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American sports museum has desi touch

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NEW DELHI: Tickets have already gone on sale and it's tipped to be one of the biggest launches in Manhattan in recent years. Annual footfalls are already being estimated at over one million and the investors are upbeat about a rosy RoI. On May 7, as the Sports Museum of America (SmA) opens its doors, just across the street from the Statue of Liberty ferry and a few blocks away from the World Trade Center Memorial site, sports crazy Americans as well as NYC tourists are expected to flock to it in droves.

However, the Indian connection of SmA—Sameer Ahuja, co-founder & CFO/COO—is not that well known yet. The investment banker-turned-entrepreneur was the brain behind raising \$100 million to build the iconic SmA. And even as he expects it to become one of the most memorable experiences of America, Mr Ahuja looks forward to featuring cricket at SmA and also dreams of bringing the concept to his own country someday.

It was partly passion and craze that made him quit a cushy job at the venture cap division of JP Morgan Chase and plunge into the heady world of [American sports](#). “SmA was a once-in-a-lifetime entrepreneurial opportunity. I had the potential to create a vibrant business from nothing more than an idea. This was exactly the type of environment I had been searching for since graduating from Harvard Business School.

The skills I had picked up as a banker at JP Morgan Chase served me well as we raised \$100-million capital to build the SmA. In addition, building the SmA allowed me to be a major contributor to the rebuilding of [Lower Manhattan](#), post the 9/11 attacks. New York City has given a great deal to me and to be able to contribute to its rehabilitation was a chance I could not pass up,” Mr Ahuja told ET from New York City.

As the first museum to pay tribute to the history and excitement of all sports, SmA has partnered with famous organisations such as USA [Football](#) and the Pro Football Hall of Fame, NASCAR and USA Basketball. And if the Indian American co-founder has his way, cricket too could be featured at SmA sometime soon. “The initial focus is on sports that are actively played in the US. However, we have begun developing plans to host temporary exhibitions in the SmA every year on sports that are loved across the globe. Cricket is one of the world's most popular sports, and one that I enjoy personally. We will certainly feature it in the SmA in the near future,” Mr Ahuja said.

In the long term, he is excited about the possibility of expanding the Sports Museum concept to other cities around the globe including some in [India](#). “It would be a personal honour and a wonderful business opportunity to build a sports museum in India. We have established over 60 exclusive partnerships with sports organisations across the globe and have the know-how and capital to execute on such a plan faster and with greater effectiveness than anyone else.

Doing so would give me the opportunity to showcase [athletes](#) and athletic achievement that are beloved to Indians, such as Sachin Tendulkar's cricket and Sania Mirza's rise into the global tennis elite. Hopefully, a museum will make the enjoyment of sports more accessible to people of all walks of life in India, and highlight the importance of physical fitness and sportsmanship,” the Delhi-born Mr Ahuja said.