

The Pitch

Most of my career was spent in selling products and the products that I sold, spoke for themselves. Of course, the salesman in me added the few required adjectives about the product and a few expletives about its competition, but that was neither here nor there. The product was the talker and the ultimate deal clincher.

Now in an agency it is all about winning or losing pitches. To a layman there is a reasonable chance of being confused of whether I was talking about the grass on the pitch before the opening of the innings or its cracked surface and hence it is my solemn duty to explain to the layman that pitches in the agency parlance is not something that is laid out in the middle of the ground for 2 teams to play on, with two umpires keeping a hawk's eye on the proceedings but that the agency pitch is laid out in a boardroom where there is just one team and it is playing against the umpire.

How do you play against the umpire?

Aha I say!

Aha I say again! Basically the second aha is just to give me some time to think because I am utterly confused as to how to finish this topic now that I have started it.

The Agency Pitch or A-Pitch as against a Cricket Pitch or C-Pitch, has a lot of similarities. Both the pitches are battle grounds in which battles are fought with principles of fair play and sportsmanship but if you were to look closely you will notice the flashes of daggers and if you were to look very very closely, you will notice that the grin that you saw was actually the teeth barred like the wolf and that the eyes with that fidgety look and the quivering hand were just waiting for the opportune moment to strike for the kill. C-Pitch is where two teams play simultaneously in front of the umpire but the A-Pitch is where two or more teams (this can go up to any number of teams that the umpire feels he can handle and the general rule is that, fatter the umpire, the more number of teams) play in turns of one after another. In a sense, one is playing against the umpire because you don't get to see how the other teams are performing and later on when the umpire declares the winning team you have to believe him and that is it! If you get to ask the umpire, somewhat indignantly, as to why your team was not chosen, then you usually

get a somewhat vague reply about it being a collective decision.

Opps! You did not know that there was a third umpire all along! After a couple of games you tend to realize how important it is for you to know who the umpire is and how many of them are there out there. Now there are various types of umpires. Some who are seriously evaluating you and you better be on your toes or he would give that dreaded finger up your aspirations and plans and then there are those who are not so serious but like to have a bunch of agency folks strut and fret in front of him and after all the strutting and fretting there is total silence. No calls, no contacts no nothing. I think these are the types who are like the polar bears; they go into hibernation for long periods of time only to wake up, all of a sudden to ask for another round of strutting and fretting. Beware of these bears because you will spend the rest of your lives strutting and fretting, full of sound and fury but actually signifying nothing.

And then there is the omnipotent word called Strategy. Strategy when playing in a C-Pitch or the A-Pitch means exactly the same in all respects except that there is a big difference. In the C-Pitch, strategy is against the other team but in the A-Pitch, strategy is for the benefit of the umpire. Here you have an umpire who has been an umpire all his life and there you are, the groundsman, who for all your life have been in the outdoors looking after the ground but it is expected that you give the umpire the clues as to how he can do better umpiring simply because the umpire has to stand on the ground that you have made and you are the expert of the ground that he is standing on. Duh!

Of course you get a lot of help before the game from the umpire. He gives you his underwear which in the agency parlance is called The Brief. Sometimes the brief is colorful and big and sometimes it is colorful and skimpy. Sometimes it is old and unwashed and smelly because it sure looks like you had been given this same brief a year ago and this year it is back again but sometimes you get a brand new brief which is sparkling clean and crisp. All types of briefs are very important because it covers the most important part of the umpire and tells you what he is all about and what he is hiding.... or not! The most dangerous of all briefs is the brief



Soumitra Bhattacharyya
Chief Executive Officer
MOMS & MRP

brief. The brief brief tells you nothing except the fact that it covers nothing and you have to strategize on it. But I should honestly say that the incidence of getting this sort of a brief brief is reducing day by day because most of the umpires are realizing that the outdoor ground is more important than they realized earlier, and hence they cannot afford to give a brief brief because after getting a brief brief, the outdoor groundsman generally plays a brief game which finishes briefly on one slide which has only the contact details. This does not help anyone so now a day's brief brief is not given.

On getting the brief you and your team immediately sit down and burn midnight oil to understand it. If by chance it is the same smelly and old and unwashed brief that you had got the last time, then you are in big trouble because you cannot give the same strategy that you gave the last time and of course the smell is so overpowering that you have to bring out all your skills of employee motivation to get your team to sit around this smelly disgusting brief and discuss things on a strategic level without once wrinkling your nose. But most of the time it is a new brief and it generally throws up a lot of ideas. New ideas lead to innovations and these innovations are the pillars, resting on which the game goes to a different level.

I seem to have done pretty well for a person who started off by being confused about what to write, but now that I am in full flow, I could carry on and on but time is of essence and there are so many briefs waiting to be worked upon. However, I would like to leave you with one basic difference that exists between a Cricket-Pitch and an Agency-Pitch. In the Cricket-Pitch the game starts and ends on the Pitch but in an Agency-Pitch the game begins after the Pitch. 