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THAKUR IS MUMBAI'S SAVIOUR

EXTENSIVE FITNESS TRAINING SESSIONS IN OFF-SEASON PAY OFF HANDSOMELY AS YOUNG PACEMAN PUTS MUMBAI IN COMMAND AGAINST MAHARASHTRA ON DAY TWO OF RANJI QUARTERS

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PURSUING cricket seriously wasn't an easy task for Shardul Thakur. At 14, the youngster had to travel for almost three hours by train everyday from Palghar to reach Mumbai's maidans for practice. And luckily for him, all the time he spent on these back-breaking journeys and sweating it out in the maidans is paying off.

Nevertheless, Thakur endured his share of criticism last season primarily because he looked overweight and that because he looked overweight and that seemed to affect his bowling. What's more, taking five wickets in six matches was certainly not the start he had envisioned for his first-class career. Things have turned around dramatically for Thakur this season and he has already claimed 25 wickets.

He was the pick of the bowlers yesterday, claiming four for 62, as Maharashtra found themselves with their backs to the wall at 219-7 in reply to Mumbai's 402 on Day Two of their quarter-final clash at the Wankhede. Resuming on 306-7, the hosts added 94 runs, thanks to Iqbal Abdulla's unbeaten 49. Thakur, 22, wears a chiseled look these days, having lost about 12 kgs in the off-season, and this largely is the result of senior teammate Rohit Sharma's constant ribbing.

Tough times

Thakur told MID DAY: "Obviously, it was tough to travel from Palghar with a kit bag. I would get up at 4:00 am to catch the train. It is only now that we have local train service up to Dahanu Road, but earlier I would depend on mail trains to reach the city. By the time I returned home it would be 8:00-8.30 pm. It was very

THAT'S GONE:
Shardul Thakur celebrates Ankit Bawne's wicket yesterday.
PIC/SURESH KK

hectic, but I wanted to achieve something." Later on, Thakur was provided accommodation by Dinesh Lad, his coach at Swami Vivekanand in Borivli and he first shot into the limelight after smashing six sixes in an over in the Harris Shield in 2006.

Meanwhile, Thakur was on fire yesterday as Mumbai's medium-pacers wrecked havoc with the new ball. He first had Maharashtra skipper Rohit first had Maharashtra skipper Rohit Motwani (0) leg before on the fourth ball of the first over of the innings. He then had the current season's highest run-scorer Harshad Khadiwale (4) caught at slips.

Vijay Zol, the India U-19 captain, showed some aggression, but his stay ended soon, courtesy a magnificent delivery from Zaheer Khan. The ball clipped the bail on his off stump as Zol (15) failed in his attempt to leave the ball.

Maharashtra would have been in deeper trouble had Wasim Jaffer, at second slip, managed to get his hands to the edge from Ankit Bawne who batting on five. Bawne was lucky again when he got a reprieve on 35 when Thakur had him caught at slips off a no ball.

Bawne put on a 115-run stand with Kedar Jadhav (51) before left-arm spinner Vishal Dabholkar provided some much-needed cheer to the Mumbai camp by dismissing Jadhav. Thakur came back to dismiss Bawne for 84 and later ensured Sangram Atitkar's stay in the middle did not last long as Vinit Indulkar caught him at slip. Later, pacer Javed Khan who had been searching for a wicket, found success when Kaustubh Pawar took a blinder at gully to send back Chirag Khurana.

