Star India gets the game on for IPL

Rishabh Pant, Jaspreet Bumrah flag off the 2019 campaign with cheeky challenges to M S Dhoni and Virat Kohli, set the ball rolling for the upcoming face-off

M S Dhoni (CSK) and Rishab Pant (DD) banter over their cricketing skills as part of the newly launched campaign for IPL

BRANDS ON BOARD

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- Paytm (Umpire partner)
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- Phone Pe, Thums Up, Asian Paints, Maruti Suzuki, Dream 11, Make My Trip, Swiggy, Voltas, MRF, Big Bazaar, Samsung QLED, Polycab (Broadcast sponsors)
- Amazon Pay, Dream 11, Swiggy, Coca-Cola, Flipkart, Maruti Suzuki, Maggi (Hotstar)

URVI MALVANIA
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Battling several demons on many fronts—be it the vagaries over dates and locations in an election year and the uncertainty over reach in the wake of the TRAI order—Star India is going all out to get viewers on its side of the turf for the Vivo Indian Premier League 2019 that starts next month. In a set of teasers released over the weekend, the broadcaster uses the league's trademark bellicosity, pitting mentor against mentee, to get the buzz going around Brand IPL.

This year, the network says it has conceptualised the tournament as a set of games where the best take on the best. The tagline "*Yeh Vivo IPL hai, yahaan game banayega name*" (This is Vivo IPL, here your game defines you) is in keeping with the narrative that the tournament has employed in the past. That the IPL is one of the biggest equal-opportunity talent platforms for cricket in the country.

> **"We are in a much better place this year even after setting higher goals than last year"**
> GAUTAM THAKAR
> CEO, Star Sports

Star Sports CEO Gautam Thakar explains the creative process underlining the campaign. "The trophy has the lines '*yatra pratibha avsar prapnotihi*' inscribed on it. It translates as 'where talent meets opportunity'. Viewers strongly resonate with the belief that this is a platform that offers an opportunity for young talent to shine under the mentorship of stars from across the globe. No other platform in India has provided as many opportunities to youngsters as the IPL has, for over a decade," he said.

The two 30-second films build on this with young players Rishabh Pant and Jaspreet Bumrah challenging stalwarts M S Dhoni and Virat Kohli respectively. More films to be released in the coming days will have the veterans responding to the challenge and closer to the start of the tournament, the network will release television commercials specific to the Chennai Super Kings (CSK) and Royal Challengers Bangalore (RCB) clash, which is the opening tie on March 23.

Along with the IPL campaigns, Star is also pushing communication around the new channel packs in order to counter the challenges posed by the implementation of the new tariff order mandated by TRAI. Thakar says that in some markets the two campaigns will be clubbed together but by and large, the two communication strategies will function separately.

Star India is also focusing on its distribution strategy given the new tariff order. It has increased the number of regional sports channels in its portfolio and will leverage its presence in these markets through customized packaging. It has a panel of close to 100 commentators for this season, across languages.

The network will also use its entertainment channels in different languages on Sundays to expand the scope of the tournament's viewership. The Select Dugout feed introduced last year will also continue into this year, albeit with some additions based on the insights gathered from last year. And a new segment will be introduced to make the game more engaging for children.

The network's assurance of a growth in reach and viewership over last year is the basis for selling advertising inventory on the IPL. Thakkar says, "I cannot get into specifics, but I can say that we are in a much better place this year even after setting higher goals than last year." Industry estimates peg Star India's revenue from the IPL in 2018 at around ₹2,000 crore. This year, sources estimate that the network has already signed close to ₹1,100 crore worth of sponsorships.

Thakar says that he and his team are working to ensure that the Star Sports bouquet is available on as many subscriptions across the country as possible by the time the tournament launches. "That there is consumer inertia is true. That we have a lot at stake (in case of the IPL) is also true. But we have a very strong cricket calendar, starting with the ongoing India-Australia series, going into the IPL and then of course the World Cup. So we are confident that people will want to watch cricket on our platforms. Additionally, we are constantly working with cable and DTH (direct-to-home) operators to be included on their base packs," he says. Given that the IPL is the most expensive cricket property in the country, there is little that broadcaster and the brands backing the tournament want to leave to chance.

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India strikes back

Tuesday's retaliatory air strikes are the first time since the 1971 Indo-Pakistan war that Indian combat aircraft crossed into Pakistan-held territory. Even during the Kargil war in 1999, when IAF fighters repeatedly struck Pakistan Army soldiers who had crossed into the Indian side of the LoC, great care was taken to ensure Indian aircraft did not violate the LoC. But in this case, military planners realised early that Pakistan would be prepared for ground strikes. Besides, the political need was for a more forceful response. That left air strikes as the only acceptable option.

Both sides have signed onto a confidence-building measure (CBM) that prohibits fixed wing aircraft from flying within 10 km of the LoC, and helicopters from coming closer than 5 km without informing the other side beforehand. By disregarding this, the IAF has sent a stern message to Islamabad. Since there are two Balakot towns, there was initial confusion over which target was struck, and how deep across the LoC it was. However, sources later confirmed that the strike occurred in Balakot in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) province.

This raises serious questions over the capability of Pakistani air defences. Their porousness was first dramatically exposed in the US operation against Osama bin Laden in Abbottabad in 2011. They have now been exposed again by the IAF's ability to strike 80 km into Pakistan without being intercepted or incurring casualties.

With PTI inputs

Nation in safe hands: PM

This poem, which he himself has written and used to great effect in 2014, set his speech firmly against the backdrop of the IAF strike. He, however, never directly referred to Pakistan, Jaish-e-Mohammed or India's strikes across the border.

Appealing to the people to bring back the BJP to power (the party won all the 25 Lok Sabha seats in Rajasthan in 2014), he said his government's policy interventions should speak for themselves and took a swipe at the Congress government in the state. "It is very unfortunate that not a single farmer from Rajasthan and Churu has got any money," he said, referring to the scheme of direct transfer of funds to small farmers. "Do you know why? Because the state government has not even sent a list of the farmers. They are not cooperating with the Centre. Within the next 10 years, ₹7.5 trillion will be deposited in the accounts of farmers. They will not have to do anything for it. They will directly get a notification on their mobile phones, saying that they have received the amount. My government has made the impossible, possible. The state government must not hinder the Centre's support to farmers," he said. Emphasising why it was important to bring the BJP back to power, he said: "India needs a strong government and I am sure that your vote this time will give us even more strength to carry on our work to take India to new heights."

SBI emergency meet on Jet

It has sought the right of first refusal after one year in the case of a sale of shares and has asked SBI to get an endorsement from the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) that in case it exercises this right, the mandatory open offer requirement will not be triggered.

However, Sebi is not willing to make an exemption and neither is SBI willing to give the right of first refusal.

A Jet Airways spokesperson, when contacted, said: "In line with its policy, Jet Airways does not comment on speculation".

An e mail query to Etihad did not elicit any response.

However, in a joint statement on Monday Jet Airways and Etihad said they were working together on a resolution plan to make the airline robust and viable. Etihad Airways is learnt to have abstained from voting on resolutions to convert Jet Airways' debt into equity in the extraordinary general meeting on Thursday.

The airlines wanted clarity on all the questions they had raised before they endorsed the resolution plan.

The lenders, however, may seek additional securities, including share pledges or guarantees from promoters, while sanctioning loans, and are not planning to move the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) at present. A delay in clearing the resolution plan would make it difficult for the airlines to negotiate interim funding from banks. The lenders' consortium is considering a ₹500-crore loan, but a final decision is yet to be taken, Punjab National Bank Managing Director Sunil Mehta had said on Friday.

Mahindra banks on SsangYong-derived car

In a financial year that saw the UV category grow by 21 per cent in volumes, according to Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers, Mahindra, which has the largest fleet of diesel SUVs in its portfolio, has seen sales stay flat and hovering under 250,000 units a year for the last three years, despite the segment growing and reaching a million cars. Mahindra's market share dropped drastically going from over 50 per cent in 2011 to under 40 per cent in 2015 and reaching a new low of 25 per cent last year. The missing products haven't been just city SUVs but also competent petrol vehicles.

This year that's expected to stay around the same, officials at Mahindra say, and that's a problem. "Auto is a volume game, the higher your number the better the profitability. Hence Mahindra has to regain lost market share even at the cost of some margin. Market share gain will also boost morale for channel partners that include dealers and components suppliers," said Chirag Shah, associate director, Institutional Equities, Edelweiss Securities.

So what went wrong? Goenka says the singular reason is this: "The compact SUV segment is at 50 per cent share of the volume of UVs and we had no product in that segment and we have around half the share of the remaining volume."

Did they not plan for it? "Frankly, we started with the KUV 100 at the beginning of 2016, and if it delivered volumes as planned then it would have been a different story." His point is they bet on a segment with a car that didn't take off. For now, Mahindra has to be careful because with the BS VI norms kicking in in the near future, every car will have to be rejigged to meet that, which means more expenditure, especially because diesel overhauls are expected to be more expensive than petrol upgrades.

"We are not sitting idle, and I can't share product plans but we do have a plan in the pipeline," Goenka says.

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Easy: ★★
Solution tomorrow

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