollar Arm organization says, “The idea for the movie came after Rinku and Dinesh signed with the Pittsburgh Pirates. My partner JB Bernstein was quietly

cultivating the opportunity through his contacts.” He adds, “The process accelerated once Slumdog Millionaire won the Oscar last year. The difference is that our story really happened.”

The concept for the movie was first developed by Mandt Brothers Productions. Joe Roth of Joe Roth Films and Mark Ciardi of Mayhem Pictures are the producers. Ciardi was behind numerous inspirational sports stories including *Invincible*, *The Rookie*, and *Secretariat* which is expected to be released in the fall of 2010.

Will Chang an owner of the San Francisco Giants and one of the visionaries of The Million Dollar Arm concept shared his vision. “The movie on Rinku and Dinesh is going to go a long, long way to not only energize youth in India to learn baseball, but also popularize the sport in India.” He adds, “I’m very excited with the



prospect of developing millions of new baseball fans in India.”

“Needless to say, I am very happy for Rinku and Dinesh,” says Will Chang. “I’m really excited because my good friend Joe Roth, one of the most successful producers in Hollywood, will produce this movie in a first class manner.”

The Million Dollar Arm founders’ goal is that India and other cricket-playing nations become a destination of choice for sourcing and developing baseball talent.

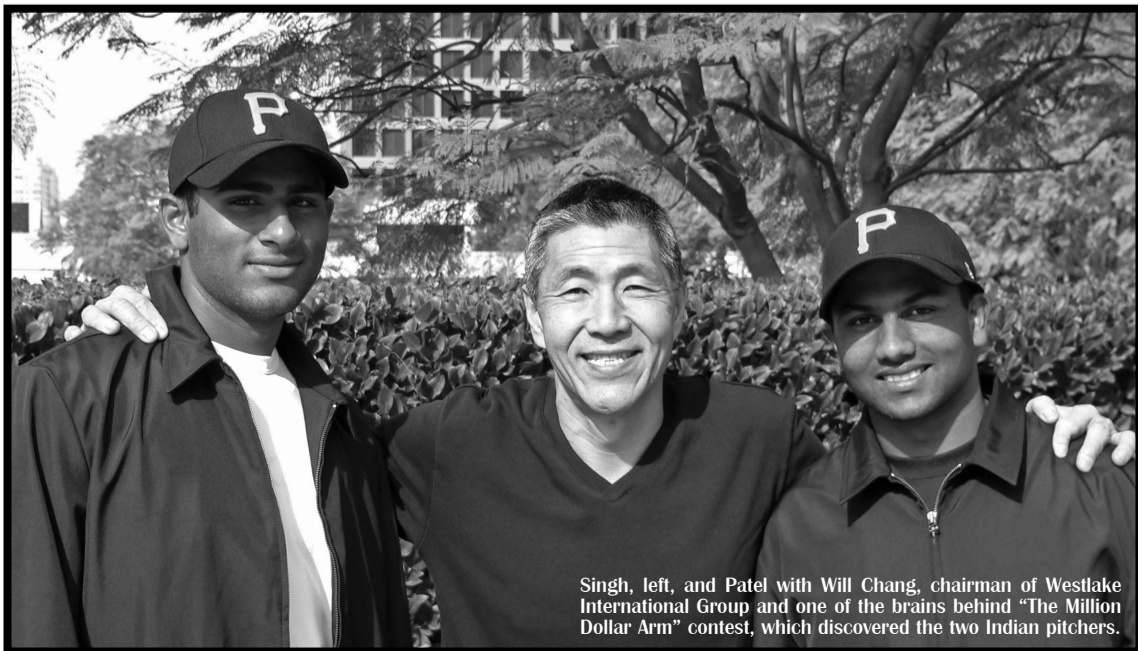
Vasudevan says, “We are convinced more than ever that several million dollar arms exist in India and we will find them through our contest.”

Next up for them? “We want to stay focused on baseball. Our goal is to pitch in the Major Leagues someday,” says Rinku.

Dinesh agrees, “Right now we are working very hard to improve our game.”

The casting will soon begin. Who will play the roles of Rinku and Dinesh? Kal Penn? If he wasn’t in Washington, DC, he’d be a great candidate. Dev Patel? Tarun Shetty? Rinku thinks “The Rock” should portray him. Dinesh believes his role should be played by Jason Bourne aka Matt Damon.

Production of the movie will start May 2010. For the next few weeks Singh and Patel will be back at home with family. Their lives will settle into a familiar pattern until they return to the USA. Perhaps by the time the movie is released Rinku’s wish will come true and he and Dinesh will be in the Major League just as their lives will be in a Major Motion Picture.



Singh, left, and Patel with Will Chang, chairman of Westlake International Group and one of the brains behind “The Million Dollar Arm” contest, which discovered the two Indian pitchers.