



INTERVIEW **WASIM AKRAM**

Pick them young is the speedster's mantra for success

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NEW DELHI: The best advice Wasim Akram got as a teenager came from two of his heroes — the late Khan Mohammad and Imran Khan. "They told me to just bowl for long hours in the nets," Akram told the *Hindustan Times*. Now, it's his turn to do the talking, and it's no surprise that he is spreading the same gospel among young fast bowlers. Akram, who was in Delhi for a weeklong camp with nine fast bowlers to be part of the Gatorade Pacers academy, was himself picked from near obscurity and thrust into the Pakistan team. There certainly is a growing trend for youngsters to be picked up from reality shows and talent hunt programmes. Just how good an idea is this? Over to Akram.

More and more cricketers are coming through from talent search programmes. Is this beneficial?

It gives them a chance very early and also gives them facilities. Before I played for Pakistan I used to have my kit-bag in my car and go from one

ground to the other looking for a net where I could bowl. I used to search for a club that was having practice so I could bowl. Now teenagers are getting facilities at an early age. They learn about technique when they are still raw, and any major faults in action are rectified. It gives them a lot of confidence. If you get a good base when you are 15-16 then you can do well in the long run. As a person, if you have confidence then it will show in anything you do.

What are the obvious advantages of picking them young?

If someone is good enough at the age of 16-17 you have to give him a chance. Then, by the time you are 25 you will be experienced and still young. Pick them early and if the person is good enough, he can go on to play for a long time.

There's the suggestion that the heavy workload means that youngsters are not going flat out in all forms ...

I don't think so. People are making myths. If you are a fast bowler you have to bowl quick in all forms of the game. You can't bowl within yourself and slow in limited overs cricket



■ Former Pakistan skipper Wasim Akram during the inauguration of the 'Gatorade Centre for Pace Excellence' in New Delhi on Monday.

SUBHAV SHUKLA / PTI

and then bowl fast in Test cricket. Certain muscle groups are used in bowling and your body will get used to fast bowling. With weights and gym work you can strengthen specific muscles, but only from bowling will you build the whole group.

You were handpicked by Pakistan. What is the key to spotting young talent?

I was pretty much hand-

picked. It's a rarity to pick a true talent young. But cricket in India and Pakistan has gone out to the smaller cities so you're getting a lot of fresh talent. Kids in big cities have a lot of distractions — computers, films, TV, Playstation, X-Box ... What did we have? When we were bored we were chased out of the house to go out and play. You have to go to smaller cities where people have not had the opportunity so far.

There, you will get cricketers who are hungry and who have talent.

The trend now is to have a lot of coaches and consultants. How does this actually help?

Worldwide, whoever wants to be coach wants to become coach of the national team. If you really want to give something back to the game, you have to coach youngsters. Look at Allan Border, he began with

CONTEST SUCCESS TALES

■ **Vikas Tokas**
 The son of a DTC bus driver, Vikas failed to make the cut to the finals in the Gatorade Pacers Hunt in 2007 and 2008.

■ **Palani Amarnath**
 After winning the ESPN Speedster competition, he played leather ball cricket from his late teens, made it to the Tamil Nadu team.

■ **NC Aiyappa**
 Was crowned the first Scorpio Speedster in 2003 with a speed of 135 kmph and then trained under Damien Fleming in 2004 at Brisbane.

the under-19 team and that was the time guys like Ricky Ponting came through. If you want to help cricket, help youngsters. If you want money and attention, coach the national team.

Your advice to youngsters

You have to listen to a lot of people but follow what your mind tells you. Speak to a lot of experts, but pick what is suitable for you and use that.