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## **Manchester United Restaurant to kick off soon in Mumbai**

**The maiden 100-150 seater restaurant will be spread across 5,000 sq ft at the Nirmal Lifestyle Mall in Mulund, a central suburb of Mumbai**

Manchester United Football Club, one of the world's richest sports clubs with star players such as Wayne Rooney and Michael Owen, will launch its very first Manchester United Restaurant & Bar in Mumbai this Diwali. The opening would add the club's name to a list of brands such as Disney, Nickelodeon, ESPN that have put down physical roots as a way of communicating with consumers, audiences and fans.

They also hope to launch another restaurant in south Mumbai early next year and push the number up to 10 restaurants and bars across major metro cities in India, within the next two to three years, with an average investment of \$1 million per site. The football club, however, is still not present in India, barring an association with sponsor Bharti Airtel Ltd for the club and an association with the All India Football Federation to spot young talent in Mumbai.

The maiden 100-150 seater restaurant will be spread across 5,000 sq ft at the Nirmal Lifestyle Mall in Mulund, a central suburb of Mumbai. The idea is to re-create the entire stadium experience for visitors and help them experience the brand, a strategy that many brands are adopting to convey their brand messages and strike a connect that a 30-second commercial can rarely deliver. The restaurant will have a wall of fame, the skybox, a dugout area and giant projector screens to telecast soccer matches and other major sporting events.

The menu will comprise Old Trafford specialities such as Fish and Chips, as well as dishes that are customized to appeal to the Indian palate. It will also be the first official

outlet for fans to buy a range of Manchester United merchandise, which accounts for up to 10% of revenues at their cafes and restaurants, internationally. They expect revenue from merchandise to be as high as 45% here, says Jatin Suri, director, Billionaire Sports Pvt. Ltd. which, secured franchise rights for these outlets in India for a sum of \$1 million. The restaurant will also look at offering several branding and promotional opportunities to advertisers such as their current partners – Airtel, Smirnoff, Nike, AIG, etc. as well as local brands looking to associate with the English Premier League team.

As one of the most popular teams of the English Premier League, Manchester United has for the last few years been pursuing newer markets fairly aggressively, especially those in East Asia, to expand their fan base as well as retain their position as market leaders. More recently the attention has been focused on markets such as India and China, which could possibly represent the last significant untapped markets for football in the world. “India has about 20 million Manchester United fans... but what is more amazing is the potential for growth... In the last three to four years, the image and prominence (of the club) has been growing by leaps and bounds,” says Andy Yun, chief executive of Manchester United Food and Beverage (Asia) Pte Ltd., which owns the exclusive rights to own, operate franchise and develop a chain of Manchester United restaurants and bar concepts in the Asia – Pacific region. The company already operates such dining formats in places such as China, Thailand, Singapore, Hong Kong, Japan and Indonesia, among others.

The growing popularity of football and the English Premier League in India, has been a major draw for football clubs, which have so far stayed away from what experts consider a potentially lucrative market. In 2008, broadcast of the EPL reached over 50 million viewers in India, despite late match timings, according to a spokesperson at ESPN Software India Pvt. Ltd. who did not wish to be named citing, company policy. The numbers are expected to be grow over the next few years as more and more young people, especially across urban markets such as Mumbai and Delhi take to sports such as football and basket ball.

“Go to any school or college in Mumbai and you will see a majority of students leaning towards sports such as football and basketball which are considered very cool,” says Indranil Das Bhal, vice president, Matchpoint Sports Pvt. Ltd a Globosport company. Cricket, he explains, has moved to become a more small-town set up, which is why you see the emergence of stars such as MS Dhoni.

“EPL has gained enormous viewership and following amongst the football obsessed teens in India thanks to the live telecast of almost all the matches,” says Sanjay Gangopadhyay, marketing director, Nike India Pvt Ltd which sells a range of Manchester United merchandise from authentic replica jerseys which sell at Rs2,295 a pop, to a range of branded caps, back packs, etc at their stores.

While metros such as Mumbai and Delhi provide audiences who see support of an English Premier League side as a must -have social accessory, local football teams have also flourished in pockets of the country such as West Bengal, Kerala, Kolkata and Goa.

However, experts maintain that urban centres will remain the focus for all major sports clubs looking at the sub-continent.

“That is where the money is... along with creating a huge fan base, they are also looking to reach them as customers,” says Blah.

**Website: <http://www.livemint.com/2009/07/14202806/Manchester-United-restaurant-t.html?h=B>**