# SPORTING INDIA

FICCI

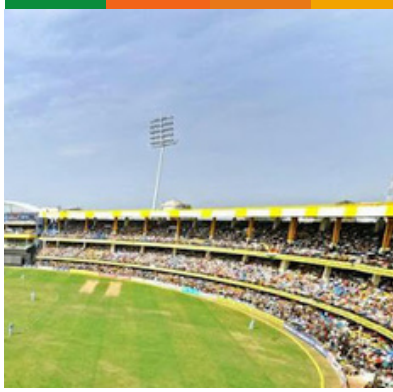
# RISING:

POLICY | PEOPLE | PURPOSE

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FIT INDIA



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# SPORTING INDIA RISING:

## POLICY | PEOPLE | PURPOSE



# Message from the Chairman

The landscape of sports in India continues to evolve at an unprecedented pace, mirroring the aspirations of a nation that is young, confident, and determined to take its rightful place on the global stage. What was once viewed as recreation has now become a strategic driver of economic growth, social transformation, and national identity. Sport today is not merely about competition, it is about community, creativity, and collective progress.

This report arrives at a defining moment in India's sporting journey. With the enactment of the National Sports Governance Act, 2025, India has taken a historic step towards institutional accountability and athlete welfare. The successes of our athletes at the Tokyo Olympics, Hangzhou Asian Games, and various world championships have demonstrated that the foundations of excellence are firmly in place. Meanwhile, initiatives such as Khelo India, Fit India, and the integration of sports manufacturing under the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports have created an ecosystem that spans participation, industry, and policy.

The report also delves into the emerging frontiers of the Indian sports economy: commercialization, technological innovation, gender inclusion, and sustainability- each critical to ensuring that the sector grows not only in scale but in equity and integrity. From the grassroots volunteer to the professional athlete, from federations to corporate partners, sport is becoming a shared language of aspiration and impact.

At GMR Sports, we have always believed in the transformative power of sports to unite people, empower youth, and inspire communities. Our work in developing world-class sporting infrastructure and nurturing talent resonates deeply with the themes explored in this report. As Chairman of the FICCI Sports Committee, I take immense pride in witnessing the synergy between government, academia, industry, and civil society, working hand in hand to shape the future of Indian sport.

The challenges outlined here, financial resilience for athletes, equitable infrastructure utilization, and gender parity remind us that there is still ground to cover. Yet, the innovative policy frameworks, forward-looking governance reforms, and recommendations presented in this report offer a comprehensive roadmap for sustainable growth.

I commend the authors and contributors of this report for their thoughtful analysis and dedication. Their work stands as a reflection of India's collective resolve to move beyond participation towards leadership in the global sporting ecosystem.

As we look ahead, let us continue to harness the power of sport not only to win medals but to build character, unity, and opportunity. Together, we can realize the vision of a New India- one where sport is not a privilege for a few, but a celebration for all.

**P.K.S.V. Sagar**
Chairman, FICCI Sports Committee
President, GMR Sports

# FOREWORD



India stands today at the threshold of a sporting renaissance. Over the last few years, we have witnessed a profound shift in how sport is perceived- not merely as competition or recreation, but as an instrument of national development, diplomacy, and social cohesion. For a nation as young, diverse, and ambitious as ours, sport represents both an opportunity and a responsibility: an opportunity to channel the energy of our youth, and a responsibility to ensure that every citizen has the freedom and access to play.

This report, India's Sports Policy Report 2025, is a collective effort to examine the evolution of India's sports governance framework and to chart a future that is both inclusive and visionary. From the National Sports Policy of 1984 to the National Sports Governance Act 2025, the journey has been one of learning, experimentation, and constant adaptation. What has emerged is a clear understanding that policy alone cannot create champions; culture does. The foundation of a great sporting nation lies in its everyday habits - how we view play, how we support our athletes, and how we weave sport into the moral and social fabric of our lives.

Under the leadership of Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, sports in India have moved from the periphery to the mainstream. His call to make sport a jan andolan- a people's movement has redefined the national narrative. Programs such as Khelo India, Fit India, and Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS) have expanded participation,

strengthened institutional integrity, and created a sense of belonging among athletes and citizens alike.

At the Centre for Sports Research, IMT Ghaziabad, our conviction has always been that sport is not just an activity, it is an idea, a language, and a moral compass. It can heal divisions, inspire communities, and strengthen democracy. In partnership with O.P. Jindal Global University and the FICCI Sports Committee, this report seeks to reaffirm that belief through evidence, policy, and vision. It also advocates for what we have long argued- the recognition of the Right to Sports as a Fundamental Right under Article 21A of the Constitution of India. Such recognition will not merely protect athletes' interests; it will institutionalize play as a national value and moral imperative.

As we look ahead, we must remember that stadiums and schemes can only take us so far. The real change will come when sport becomes part of our daily grammar, when every schoolchild plays, every workplace encourages activity, and every policymaker views sport not as expenditure but as investment in human capital.

This report is both a reflection and a roadmap. It honours the athletes who have carried our flag with pride, the administrators who have strived for reform, and the citizens who believe that India's tryst with destiny will be incomplete without its tryst with sport.

Let us together build a nation where every citizen has the right to play, the freedom to dream, and the opportunity to excel.

**Prof. (Dr.) Kanishka Pandey**
Chair, FICCI Sports Committee (UP Chapter)
Faculty and Head, Centre for Sports Research, IMT Ghaziabad

# FOREWORD



Sport is the purest metaphor for human aspiration an art of discipline, an act of unity, and a mirror to a nation's moral imagination. In every contest of strength and skill, there lies the story of a civilisation seeking excellence through fairness, resilience, and integrity. As India stands poised at the threshold of its Olympic ambition for 2036, India's Sports Policy Report (2025) speaks not merely to the architecture of governance, but to the larger philosophy that sport is both a right and a responsibility a cornerstone of citizenship and nationhood.

This report, conceived through a collaboration between the Centre for Sports Law, Business & Governance and Jindal Society for International Sports Law of Jindal Global Law School at O.P. Jindal Global University and the Centre for Sports Research, IMT Ghaziabad, represents a landmark synthesis of research, policy, and vision. It chronicles India's sporting evolution from the aspirational frameworks of 1984 and 2001 to the institutional consolidation of 2011, culminating in the statutory maturity of the National Sports Governance Act, 2025. Through its analyses, it captures a fundamental shift: from sports as spectacle to sport as statecraft.

It has been my privilege to serve as one of the co-lead authors and to guide the legal, institutional, and ethical foundations that underlie this document. The report's central conviction is that sport cannot remain at the periphery of policy; it must be reclaimed as an instrument of justice, inclusion, and human development.

The call for recognising the Right to Sports as a Fundamental Right is, therefore, not rhetorical it is constitutional realism, anchored in the belief that a truly modern republic must guarantee every citizen the dignity of play.

In its essence, this report envisions an India where every playground is a classroom of citizenship, every athlete an ambassador of constitutional values, and every victory a reaffirmation of national purpose. If this document succeeds in inspiring reflection, reform, and renewed commitment, it will have fulfilled its truest ambition to transform sport from a pastime into a pillar of public virtue and collective pride.

**Prof. (Dr.) Subhrajit Chanda**
Assistant Director, Centre for Sports Law, Business & Governance
Faculty Coordinator Jindal Society for International Sports Law
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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This Policy Report has been jointly developed by the Centre for Sports Law, Business & Governance and the Jindal Society for International Sports Law, Jindal Global Law School, O.P. Jindal Global University, in collaboration with the Centre for Sports Research, IMT Ghaziabad.

We extend our sincere gratitude to Dr. Atish Chattopadhyay, Director, IMT Ghaziabad, for his guidance and encouragement throughout this initiative.

We also acknowledge the invaluable support of Mr. Anirban Chatterjee, Additional Director, and Mr. Pranav Yadav, Assistant Director, FICCI (Sports & Youth Development), for their collaboration and insights.

Special thanks are due to Mr. Vinay Rawat, Senior Research Assistant, Centre for Sports Research, IMT Ghaziabad, for his research support and data coordination.

We appreciate the contribution of the following student members of the Jindal Society for International Sports Law for their research and drafting assistance:
Nihal Tiwari, Adhiraj Sood, Anuragh Satish Menon, Vydhrithi Reddy Peesari, Aaradhya Mukerji, Garrv Loddha Jain, Aviral Jain, and Ishita Jadeja.

*With Gratitude and resolve*

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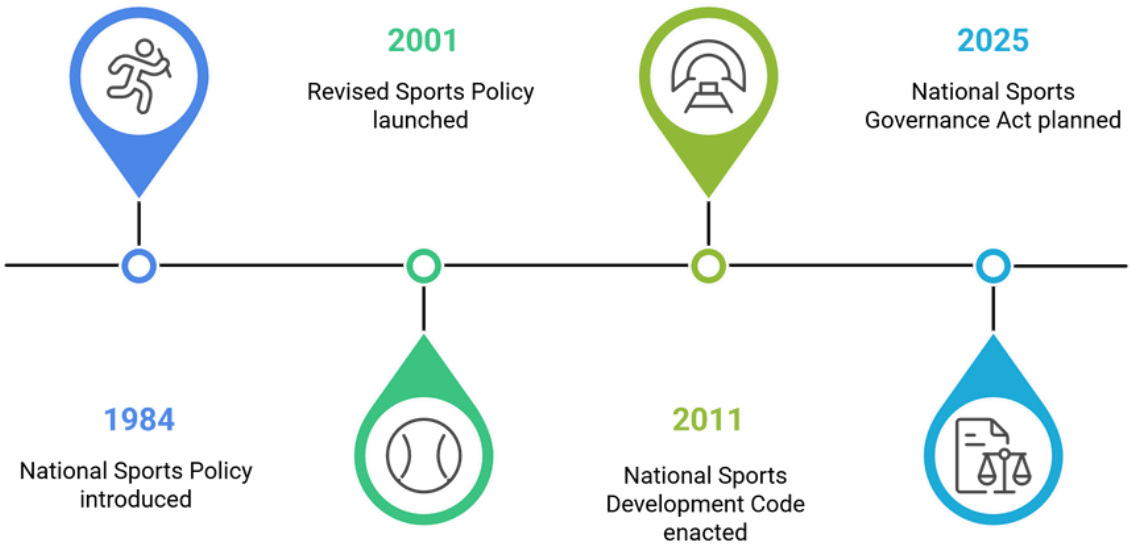


# Executive Summary

# Executive Summary

**India's journey in sports policy reflects a steady evolution from fragmented frameworks to an integrated vision of national transformation. From the National Sports Policy of 1984, through the revised framework of 2001, the National Sports Development Code of 2011, and culminating in the National Sports Governance Act, 2025, the trajectory demonstrates both the continuity of ambition and the courage to reform. Together, these milestones embody India's aspiration to move from sporadic excellence to systemic success anchoring sport at the heart of governance, economy, and society.**

Over the past four decades, India's sports ecosystem has matured from viewing sport merely as recreation to recognizing it as a tool of nation-building, diplomacy, and social justice. This transformation has been reinforced by the leadership and vision of Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, who has consistently highlighted sports and sportspersons as pillars of India's soft power and global identity. Under his call to make sports a people's movement, India has witnessed an unprecedented surge in athlete visibility, institutional accountability, and community participation turning sport into a vehicle of aspiration and national pride.



## Evolution of India's Sports Policy

**At the policy level, the 1984 and 2001 frameworks laid the philosophical foundation for mass participation, physical education, and elite excellence. They emphasized the dual goal of broad-based sporting access and high-performance achievement. The 2011 National Sports Development Code (NSDC) introduced crucial administrative reforms ensuring transparency, age and tenure limits, and compliance standards for federations.**




However, the National Sports Governance Act, 2025 marks a historic turning point by providing legal enforceability to athlete rights, institutional integrity, and gender equity. For the first time, Indian sport enters an era of codified accountability and athlete-centric governance, a shift from voluntary compliance to statutory responsibility.

The Act establishes a National Sports Tribunal, ensures representation of athletes and women in decision-making bodies, and mandates financial disclosure and ethical oversight, bringing India in line with global governance norms.

## From Policy to Performance: Tangible Outcomes

**The achievements of recent years, India's record performance at the Tokyo 2020 Olympics, Hangzhou Asian Games 2023, and the steady rise of professional leagues illustrate the tangible dividends of policy coherence.**

Flagship initiatives such as Khelo India, Fit India, and the Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS) have created a structured ecosystem linking grassroots participation with elite performance.

India's sports economy has expanded rapidly, contributing to employment generation, tourism, innovation, and entrepreneurship. Sports have evolved into both a public good and a commercial ecosystem, supported by increasing private investment, CSR engagement, and academic-industry partnerships.

## Challenges and Corrective Pathways

**Despite these achievements, several systemic challenges persist. Funding imbalances between cricket and Olympic sports, uneven grassroots infrastructure, and governance lapses in certain National Sports Federations continue to hinder progress. Moreover, the integration of sports into education remains partial, depriving millions of children of early exposure and skill development.**

The National Sports Governance Act, 2025 provides a corrective roadmap, institutionalizing legal oversight, athlete welfare mechanisms, and time-bound grievance redressal through independent tribunals. The report also emphasizes the inclusion of sports management professionals within administrative frameworks ensuring that governance is driven by expertise rather than hierarchy.

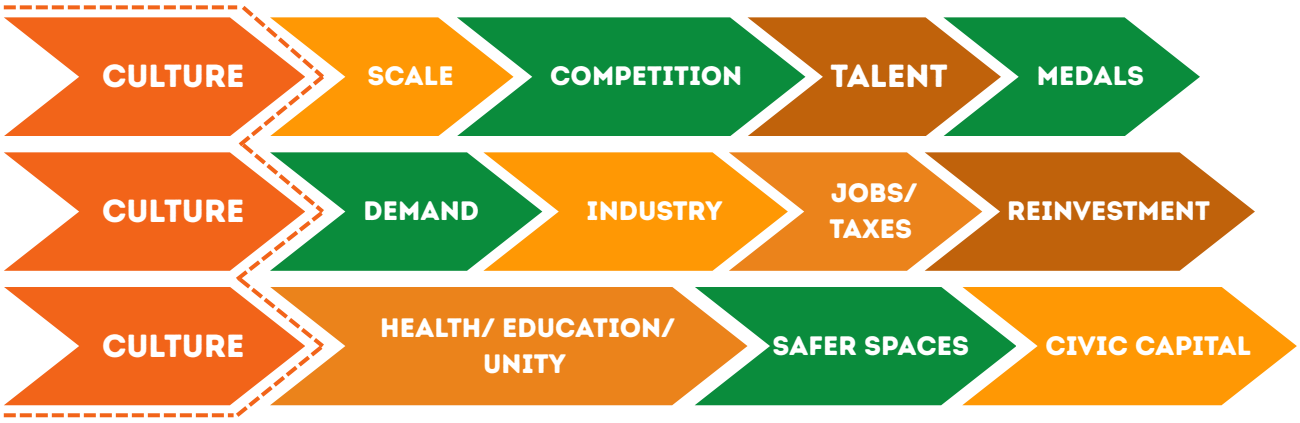
## Lessons from Global Models

### India's reforms resonate with successful international models.

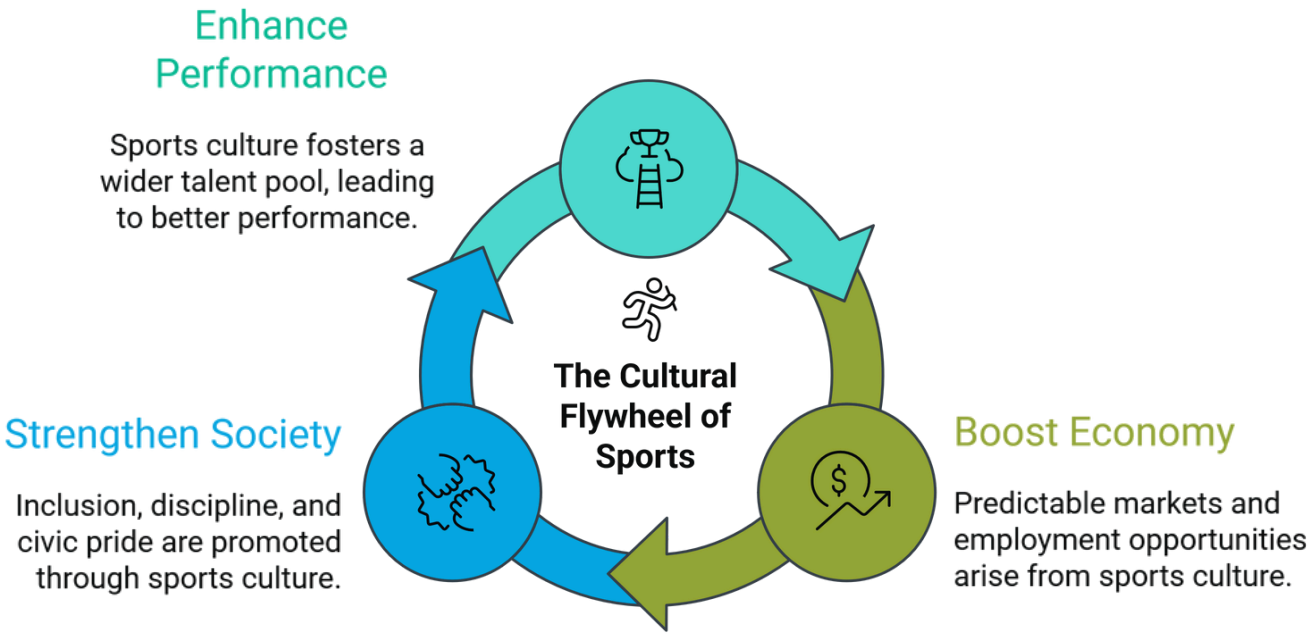
1. Australia's AIS framework demonstrates the power of centralized, science-led athlete development.
2. The UK's lottery-funded high-performance system highlights sustained public financing and accountability.
3. South Korea's education-integrated sports pipeline showcases the importance of linking schooling with training.

Together, these examples affirm that India's trajectory is aligned with global best practices moving towards a science-driven, evidence-based, and inclusive sports ecosystem. The next frontier, however, is cultural transformation, ensuring that sport becomes not an event but a daily practice woven into the fabric of Indian life.

## Why Sports Culture Is the Bedrock




**The report reaffirms that at the heart of every successful sporting nation lies not just infrastructure or funding, but culture the invisible ecosystem of habits, values, and social energy that sustains participation and excellence. Sports culture is not a policy document or a government program; it is the sum of everyday behaviours, community rituals, local heroes, and institutional rhythms that make play instinctive and continuous.**




When families, schools, and workplaces normalize daily sport, protecting a sport hour, maintaining local leagues, and celebrating volunteers participation ceases to be exceptional and becomes inevitable. This cultural metabolism powers three interlinked flywheels:

1. ***Performance:*** A broad base of active citizens produces deeper talent pools.
2. ***Economy:*** Consistent participation drives predictable markets and employment.
3. ***Society:*** Shared play fosters inclusion, discipline, and civic pride.

Budgets may fluctuate and programs may lapse, but culture endures it fills infrastructure with people and purpose. Strengthening this cultural foundation is India's greatest multiplier: it lowers costs, raises outcomes, and transforms sport from an occasional event into a way of life.

## Sports as a Right and a Responsibility

**Finally, the report asserts that sports are not a privilege, but a right, a constitutional and moral entitlement that shapes the character of the Republic. Recognizing the Right to Sports as a Fundamental Right under Article 21A would complete India's constitutional circle, aligning physical education, youth development, and human welfare within a single framework.**

This recognition would guarantee every citizen the right to access, participate, and benefit from sport irrespective of geography, gender, or socio-economic status. It would also hold the State accountable for ensuring adequate infrastructure, safety, and opportunity. When every citizen, regardless of origin, has the means to play, perform, and progress, India will not just build athletes, it will build a sporting civilization.

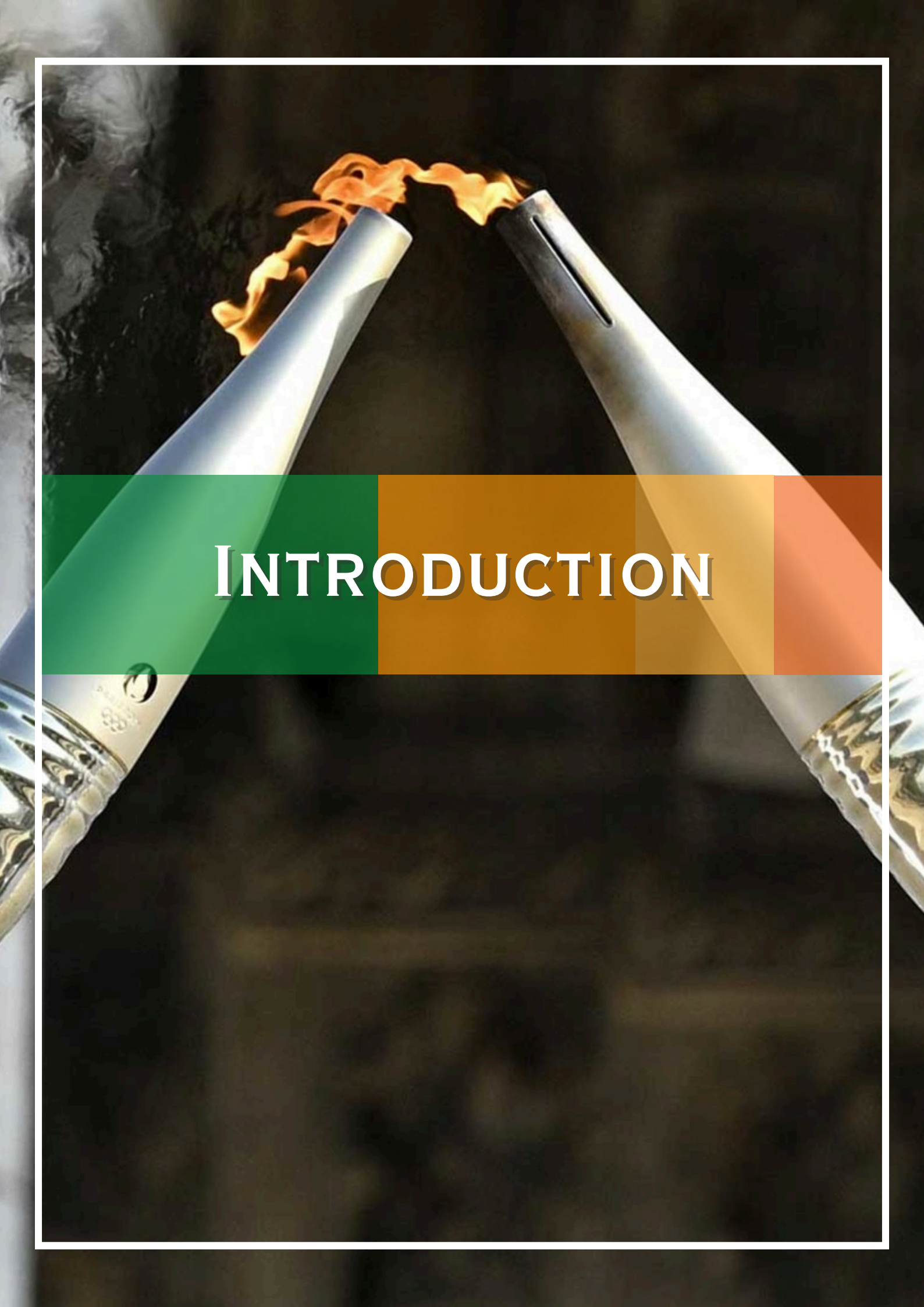
## Towards a Sporting Republic




**In conclusion, this report envisions India as a Sporting Republic, a nation where play is policy, fitness is culture, and excellence is collective.**

By linking governance with participation, culture with opportunity, and rights with responsibility, India can convert its demographic dividend into a sporting dividend.

From the playground to the Parliament, and from the village field to the Olympic podium, sport represents the truest expression of national unity and potential. When India learns to play together, it will learn to grow together and in that shared rhythm of effort and aspiration lies the promise of a stronger, healthier, and more confident nation.



# Introduction

# Introduction

## The Role of Sports in Nation-Building




**In India, sports have never been simply recreational; they are a vessel for culture, identity and shared national purpose. Pre-colonial traditions like akhara wrestling, tribal archery, village kabaddi, North Indian polo and South Indian boat racing were enmeshed in ritual and discipline. They provided social integration and established an ethic of norms in the life of the community.**

Colonialism brought institutionalised sports like cricket, hockey and football into universities, schools and the armed forces. Initially, these sports were instruments of social discipline, but they progressively assimilated by the Indian populace as spheres of assertion and pride. The pre-eminence in field hockey by the Indians for the years 1928 to 1980, consisting of eight Olympic gold medals, and the victory in the 1983 Cricket World Cup came to serve as national benchmarks, which is evidence of the ability for excellence within world regimes of sport.

In contemporary India, sports bear diplomatic, economic and symbolic weight. Achievements such as Neeraj Chopra's gold at Tokyo 2020 operate as a collective aspiration rather than the advancement of an individual. Any discussion of sports policy must, therefore, treat sport as a vehicle of nation-building and public purpose, not merely as a private pastime.

## The Socio-Political Role of Sports in India

**In the federal structure, "sports, entertainments and amusements" are primarily covered in the State List of the Seventh Schedule, but international representation and national policy considerations give a common domain of work for the Union and the States. This separation can be the reason why states such as Haryana, Manipur and Odisha, with well-formulated state policies, have been better than others in the area of spotting and developing talent.**

Ever since the early Five-Year Plans, the Union has cherished sport as a social-inclusion and youth-development tool and has invested in playgrounds, community involvement and physical education. At the international level, sport has also been leveraged as a form of diplomatic capital. For instance, India's long-standing cricketing and educational exchanges with Australia, and its vision to host mega events such as the Olympics in 2036, illustrate the intersection of sport, nation branding, and foreign policy.

With over sixty-five per cent of the citizens under the age of 35, organised sports routes fulfil constitutional mandates for inclusivity and social evolution by harnessing youth energy, minimising alienation, and developing leadership and discipline. Medals are important, but social outcomes and demographic dividends are equally important.

# The Evolution of the Governance for Sports in India

**On the national stage, the Ministry for Youth Affairs and Sport (MYAS) has policy formulation, funding and monitoring responsibility. The Sports Authority of India (SAI), in operation since 1984, provides policy in the form of training centres, coaching functions and amenities. The National Sport Federations (NSFs) control individual sports, but despite the illusion of autonomy, they are subservient to government recognition and grants, and they are magnets for suspicion. The Indian Olympic Association (IOA) represents India to the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and has responsibility for multi-sport representation.**

Despite this design, however, governance has been criticized for political meddling, nepotism, lack of transparency and weak accountability. Court interventions, including by Delhi High Court and Supreme Court, have often been necessary to impose compliance and basic governance norms. National Sports Development Code, 2011 (NSDCI) tried to standardize through age/tenure caps, disclosures and election norms. But enforcement is patchy and when it is challenged, it has no solid statutory foundation.

## Rationale for a National Sports Policy

**The 1984 National Sports Policy raised the prominence of physical education and sports infrastructure, but suffered from delayed implementation because of the lack of resources and administrative proliferation. The 2001 overhaul aimed to reconcile mass participation along with superior performance channels, but the lack of a legislative basis remained to hamper its compliance.**

Judicial prodding culminated in 2011 with the National Sports Development Code of India, but it did not put a stop to the autonomy-accountability dichotomy. The initiative towards a National Sports Governance Act, 2025, seeks to give some solid statutory backing, meaning, enforceable audit, athlete-centric grievance procedures, mandates for gender equity, and explicit fiduciary duty for office holders. The policy thinking, thus, is systemic in fairness, inclusion, welfare and long-term sustainability amongst athletes, rather than medal-centricity in isolation.

## Sports and the Indian Economy

**Sports now constitutes a distinct economic sector. Professional leagues such as the Indian Premier League (IPL) and Indian Super League (ISL) have transformed broadcasting, sponsorship, merchandising and fan engagement, producing spill-overs in venue management, performance science and legal/commercial services. At the very base, employment is generated for coaches, officials, physiotherapists, data analysts and sports managers. The rapid growth of e-sports has expanded participation and monetisation models in the digital economy.**

Sports tourism, infrastructure development and endorsements further embed sport within India's growth strategy. Public policy must therefore address not only athlete development but also financial transparency, investor confidence and integrity safeguards to secure sustainable sectoral growth.

## India's Global Sporting Aspirations



**India's performance pattern has been somewhat patchy, with traditional excellence in hockey and cricket paired with modest Olympic performances for the size of the country. Since 2008, there has been steady progress, starting from Abhinav Bindra's individual gold at Beijing, the medal flurry at London 2012, and a national-record total at Tokyo 2020. Hopes to stage the 2036 Olympics are a commitment to match great-power stature in sport.**

Realising these ambitions requires synchronised action with respect to athlete pathways, coaching quality, sports science, infrastructure, event governance, financial integrity and public-private partnerships. Hosting capability must be treated as a governance stress-test, not just a branding exercise.

## Sports as a tool for Social Justice and Inclusion

**In a country marked by deep social, economic, and gender divides, sports stand as one of the few truly democratic spaces where effort, discipline, and merit can triumph over privilege, and where identity is defined not by caste, class, or creed, but by courage and performance.**

Sports have the capacity to do what policies often struggle to achieve: they humanize equality. A child from a remote village can share the same field, the same jersey, and the same dream as one from a metropolitan city. On the playing field, hierarchies dissolve, and the principles of justice, fairness, respect, and opportunity come alive in their purest form.

By empowering women, tribal communities, persons with disabilities, and the economically marginalized, sports become a vehicle of emancipation. Every medal won by a woman athlete, every rural sports academy that nurtures hidden talent, and every grassroots tournament that bridges divides is a silent act of social revolution.

As India builds its sports policy for the future, it must view sports not merely as a matter of performance but as a mechanism of justice, dignity, and national cohesion. When access to sports becomes universal, inclusion ceases to be rhetoric, it becomes reality.

In the arena of sport, India finds its most powerful expression of equality where every citizen, regardless of origin, can dream, strive, and belong.

## Challenges Confronting the Sports Ecosystem

**The absence of a codified statute, inconsistent grievance redressal and limited independence in selection and governance processes need to be tackled in order to address these persistent gaps and roadblocks to the outcomes in school and university sports infrastructure, politicisation in federations, fragmented talent streams, and inadequate safeguarding for athletes.**

Doping scandals damage credibility and precipitate sanctions. The pre-eminence of cricket skews resources, making Olympic sport under-resourced

Addressing these issues requires clarity with respect to statutory substance, procedure, compliance mechanisms, and overall institution-building.

## Objectives of This Report

**This report, prepared jointly by the Centre for Sports Law, Business & Governance and Jindal Society for International Sports Law, Jindal Global Law School, O.P. Jindal Global University and The Centre of Sports, IMT Ghaziabad, seeks to:**

1. Present a historically grounded account of India's sports policy evolution and governance architecture;
2. Conduct a critical assessment of achievements and shortcomings;
3. Offer international best practice comparisons relevant to the Indian federal and institutional context; and
4. Make recommendations for reforms which are normative, institutional and financial, consonant with India's 2036 Olympic ambitions.

Taken collectively, the Introduction seeks to set out the concept of sports in the constitutional and developmental project in India. The report then goes on to assess the framework in place, determine the binding limitations and lay down the road to reform for an inclusive, accountable and globally competitive sports environment.




# Evolution of Sports Policy in India

# Evolution of Sports Policy in India

**Keeping in mind the country's aspirations India's Sports Policy has evolved significantly while tackling various governance challenges. Since the past 40 years, India has transitioned from ad hoc measures to rather more structured institutional frameworks, beginning with the National Sports Policy of 1984 and continuing through the 2001 and recent 2025 revisions, the National Sports Development Code of 2011, finally culminating in the National Sports Governance Act, 2025. Each milestone has addressed prevailing gaps, global pressures, and domestic needs, introducing new provisions and initiative.**

## The National Sports Policy, 1984: Laying the Foundation

**The National Sports Policy of 1984 was the first comprehensive attempt to develop a coherent national approach to sports. This policy was driven by two factors: Firstly, there was a growing consensus that sport governance and management could not be left to the sole discretion of state governments or voluntary federations. Secondly, systemic weaknesses were further highlighted due to declining international performances, notably the once dominant men's hockey team who had failed to win a medal in a long time. This policy was aimed at raising the standards of sports in the country.**

The 1984 policy emphasized:

- Institutional support and promotion of sports at a larger level;
- Mass participation in sports and physical education as key for youth development;
- Infrastructure expansion and development required, particularly at the grassroots level; and
- Institutional Support for training & coaching programmes, bringing in more scientific and organised training.

This policy was the first of its kind organised national framework and laid down a philosophical foundation for Indian Sports Governance, moving away from a laissez faire approach. However, visionary in intent, the policy was largely aspirational and non-binding. It served more as a guiding philosophy, without any enforcement mechanisms or detailed plan to achieve its goals, with little attention to governance reforms or accountability of federations.

Implementation relied on existing bureaucratic channels or the fledging Sports Authority of India (1984), without really curbing the autonomy of sports federations, resulting in them continuing to operate with little accountability. Funding was inadequate and the State & Union Governments had weak coordination.

The National Sports Policy 2025 and the National Sports Governance Act 2025 built on the 1984 policy's philosophy, mandate a regulatory framework to strengthen implementation and accountability, giving statutory teeth to governance reforms by anchoring them in law, a remedy that was absent in 1984.

## The National Sports Policy, 2001: Balancing Mass and Elite Excellence

**Despite the 1984 Policy, by the late 1990s, the Indian sports ecosystem was grappling with multiple challenges. International performances remained stagnant, with India securing only one medal at the 2000 Sydney Olympics. Infrastructure at the grassroots level continued to be inadequate, and growing concerns emerged regarding governance inefficiencies and the need for greater transparency and accountability within the National Sports Federations (NSFs)**

**Against this backdrop, the 2001 National Sports Policy was formulated based on a twin set of objectives i.e 'Broad-Basing of Sports' & 'Achieving Excellence in Sports'. The policy aimed to strike a balance between these two critical objectives:**

- Mass participation in order to improve physical fitness, create a sporting culture, and provide equal access to opportunities; and
- Excellence in elite sports, with a clear recognition that India needed structured support systems to compete internationally.

Key features included:

- Integration of physical education into schools and universities;
- Creation of sports talent scouting and development systems;
- Expansion of coaching facilities and better training for coaches;
- Encouragement of public-private partnerships in infrastructure; and
- Calls for greater accountability in NSFs, though without legally binding mechanisms.

The 2001 Policy marked a significant philosophical shift. Unlike the relatively narrow 1984 policy, the 2001 policy emphasised on the need of a systematic sports system where sporting success would not just be rooted in the passion of the athletes but also systematic institutional support. However, the policy though provided a blueprint, fell short in practice, echoing similar issues of the 1984 policy.

Funding improved objectively; however, its allocation remained uneven, with cricket continuing to dominate over Olympic sports and several federations resisting substantive governance reform. The absence of enforcement mechanisms meant that many of the policy's governance commitments remained largely aspirational. In the absence of a binding legal framework to ensure transparency and accountability, the Indian sporting ecosystem continued to experience governance-related challenges, particularly in the functioning of National Sports Federations and the organisation of major events such as the 2010 Commonwealth Games.

These shortcomings are addressed in the latest developments. The 2025 policy replaces the 2001 policy and has built on its themes with far more concrete strategies. But more, importantly, the National Sports Governance Act 2025 finally provides the legal backbone that the 2001 policy lacked. The 2025 Act legally mandates transparency and can even impose penalties for non-compliance.

## The National Sports Development Code, 2011: Governance Reforms

**By the late 2000s, governance deficits in Indian sports had become increasingly evident. Consequently, the 2011 National Sports Development Code (NSDC), albeit not a "policy" in the strict sense, marked a pivotal moment in the evolution of sports governance in India. The Code emerged in response to judicial interventions and broader calls for institutional reform and enhanced administrative accountability. Unlike earlier policy frameworks, the NSDC introduced binding operational guidelines for the National Sports Federations (NSFs), aimed at fostering transparency, integrity, and good governance across the sporting ecosystem.**

Key Provisions of the 2011 NSDC envisaged:

- Age and tenure limits for office-bearers of NSFs and the IOA;
- Mandatory annual recognition and compliance requirements for NSFs;
- Transparency obligations, including disclosure of selection criteria, audited accounts, and governance practices; and
- Oversight by the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports to ensure compliance.

The NSDC was significant as it was the first concrete step to enforce good governance in sports federations. It challenged the hegemony created within federations tackling the acute nepotism plaguing these bodies through structural restrictions. The transparency requirements were beneficial to an extent, as it became routine for federations to announce selection trials and criteria publicly. The code requiring federations to meet certain standards of accountability aligned itself with international best practices.

Yet, once again its greatest weakness was the lack of any statutory backing. It was merely an executive code and not a law passed by the parliament, thus enforcement remained inconsistent and weak. A conflict between autonomy & accountability arose as Federations often contested its provisions in court, arguing that their autonomy was being compromised.

It played a pivotal role in setting minimum governance standards, however the only penalty for non-compliance was de-recognition of the federations, often proving impractical or leading to court injunctions. Therefore, the NSDC's ultimate enforcement capacity was largely limited and it lacked the teeth to truly reform the entrenched issues.

The new Act however, retains the core tenets of the Code, such as age/tenure limits, transparency, accountability, athlete welfare and shuts of the loophole of any voluntary compliance. The Act creates independent bodies like the National Sports Board and the National Sports Tribunal in order to strictly enforce rules and get rid of the laissez faire governance. Many of the 2011 Code's provisions reappear in the Act, but now non - compliance can have legal consequences, addressing the primary shortcoming of the 2011 initiative.

## The National Sports Governance Bill, 2025: Towards Legal Accountability

**Recognizing the governance challenges in past policies, the Government of India has now enacted the National Sports Governance Act, 2025 (NSGA 2025), which would prove to be a landmark step in changing how sports federations are regulated and held accountable. While previous policies or codes have themselves been voluntary in nature, the Bill moves the needle significantly and changes the conversation from seeking voluntary compliance to a position of legal requirement and creates a binding legal framework that NSFs and IOA are subject to in terms of their governance systems and more significantly the welfare of athletes.**

The key provisions of the Act include:

- Legal accountability of NSFs and IOA through mandatory registration, disclosure, and compliance;
- Establishment of an Athlete Rights Charter, protecting athletes from discrimination, harassment, and contractual exploitation;

- Gender equity requirements, mandating representation of women in decision-making positions;
- Independent sports tribunals for athlete grievances and dispute resolution;
- Strengthening of audit and compliance systems, including oversight by the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG); and
- Mechanisms to regulate emerging fields like esports and align with international anti-doping obligations.

The National Sports Governance Act (NSGA) has the potential to significantly strengthen the governance landscape of Indian sport. For the first time, standards of governance have been granted statutory recognition, with non-compliance subject to defined administrative and legal consequences. Provisions relating to transparency and accountability, such as mandatory financial audits and compliance with the Right to Information (RTI) framework, are expected to enhance institutional integrity and promote greater confidence in the operations of the National Sports Federations.

These reforms are greatly beneficial for the athletes as the Act provides a much faster and efficient dispute resolution system, while ensuring justice for the athletes. The NSGA also simplifies entry for young athletes to take top positions within the federations, and mandates 25% of federation boards to comprise of eminent sports persons, thus exponentially increasing athlete representation.

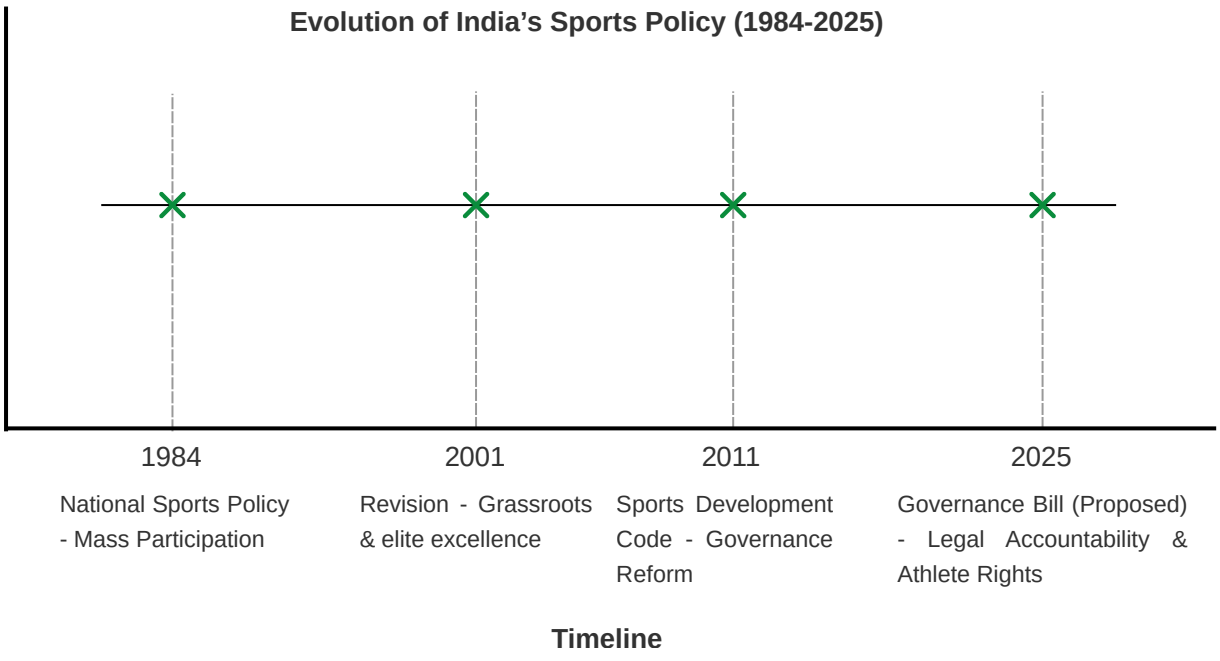
The enforcement bodies such as the NSB or the tribunal set up with competent and independent individuals, would mark a paradigm shift in Indian sports landscape; aligning India’s sports ecosystem with its ambition of becoming a global sporting powerhouse in the run-up to the 2036 Olympics.

## Comparative Reflections

**Tracing the history, India's sports policies highlight constant progress. The 1984 policy provided a clear vision, the 2001 policy expanded the scope, the 2011 Code emphasized good governance, and the 2025 Act establishes legal enforceability. Yet every step has also reflected the difficulties of reforming long-established systems and achieving a balance between freedom and responsibility.**

A comparative global perspective highlights that such a strong legal framework is essential to transform the sporting landscape of a country. For example, Australian Institute of Sport (AIS) system comprised of a central, state of the art training environment backed by adequate funding, and sports science support is considered the reason for its international sporting success. The UK's lottery funding model dramatically increased funding into elite sports, governed by strict accountability for results.

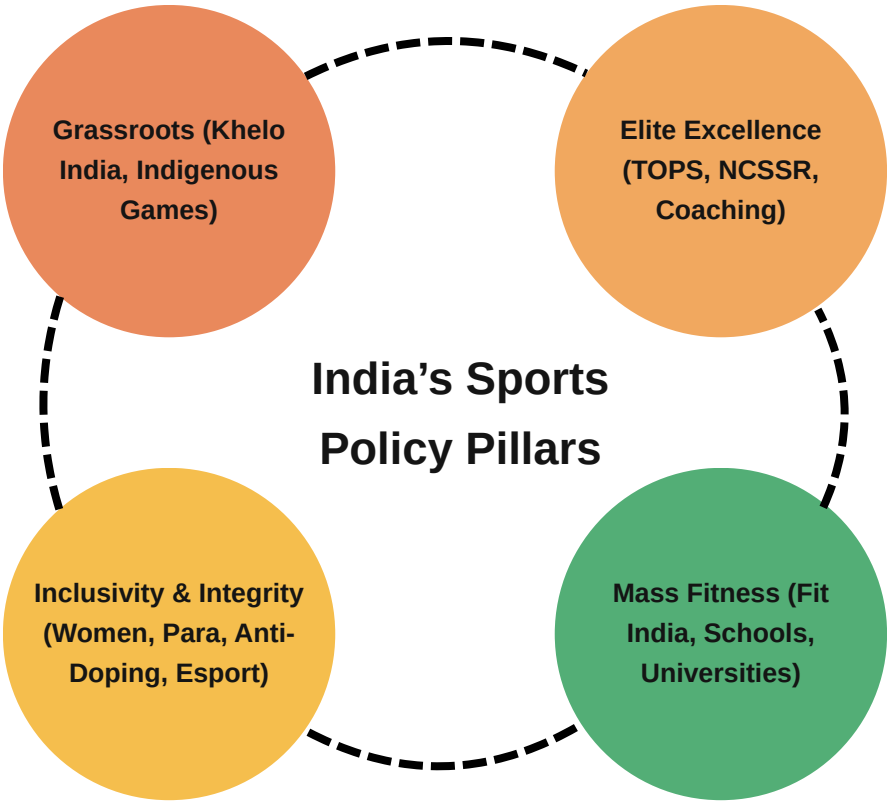
These models have shown that legal and institutional clarity can transform national sporting fortunes. India's hardest challenges have been the fragmentation of authority and resistance to reform within the NSFs, both of which are now addressed and tackled by the NSGA, by providing a single, enforceable governance architecture.



## Conclusion

**The evolution of India's sports policy is not merely a series of documents and codes; but rather a narrative of the nation's sporting aspirations and the search for its sporting identity. From the optimism of 1984 to the reforming zeal of 2001, and then to the pragmatic governance focus of 2011, and now again to the revolutionary ambition of 2025, India has moved unevenly but steadily towards the creation of a sporting ecosystem that can develop both mass participation and international excellence.**

With India preparing for a potential bid for the 2036 Olympics, the future of the National Sports Governance Act will be crucial to whether the country is able to balance its policy aspirations with what is present, transforming sport from being just a symbol of national pride to a constant driving force of national transformation.





# Institutional Framework

# Institutional Framework

**The governance of the Sports in India is largely spread across a web of institutions operating across the international, national and state level. The Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports (MYAS), operating as the apex policymaking body, concerns itself only with the legislative obligations, while the administration and execution of such legislature is spread across such institutions. Hence, this makes it even more crucial to understand this institutional ecosystem in order to comprehensively assess the effectiveness of the India's sports policy in play, for these institutions are empowered with the core objective of giving force to such policies on ground.**

## Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports

**As mentioned hereinabove, the core responsibility of sports governance in India rests on the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports (MYAS) which functions as the body for policymaking, funding, and oversight. It has its responsibilities spreading across:**

सत्यमेव जयते

युवा कार्यक्रम
एवं खेल मंत्रालय
MINISTRY OF
YOUTH AFFAIRS
AND SPORTS

- Formulating national governance policies on sports and youth development,
- Allocation of annual budget and grants to the Sports Authority of India (SAI) and various National Sports Federations (NSFs) for them to carry out their operations,
- Regulating NSFs through recognition and derecognition,
- Compliance with the National Sports Development Code (2011),

- Co-ordination with the international organizations such as the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA),
- Implementation of flagship schemes like Khelo India and Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS)

Through these functions, the impugned ministry aims to critically design and implement regulations and policies that is aimed towards betterment of the sports and effective curation and management of the sportsperson at national level.

## SPORTS AUTHORITY OF INDIA

**The Sports Authority of India (SAI) is another institutional body functioning as the backbone for proper implementation and execution of the policies devised by the MYAS. Established in the year 1984, in the wake of Los Angeles Olympics, its mandate extends to properly implement the policy into action and translate the objectives into success.**

The core functions of this authority extend into proper operation of sports training centres and academies across the country, running of coaching programs and certifying sports science experts, identifying talent in the grassroot level and provisioning scholarships, along with managing India's national camps for athletes while maintaining and upgrading national sports facilities to bring it at par with the international standards.

Since its inception, the SAI has undertaken to fulfil what it set out to achieve while also delivering stellar results when it comes to implementation of policies and nurturing the value of sports in the people of India.

## INDIAN OLYMPIC ASSOCIATION (IOA)

**The IOA was designed to make India better known across the world. It is in charge of sending athletes to the Olympics, the Asian Games, and the Commonwealth Games to represent India. The organisation makes sure that India is well represented in a variety of international multi-sport events.**

Its main goal is to maintain India's ties with the International Olympic Association (IOC) stable, but it also needs to keep an eye on the activity of the National Sports Federations (NSFs) that are linked to it.

IOA intends to cooperate with MYAS and SAI to design and utilise an athlete-centered model with the phrase “Athlete First”. This will enable athletes focus on their training and competitions while the system handles logistics and other assistance.

## NATIONAL SPORTS FEDERATION

**The National Sports Federations (NSFs), an autonomous body specific for almost every sport, is responsible for governing the specific sport it undertakes to. Athletics Federation of India, Wrestling Federation of India, Hockey India, and Swimming Federation of India are a few examples of these NSFs operating to govern the sport.**

They are primarily tasked with the responsibility of organizing domestic tournaments and national championships, selecting athletes for sports specific international competitions and recommending athletes for multi-sport international competitions, along with managing coaching programs and grassroot development of athletes in their respective sports, and coordinating with international federations of their respective sports.

Although these institutions are dependent on government funding, these NSFs are granted with autonomy under the Olympic Charter to operate and function through ways that better suits them and the organization of the sports.

## State Governments and State Sports Authority

**State Governments also undertake a considerable and substantial activities and play a significant role in building sports infrastructure and promoting local talent, nurturing them further, and developing a world-class sportsperson under their realm.**

There have been various instances wherein a few states have emerged as success stories owing to their targeted investment in a particular sport which reflected out through repeated success of athletes from that state, such as that of wrestlers from Haryana, hockey players from Odisha, and boxers from Manipur.

State Governments are empowered to establish their own sports authorities as well in order to develop the regional infrastructure (stadiums, academies etc.), conduct school and inter-state competitions, as well as to provide financial incentives and jobs to medal-winning athletes.

## Supporting Institutions and Schemes

**Along with these institutional frameworks, there are other specialized institutions and schemes as well that contribute to the India's sporting ecosystem. This includes:**

- Khelo India Scheme promotes grassroot participation and identifies young talent;
- TOPS aims to provide funding and support to elite athletes in order to develop more athletes finishing at podium positions at international sporting events;
- Fit India Movement aims at mass awareness of sports and fitness in the Indian youth;
- National Anti-Doping Agency (NADA) aims to comply with the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) regulations and promote clean sport; and
- National Centre for Sports Science and Research (NCSSR) aims to integrate spirts, science, medicine, and technology into athlete training.

## Judiciary and Regulatory Oversight

**The judiciary has also often played a key role in proper governance, always stepping in to fill in the weak spots of the policy framework. Landmark judgments delivered by judicial authorities throughout, including the case of *Zee Telefilms v. Union of India (2005)* classifying quasi-public nature of bodies like the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI), as well as various other judgments enforcing compliance of NSFs and IOA with the governance norms, has aimed to fill in the judicial gap persisting and address the persisting issues.**

The judicial activism also highlights the gaps in statutory regulation and underscores the importance of the proposed National Sports Governance Bill, 2025, which seeks to give legislative authority to many of these oversight functions.

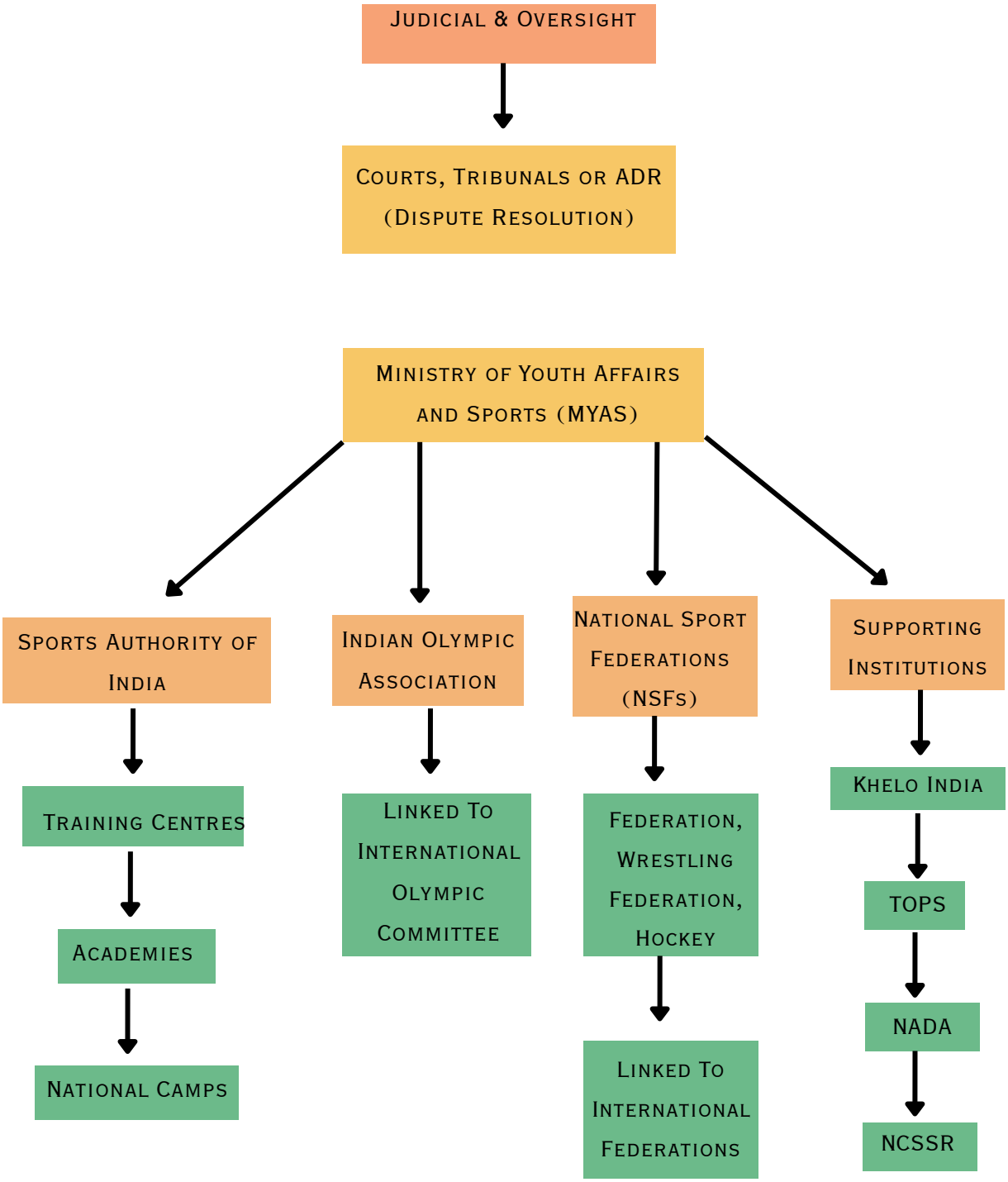
## Private Sector and Civil Society

**Private entities have also begun to shape the institutional landscape in ways that have brought about a positive impact on the sports and the industry as a whole.**

With the initiation of the Franchise-based Leagues such as IPL, ISL, Pro Kabaddi etc., it has completely transformed the sports economy. The Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) funds of big corporations are being directed towards grassroot level of sports in order for identification, management and curation of talent in the local population. Further NGOs and Civil Society Organizations are promoting inclusivity in tribal and rural sports in order to support the talented youth in the backward areas.

This diversification has brought about investment and visibility into the sports domain as well as attracted athlete welfare.

## Institutional Framework of India's Sports Governance






# Key Initiatives in India's Sports Policy

# Key Initiatives in India's Sports Policy

**India's sports policy has been put into action through both high-level frameworks like the National Sports Policies of 1984 and 2001 and the National Sports Development Code of 2011, as well as several major projects that make this a surface level reality. These programs include programs for elite athletes, programs to get more people involved at the grassroots level, inclusivity campaigns, and programs to raise public awareness. The athletic ecosystem in India is supported by these operational pillars.**

## Khelo India

### Governance and Accountability

The Governance Act 2025 sets up a legal system for accountability, making sure that Khelo India centres, academies, and youth games provide transparent audits and disclosures. This legal support turns access to grassroots sports into a right that can be enforced.

### Merit-Based Selection

The Act also makes sure that athletes identified under Khelo India move through merit-based, regulated selection systems that are free of bias or arbitrariness by linking National Sports Federation (hereinafter referred to as "NSF") recognition to compliance with governance norms.

# Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS)

## Athlete Rights Protection

The requirement of Athlete Rights Charters within NSFs in the Act reinforces TOPS, which is already a known scheme for Olympic preparation. This implies that top athletes have legally binding assurances of fair treatment and assistance.

## Dispute Resolution

The Act's National Sports Tribunal gives TOPS athletes a quick, specialist way to settle selection or contract issues, which keeps training times from being interrupted.

## Transformation of Scheme

These changes turn TOPS from an administrative program into a high-performance system supported by rights, which shows the government's commitment to excellence.

# Fit India Movement

## Institutional Compliance

The Act assists Fit India by mandating that all institutions follow rules for safe sports and ethics. This helps to ensure sure that schools, universities, and businesses all comply with the rules for fitness and health.

## Constitutional Backing

The objectives of Fit India are not merely ambitious; they are constitutionally enforceable at the institutional level, as transparency and compliance audits have been codified in law.

# Public–Private Partnerships and Professional Leagues

## Transparency and Accountability

The Act says that NSFs and related organisations must function with transparency in the disclosure of financial records and democratic elections. This gives leagues like IPL, ISL, and Pro Kabaddi League credibility and investor confidence under the supervision of the government.

## Recognition of NSFs

By recognising BCCI and all NSFs as accountable organisations, the Act makes sure that India's professional leagues can grow commercially in a system of open governance.

## Strengthening PPP Models

This mix of freedom and responsibility makes PPP models stronger, and the government deserves praise for seeing the need to connect commercial sports with the public good.

# Initiatives Promoting Inclusivity

## Representation in Governance

The Act requires that women and athletes be represented in government organisations, making inclusivity a legal requirement instead of a matter of administrative choice. This directly supports NSP 2025's promise to promote gender and social equality.

## Safe Sport Rules

Safe Sport Rules keep athletes safe from harassment, exploitation, and discrimination, especially women and other groups who frequently excluded. The government has implemented the constitutional values of dignity and equality a component of sports law that may be enforced.

### Legal Recognition of Inclusion

By including para-sports and indigenous disciplines in the responsibilities of NSFs, inclusion is now legally recognised in Indian sport.

## Sports Infrastructure and Education

### Maintenance and Access

The Act makes sure that infrastructure financed by NSP 2025 is kept up to legally required levels of access and usage by requiring NSFs and state authorities to follow certain rules. This stops neglect or insufficient utilisation.

### Integration with Education

The Act makes NSP 2025's integration of sports into school and university curriculum stronger by making governing bodies responsible for building organised sports programs that connect grassroots with elite levels.

## Anti-Doping and Conduct

### Strengthening Anti-Doping Measures

The Act strengthens to the National Anti-Doping Act 2022 by requiring NSFs to follow WADA-aligned norms and internal codes of conduct. This puts India in the same group as countries that have strong, law-based systems for integrity in sports.

### Wider Integrity Provisions

The Act goes beyond doping to include match-fixing, age fraud, and other violations of integrity by mandating every NSF to have ways of dealing with complaints and penalties.




# Achievements

# Achievements

**Over the past two decades, India's sporting landscape has changed in ways that were once impossible to imagine. The journey has not been without hurdles, but the period after the 2010 Commonwealth Games in Delhi has marked a turning point for sports in India.**

What is being witnessed today is most certainly not a collection of isolated successes, instead the outcome of years of conscious effort which have taken the form of stronger policies, increased corporate backing and a surge of public interest in sports beyond cricket. The achievements listed below capture the spirit of this transformation and highlight how far India has come in terms of redefining its glorious sporting story.

## Record Medal Tally at Tokyo 2020 Olympics

**A landmark moment in India's sporting history was witnessed during the 2020 Tokyo Olympics. Despite the global disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, India delivered its greatest ever medal haul, securing seven medals. These included:**

- **1 Gold:** Neeraj Chopra (Javelin Throw) – India's first-ever Olympic gold in athletics.
- **2 Silver:** Mirabai Chanu (Weightlifting), Ravi Kumar Dahiya (Wrestling).
- **4 Bronze:** P.V. Sindhu (Badminton), Lovlina Borgohain (Boxing), Bajrang Punia (Wrestling), Men's Hockey Team.

This performance was remarkable not only for the impressive medal haul, but also for the symbolic marker it set for India's progress in sports:

- Neeraj Chopra's gold put India on the World Athletics map, a sport which had been traditionally dominated by Western nations.
- A historic return to Olympic glory after four decades was delivered by the men's hockey team who clinched bronze.

- Mirabai Chanu and P.V. Sindhu's medals reinforced the role of women athletes as national icons.
- The implementation of robust policy frameworks like the Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS), enhanced sports science integration, and increased funding for high-performance training were major drivers behind the success of Tokyo 2020. It marked India's transition from relying on isolated individual brilliance to adopting a structured, strategy-driven approach to medal-winning.

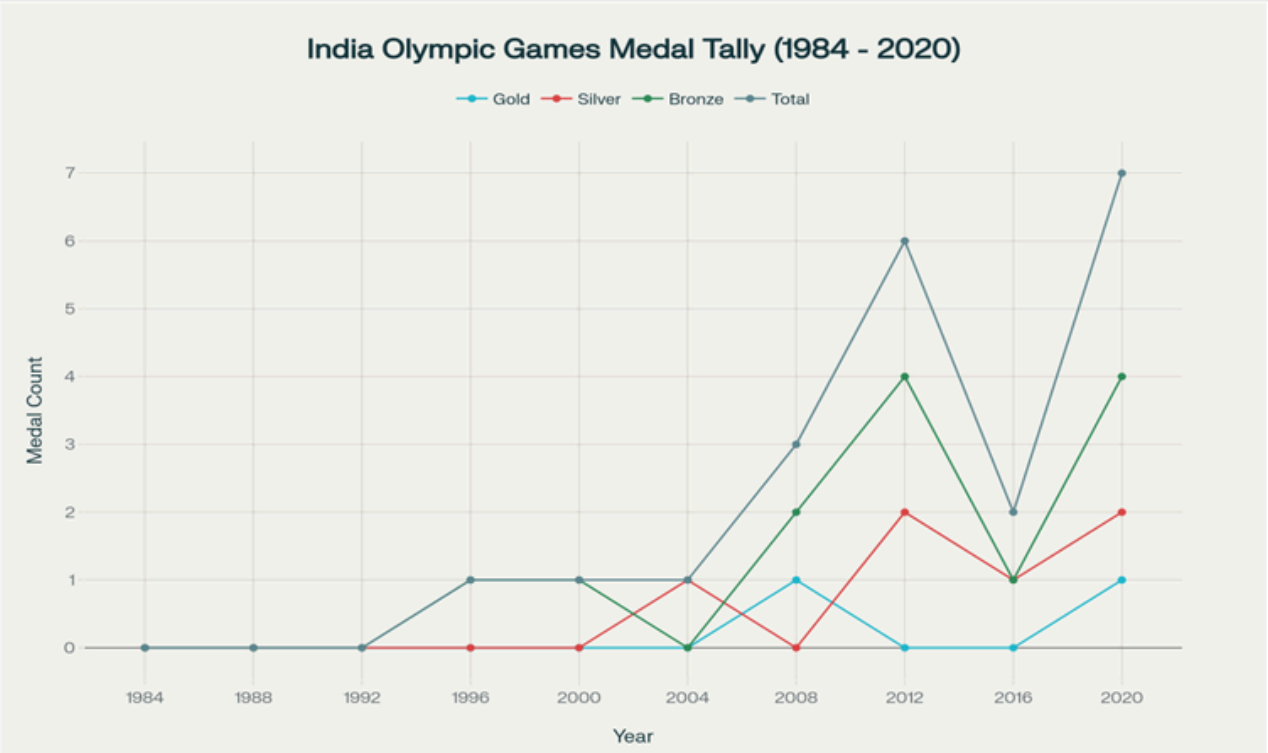



***Figure 1:*** *This line graph depicts India's medal tally progression in the Olympics from 1984 (when the first National Policy was introduced) till 2020 Tokyo Olympics where it completed a record haul of seven medals.*

## An Impressive Showing at the 2023 Asian Games at Hangzhou

**India's reputation as a rising sporting power was consolidated even further by the 2023 Asian Games at Hangzhou.**

**India achieved its best-ever performance, finishing with a remarkable 107 medals, including 28 golds, across disciplines such as athletics, shooting, archery, wrestling, and cricket.**

Notable highlights included:

- Dominance in archery, with both men's and women's teams excelling.
- Multiple gold medals in athletics, particularly in middle-distance and relay events.
- Historic victories in women's cricket and kabaddi.
- Para-athletes setting benchmarks in their categories.

This achievement clearly demonstrated India's success in broadening its competitive base, which is no longer restricted to one or two sports. Additionally, this noteworthy haul of Asian Games medals proved that the grassroots and university-level initiatives undertaken were a rousing success. The Khelo India Youth Games particularly contributed to a large part of its success as it served as a feeder system for this competition.

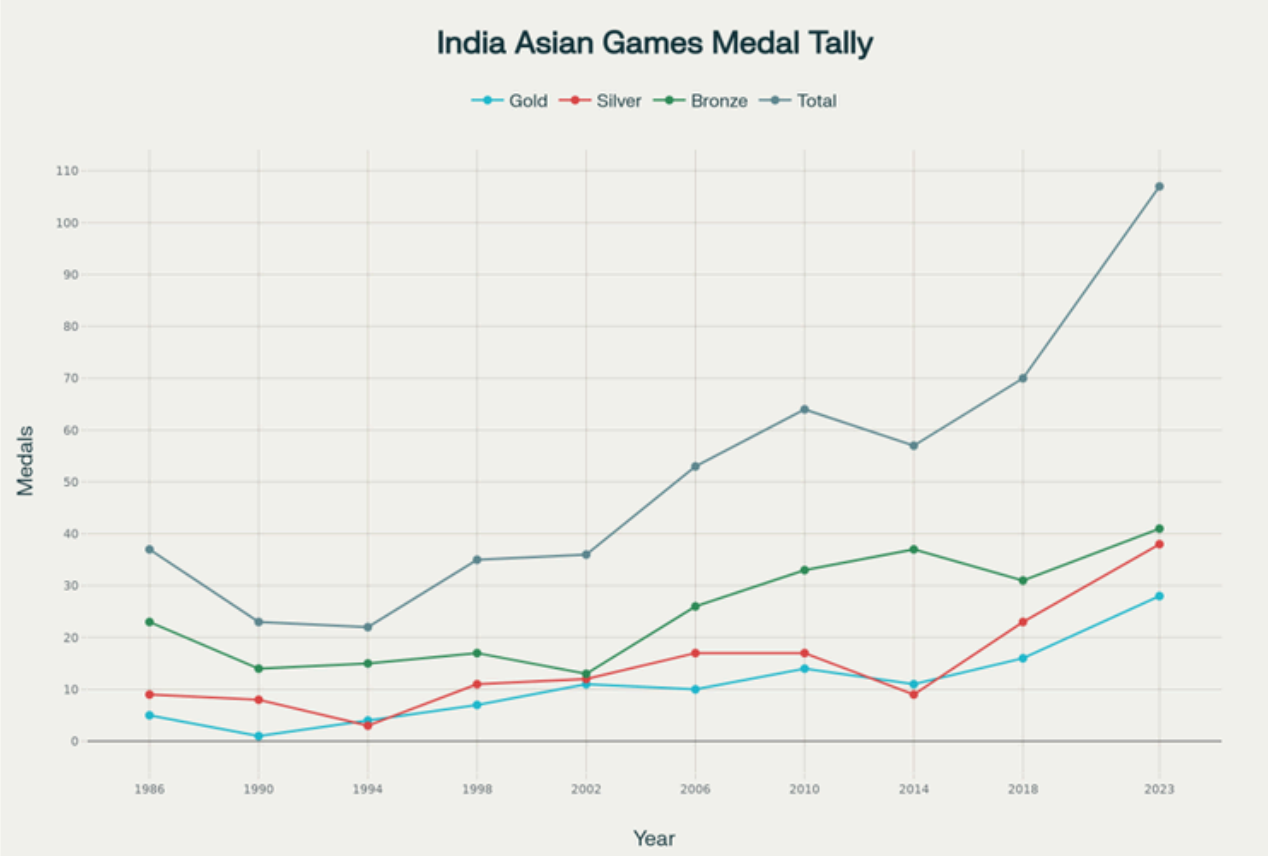



***Figure 2:*** *India's Asian Games Medal Tally Progression from 1986-2023*

## Growth of Corporate Sponsorship and Private Investment

**The surge of corporate sponsorship and private investment has been a watershed moment in Indian sports. For instance, the Indian Premier League (IPL) revolutionized sports financing, attracting global sponsors and media rights deals worth billions of dollars. Taking inspiration from this highly successful model, leagues in football (ISL), kabaddi (PKL), badminton (PBL), and wrestling (PWL) emerged. As a direct outcome of this, new revenue streams and professional contracts for athletes were created.**

Beyond the emergence of new leagues, corporations are increasingly investing in Olympic disciplines. Companies like JSW, Tata, and Reliance have established sports academies and foundations to support athletes. For instance:



- Prominent athletes like Sakshi Malik and Neeraj Chopra were supported by JSW
- Nationwide school and college competitions were run by Reliance Foundation Youth Sports
- Hockey and archery programs have been given solid backing by Tata Trusts

CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) funding has also come into play with a portion of mandatory corporate spending being channelled into sports. This has reduced sole dependence on government budgets and brought in professionalism, global best practices and private accountability into Indian sports.

## Expansion of Grassroots Sports Participation

**The most noteworthy achievement of India's sports policy is the expansion of grassroots sports participation. It has laid a solid foundation that was previously missing, allowing athletes to grow in a more structured and supportive environment.**

This progress has also helped to shift the long-held perception of sports as a distraction from education, which existed due to the lack of clear pathways for emerging talent. Today, such pathways exist as a direct outcome of successful initiatives such as Khelo India, the Fit India Movement, and state-sponsored programs which have helped normalise sports as a highly respectable and legitimate career option.

Some notable milestones of grassroots initiatives include:

- The rise of Khelo India Youth Games, which provide a national platform for under-17 and under-21 athletes.
- Establishment of district-level academies and centres of excellence across the country.
- Integration of sports into school curricula through Fit India certification programs.
- Promoting gender inclusivity, with increasing participation of women, para-athletes, and tribal communities.

The success stories of athletes from rural and marginalized backgrounds, demonstrate how grassroots programs are democratizing access to sports across India. Athletes who have benefited greatly from these initiatives include:

- Mirabai Chanu (Manipur)
- Lovlina Borgohain (Assam)
- Deepika Kumari (Jharkhand)

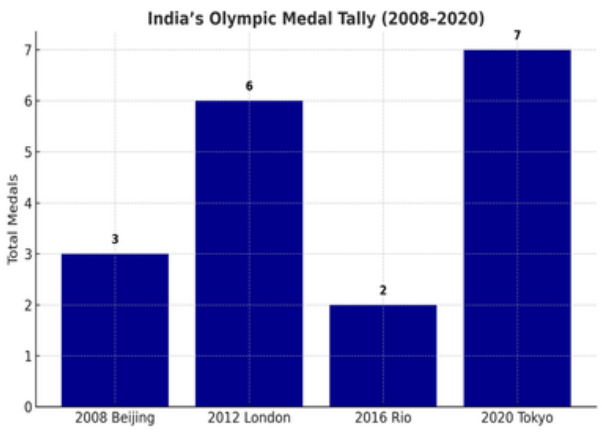


## A Changing Sporting Culture

**Beyond the impressive medal tallies and the emergence of robust policy frameworks, India's recent sporting journey has witnessed the transformation of its very sporting ethos. Once perceived as a leisure pursuit or a diversion from academics, sport has now ascended to the national consciousness as a symbol of pride, aspiration, and opportunity.**

This cultural shift has been significantly reinforced by the visionary leadership of the Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, who has repeatedly underscored the role of sports and sportspersons as key drivers of India's social and developmental visibility. His emphasis on integrating sport into national identity through initiatives such as Khelo India, Fit India Movement, and Meet the Champions has inspired millions to view the playground as a platform for nation-building. By celebrating athletes as heroes of a "New India," the Hon'ble Prime Minister has brought sport from the margins of public life to the forefront of policy, media, and collective imagination.

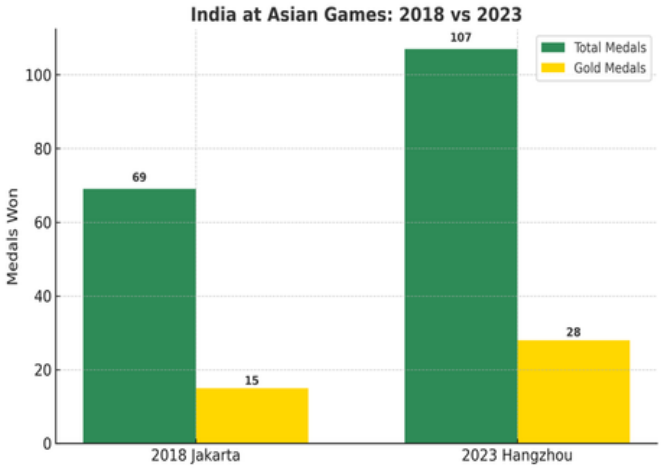
Simultaneously, the rise of digital and social media has amplified athlete visibility to unprecedented levels. The journeys of Indian sportspersons their struggles, triumphs, and perseverance now inspire a generation of parents and communities to encourage sports as a viable career and a vehicle of social mobility.




This transformation has also found reflection in academia and professional practice. Disciplines such as sports law, sports management, and sports governance have rapidly evolved, with pioneering institutions like the Centre for Sports Law, Business, and Governance at O.P. Jindal Global University and the Centre for Sports Research at IMT Ghaziabad driving evidence-based scholarship and policy innovation.

Collectively, these developments signify that India's sporting culture is no longer confined to the playing field, it now permeates classrooms, courtrooms, boardrooms, and living rooms.

Sport today is both a career and a catalyst, shaping not just athletes, but an entire nation's sense of confidence, unity, and purpose.





# Challenges

# CHALLENGES

**India's sports system continues to be hindered by structural and cultural obstacles which limit its competitiveness in international sports, despite the introduction of a new Act and several governmental efforts. The issues are not merely confined to the performance of sportspersons but range across governance, infrastructure, law, and sporting culture. Unless holistically addressed, they risk diluting the achievements of the past few decades. These ongoing issues with the most recent data and policy changes are described in this section.**

## GOVERNANCE DEFICITS AND POLITICAL INTERFERENCE

**Governance issues including political interference and non-transparent functioning of many NSFs, continue to plague the Indian sport. The National Sports Governance Act, 2025 introduces legal accountability while mandating term limits, athlete representation, compliance with international charters and the establishment of a National Sports Tribunal. However, the implementation of these reforms must be done effectively for it to yield meaningful results.**

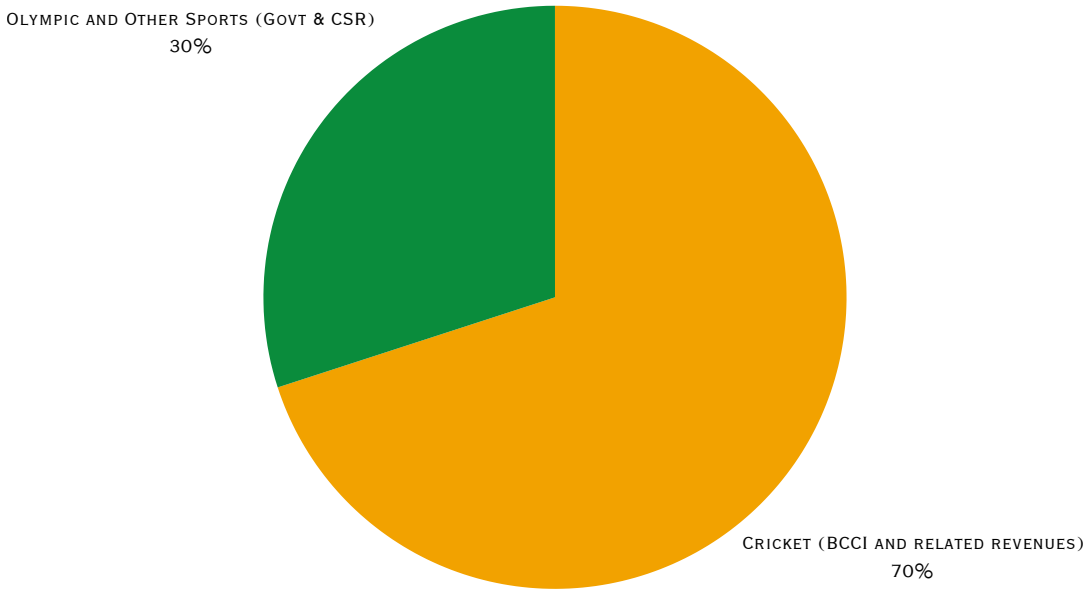
Recently, there have been repeated court interventions in bodies like the Wrestling Federation of India and the All-India Football Federation due to irregularities in elections, athlete selection and financial management. While the 2011 National Sports Development Code sought to impose age and tenure limits, the absence of legislative force has limited its impact. The new Tribunal System now institutionalizes sports dispute resolution, but leaves some issues such as doping, for other bodies, adding complexity and confusion.

## Funding Imbalance

**India's sports budget for FY 2025-26 reached a record ₹3,794.3 crores indicating a rise of 10% over the previous year and with over ₹1,000 crores allocated to the Khelo India programme for grassroots and multi-sport development. However, the distribution of these funds is not equitable to the sports themselves and remains skewed.**

Cricket, which operates under the independently wealthy BCCI, attracts the vast majority of corporate sponsorship and private investment, dwarfing funds available for Olympic and other sports. Olympic sports rely on limited government funding and sporadic corporate CSR contributions.

**Sports Funding Allocation in India (Cricket vs Olympic Sports)**




National Sports Federations (NSFs) collectively received ₹400 crores, while the Sports Authority of India was allocated ₹830 crores for athlete training and infrastructure. The National Sports Board Fund established under the Act is a step forward to create an equitable resource allocation mechanism but is not guaranteed a minimum allocation and many reforms for marginalized sports hinge on the availability and timely disbursal of government and private funds.

## Weak Grassroots Infrastructure

**The Khelo India initiative has upgraded or built over 280 projects in five years, with several states investing heavily in new training centres, synthetic tracks, and multi-use facilities.**
**Yet, infrastructure quality and access remain highly unequal:**

- Elite academies and new facilities cluster in urban regions and select sports-centric states like Haryana & Odisha, while rural and smaller towns often lack even basic playfields or trained coaches;
- While inclusiveness and accessibility are emphasized in the Act and updated programme guidelines, implementation at the block and village level is hampered by bureaucracy, funding constraints, and capacity gaps;
- Recent private-public partnership models and the use of corporate funds (CSR) are helping bridge some gaps, but there is no data showing that all the districts meet minimum facility standards nationwide; and
- Without strong school-level systems, India's talent pipeline will continue to depend on isolated academies and individual initiatives rather than a nationwide program.

## Doping Concerns and Ethical Challenges

**India remains at the top of the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA)'s global list for most doping violations as of 2022, with 125 positive cases, amounting to 3.2% of all tests which are higher than Russia, the USA, or China. Contributing factors include:**

- Limited awareness among coaches and athletes about banned substances;
- Testing had been increased by agencies such as NADA but were limited as compared to developed nations we are competing with on a global level;
- Inadequate education programmes at grassroots and university levels;
- Issues such as age fraud, match-fixing, and procedural irregularities in certain leagues have also raised concerns regarding the integrity and governance standards of Indian sport.; and
- Patchwork regulation, as anti-doping disputes continue to be handled by NADA, not the unified Tribunal under the Act.

The new Act addresses safe sports and ethics which must be rigorously enforced or the reputation of Indian athletes will remain seriously at risk.

## Prior Absence of a Comprehensive Sports Law

**The National Sports Governance Act, 2025 provides, for the first time, a unified statute covering NSFs, dispute resolution, ethics, athlete rights, and transparency. However, some exclusions persist like:**

- Doping-related disputes and international event conflicts are outside the Tribunal's purview (as per Sections 20 & 21) and are still covered by NADA which splits the powers to adjudicate to cause confusion moving forward; and
- Mechanisms for regular financial audits and penalties are strong on paper but require strict and independent enforcement.

India advances towards a global-standard regulatory framework, but specific implementation rules and regulations are still rolling out.

## Cultural Challenges

**Changing mindsets, especially at the family and community level, is a generational effort that must accompany policy and funding reforms.**

- Sports are still widely viewed as secondary to academic achievement, particularly in rural and low-income families despite the rise in Khelo India participation and awareness campaigns;
- Female and para-athlete participation in grassroots programmes is improving, yet cultural and logistical barriers persist in many states; and
- Sports education and career counselling in the field still remains limited.

While the National Sports Governance Act, 2025 puts critical reforms into statutory force, historical challenges of over-centralization, funding bias, ethical violations, and grassroots inequities are far from solved. The success of this new era will depend on robust monitoring, transparency, and sustained investment across all regions and disciplines.



# Global Comparisons

# Global Comparisons

**As India moves forward with the National Sports Governance Act (NSGA) 2025, it's crucial to align this policy with global best practices for long-term success. The Act aims to enhance transparency, athlete welfare, and governance, but its effectiveness will depend on how it mirrors successful models from countries like Australia, the UK, and South Korea. These nations have achieved sporting excellence through sustained funding, independent governance, and science-driven athlete development. Drawing from their strategies will ensure that India's sports reform is not only regulatory but also performance-focused and future-ready.**

## Australia – The Australian Institute of Sport (AIS) Model: A Science-Integrated National Approach

**Australia's emergence as a global sporting force, particularly since the 1980s, is directly attributed to the establishment of the Australian Institute of Sport (AIS) in 1981.**

The AIS was a strategic response to Australia's underperformance at the 1976 Montreal Olympics, where it failed to win a single gold medal. Its creation marked the beginning of an integrated, science-backed, athlete-centric high-performance system. The AIS unified sports science, medicine, coaching, psychology, nutrition, and strength conditioning under one institutional framework. Backed by stable federal funding, the AIS enabled continuity across Olympic cycles, shielding sports development from the vagaries of political cycles or annual budgets. A core strength of the AIS lies in its pioneering research and application in biomechanics, exercise physiology, and performance analytics, which are integrated into the daily training environments of elite athletes.

The AIS also serves as a knowledge hub, disseminating expertise to regional and sport-specific centres across the country. As a result, Australia now regularly finishes among the top ten to fifteen nations in the Olympic Games, demonstrating how evidence-based systems can yield global competitiveness even in nations with modest population sizes.

## United Kingdom – Lottery-Funded High-Performance Strategy and Institutional Independence

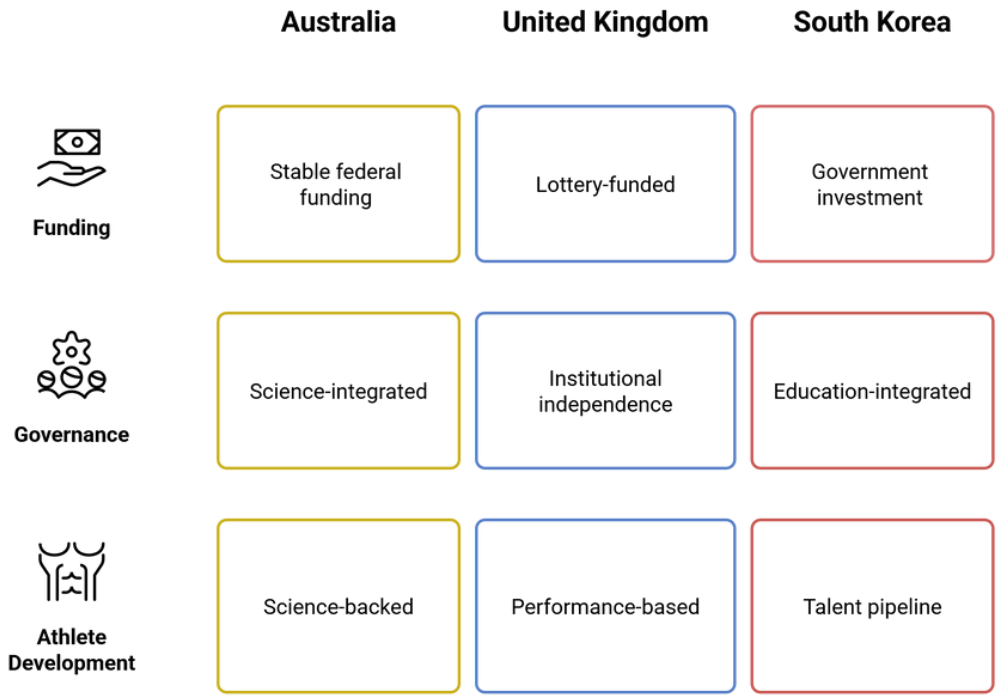
**The United Kingdom's rise as an Olympic powerhouse was a result of strategic reforms undertaken in the 1990s, particularly the introduction of National Lottery funding and the establishment of UK Sport. The National Lottery provided a ring-fenced, predictable funding stream dedicated to Olympic and Paralympic sports, allowing for long-term planning and investments.**

UK Sport, an autonomous agency, was created by the Government to manage these funds and disburse them based on sport-specific performance benchmarks. This "no compromise" funding model ensured that resources were channelled into disciplines with high medal potential, while also holding federations accountable for delivering results. The British approach extended beyond funding as it implemented stringent governance norms via the Code for Sports Governance, which mandates transparent financial practices, gender equity, athlete representation, and professional leadership within sports bodies. The impact of this systemic reform was transformative. From a solitary gold medal at the 1996 Atlanta Olympics, the United Kingdom surged to second place on the medal table at the 2016 Rio Olympics with 67 medals. This trajectory underlines the efficacy of combining autonomous governance, performance-based funding, and targeted high-performance support to elevate a country's global sporting stature.

## South Korea – An Education-Integrated Talent Pipeline

**In contrast, South Korea's model is distinguished by its seamless integration of sport into the national education system. From early schooling through university, talented athletes are identified, trained, and mentored within an ecosystem that treats athletic performance as a legitimate academic pursuit.**

Sports are embedded within school curriculums, supported by structured competitions and government-sponsored coaching. Promising athletes are then channelled into specialised sports schools and universities, the most prominent being the Korea National Sport University (KNSU). Founded in 1977 and granted university status in 1993, KNSU has been instrumental in developing Olympic-level talent across sports like taekwondo, archery, short-track skating, and baseball. Government ministries provide consistent investment in facilities, international exposure, and scientific support. The cultural ethos around sports as a form of educational achievement reinforces participation and respect for athletic careers. This integration has resulted in a stable and highly productive talent pipeline that has sustained South Korea's competitive edge across multiple Olympic cycles.

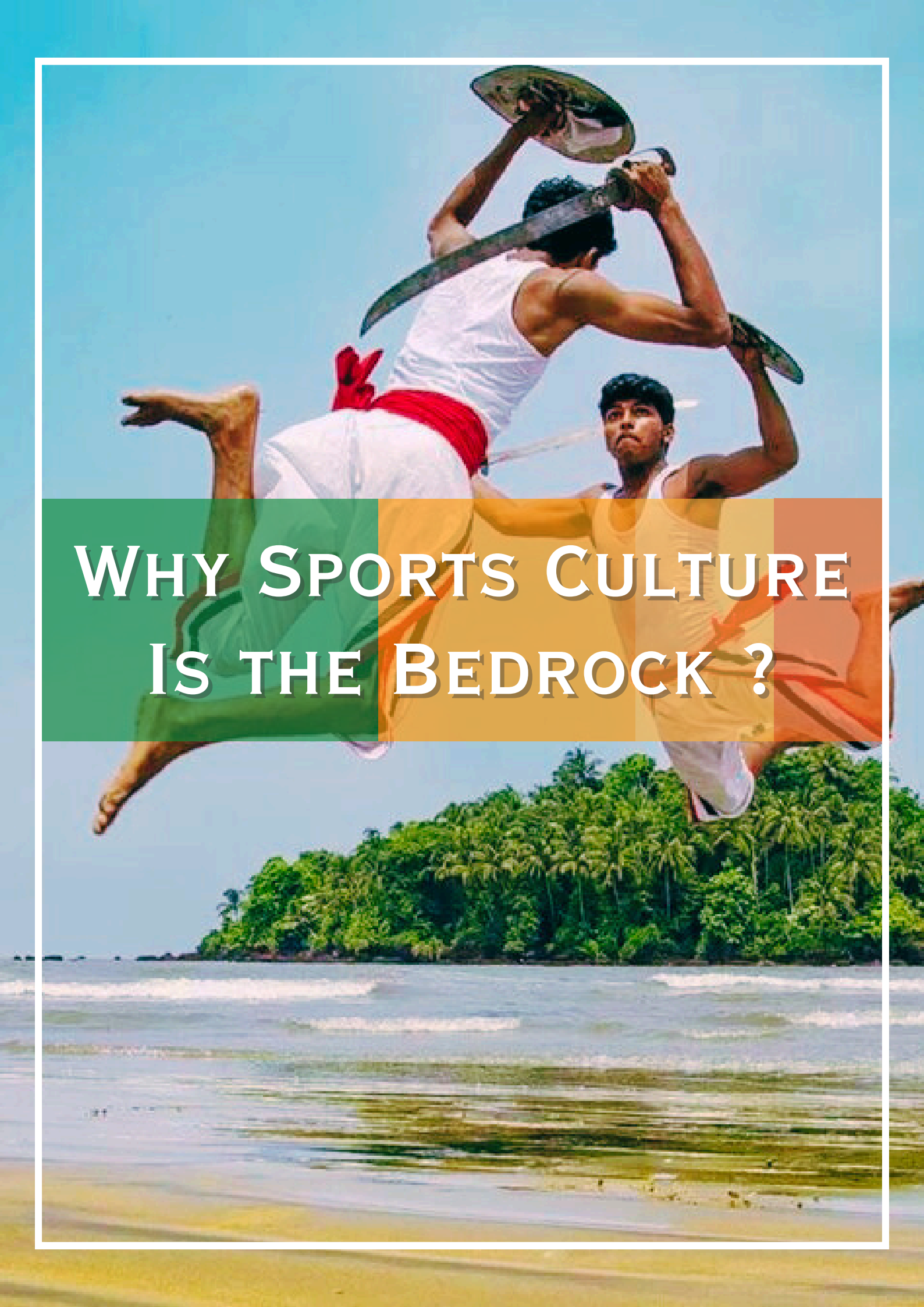


# Strategic Implications for India under the National Sports Governance Act, 2025

**Drawing from these case studies, there are four core strategic implications for India's implementation of the National Sports Governance Act, 2025. First, consistent and ring-fenced funding is essential. India's current sports financing often fluctuates year-to-year and is heavily skewed towards cricket.**

Creating a dedicated, non-lapsable National Sports Development Fund which is protected from fiscal variability, would provide the long-term stability needed for multisport development. Second, institutional autonomy with accountability must be ensured. The National Sports Board, envisioned under the NSGA 2025, must operate with independence akin to UK Sport or the AIS, governed by professionals and protected from political interference. Third, science-driven high-performance centres must become the backbone of Indian athlete development. Revamping the Sports Authority of India centres into multidisciplinary hubs that house coaching, nutrition, psychology, data analytics, and sports medicine will bring India closer to the operational standards of AIS. Lastly, sports should definitely be integrated within the national education framework. The National Education Policy 2020 provides a foundation, but further steps are needed to make sports a viable academic and professional pathway, similar to the Korean model. This includes the development of specialised sports schools, structured inter-school and university-level competitions, and scholarships that encourage early-stage participation and elite transition.

The National Sports Governance Act, 2025 presents a historic opportunity to reshape India's sporting future. Global precedents show that successful countries do not rely on talent alone as they build systems, protect them from short-term disruption, and invest in science and education. India must move from episodic excellence to sustained sporting achievement. For that, the combination of progressive legislation, institutional reform, financial commitment, and evidence-based planning is not optional, it is essential.



# Why Sports Culture Is the Bedrock ?

# Why Sports Culture Is the Bedrock ?

**Sports culture is not a program or a policy, it is a living ecosystem of habits, norms, role-models, spaces, calendars, and conversations that make playing, training, competing, spectating, volunteering, and valuing sport feel natural and daily.**

It is broader than “physical literacy” (skills and knowledge to move) and deeper than raw participation counts (how many turned up this week). Sports culture answers a more fundamental question: Do people in this society instinctively make time for sport, organize around it, and pass it on?

When that answer becomes “yes,” three reinforcing flywheels begin to spin - ‘in performance’, ‘in the economy’, and ‘in society’ each accelerating the others.

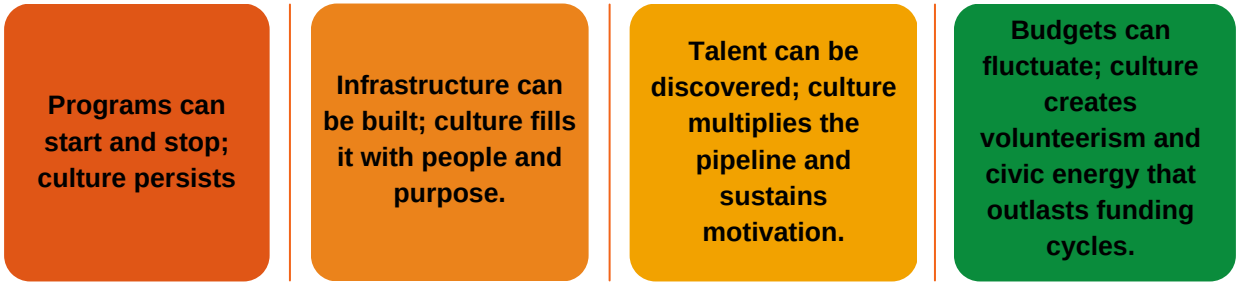
## What exactly is “sports culture”?

Sports culture is the sum of seven interlocking elements:

- ***Daily Behaviours:*** People routinely play, train, walk/cycle to school, join a club, or volunteer at events.
- ***Social Norms:*** Families, teachers, employers, and peers expect and value sport; girls and para-athletes are welcomed and celebrated.
- ***Spaces & Access:*** Parks, school grounds, lanes, rooftops, ghats, and stadia are visibly used; access is safe, nearby, and affordable.
- ***Calendars & Rituals:*** Local leagues, school fixtures, festivals, and district championships exist on predictable, publicized schedules.
- ***Institutions:*** Clubs, coaches, referees, event organizers, and facility operators function reliably with simple rules and fair play.
- ***Symbols & Stories:*** Local heroes, school captains, community rivalries, and shared memories create identity and pride.
- ***Pathways:*** From the first kick/throw all the way to elite training, there are recognizable rungs school → club → district → state without invisible gates.

When these elements cohere, participation shifts from “special” to everyday. That normalcy is the bedrock upon which elite performance, industry growth, and social dividends are built.

## WHY CULTURE BEATS ISOLATED PROGRAMS ?



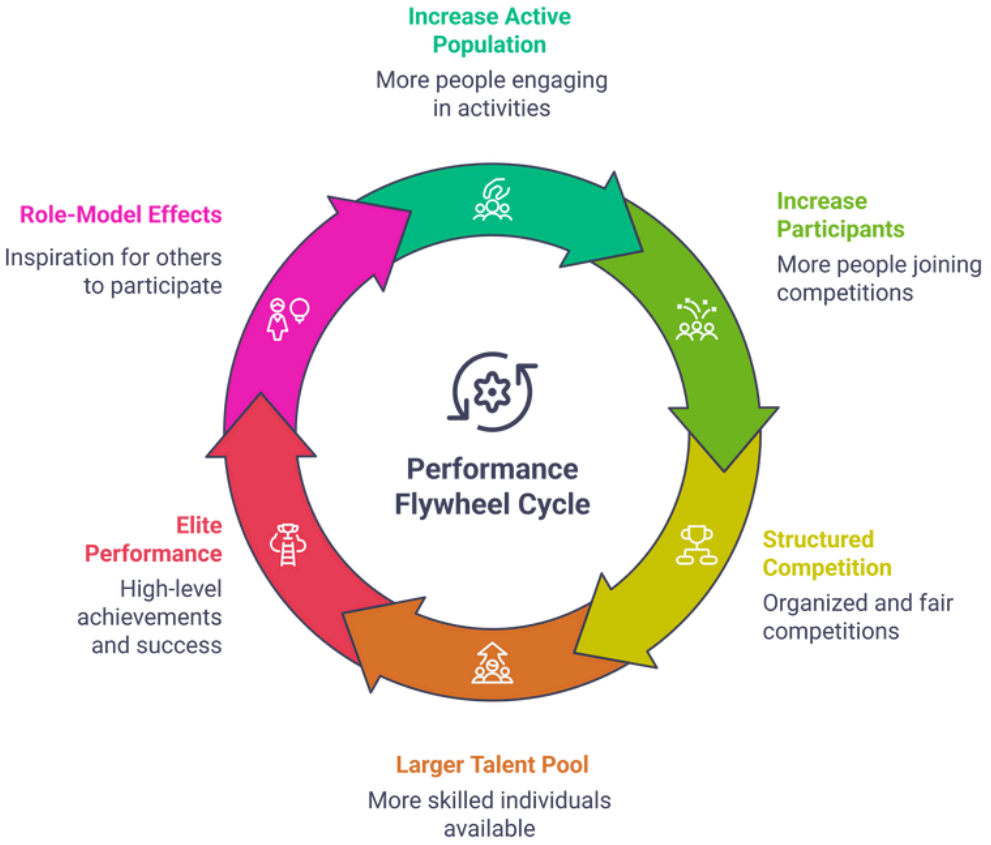

In other words, culture is the metabolic rate of the sports system. If it runs high, everything else becomes easier and cheaper.

## THE THREE REINFORCING FLYWHEELS

### Mechanics of Performance Flywheel

- ***Active Base:*** More children and adults move weekly; schools protect a daily sport hour; neighborhoods have 10-minute walk access to play.
- ***Participant Conversion:*** Regular play converts into registered participants i.e. school teams, community clubs, age-group leagues.
- ***Competition Density:*** Predictable calendars (school, inter-ward/GP, district, state) raise the number and quality of meaningful matches.
- ***Talent Identification & Development:*** A broader base + more game minutes produce more and more ready talent for academies and HPCs.
- ***Elite Performance & Role Models:*** State and national success is seen locally (streams, assemblies, parades), renewing aspiration and belief.

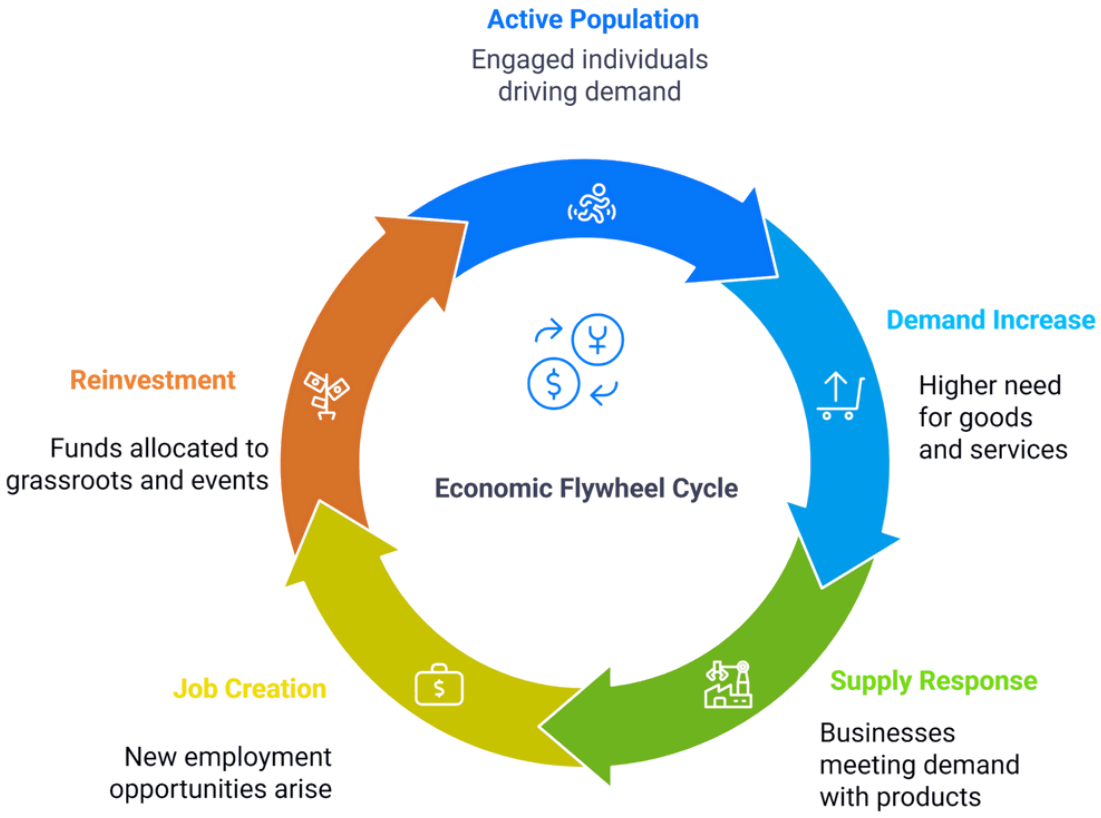
- ***Early indicators to watch***
  - Weekly participation rate (children/adults), competition minutes per athlete/season, club density per 10k residents, and % of schools with functioning teams.
- ***What switches it on***
  - Daily school sport hour, school-to-club twinning, district league calendars published pre-season, low-friction registrations, and safe, nearby play spaces.




## Mechanics of Economic Flywheel

- ***Demand Spark:*** As more people play, households spend on balls, racquets, shoes, protective gear, apparel; schools and clubs buy team kits and shared inventory.
- ***Services Scale:*** Coaching, physiotherapy, strength & conditioning, officiating, events, turf operations, local streaming, and analytics start to formalize.
- ***Supply Response:*** Manufacturers upgrade quality and variety; retailers expand formats; repair/refurbish micro-enterprises appear; digital booking platforms grow.
- ***Employment & Revenues:*** Steady local leagues mean predictable revenue for venues and vendors; more formal jobs and GST streams emerge.

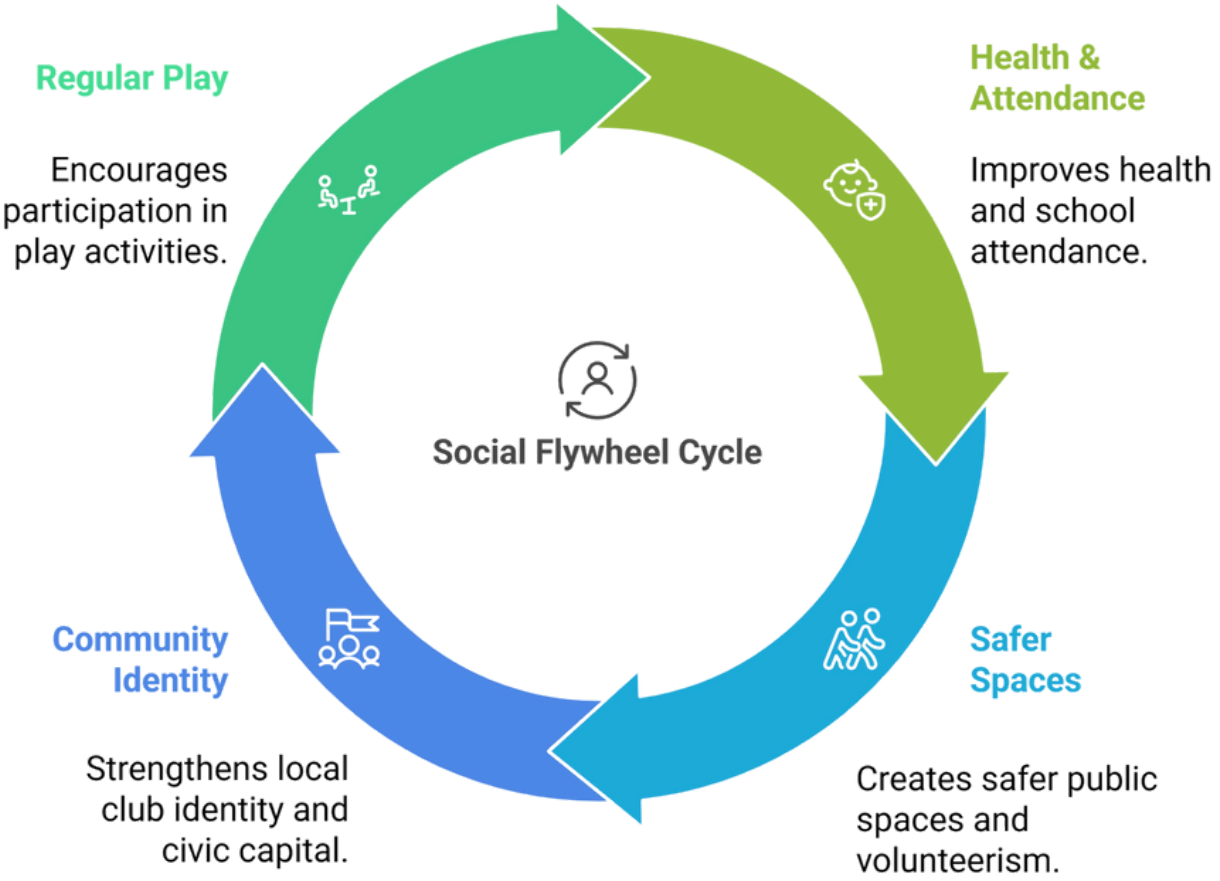
- ***Reinvestment:*** With visibility of returns, municipalities, CSR, and private operators reinvest in lights, surfaces, equipment libraries, and youth programs fueling the next demand wave.
- ***Early indicators to watch***
  - Household sport spend share, equipment library turn-over, coaching certificates issued, venue utilization hours, MSMEs onboarded to standards/certification.
- ***What switches it on***
  - Equipment libraries (reducing entry costs), capped community fees, predictable event calendars, local procurement policies, and “Active Workplace” employer challenges.




## Mechanics of Social Flywheel

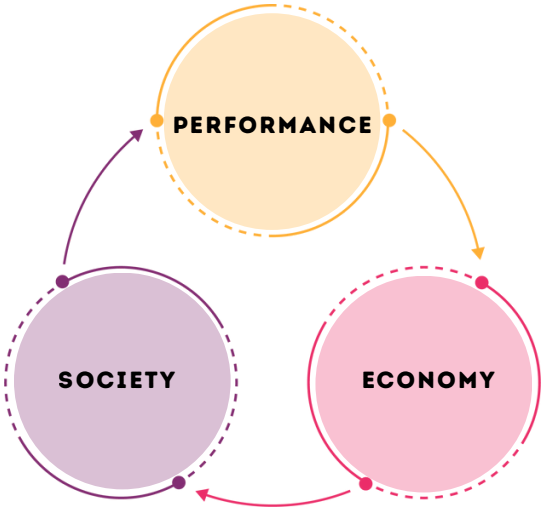
- ***Human Development:*** Routine sport improves fitness, attention, resilience, teamwork, and mental well-being; schools report better attendance and conduct.
- ***Gender Inclusion:*** Women-first slots and visible girls’ teams normalize female participation; community attitudes shift; drop-out rates fall.
- ***Cohesion & Safety:*** Activated parks with lighting and marshals become safer; neighbors meet; informal mediation and social trust increase.
- ***Civic Capital:*** Clubs and volunteer groups emerge as new “little institutions” that organize leagues, maintain spaces, and raise resources.

- ***Identity & Pride:*** Local derbies, district finals, and school assemblies build shared stories. The jersey becomes a symbol; youth feel seen.
- ***Early indicators to watch***
  - Girls' participation ratio, para-inclusion rate, attendance improvements in participating schools, volunteer hours logged, reported safety incidents during play slots.
- ***What switches it on***
  - Women-first prime time, para-accessible design, safeguarding protocols, neighborhood marshals, streaming of local finals, and recognition for volunteers.



## How the flywheels reinforce one another ?

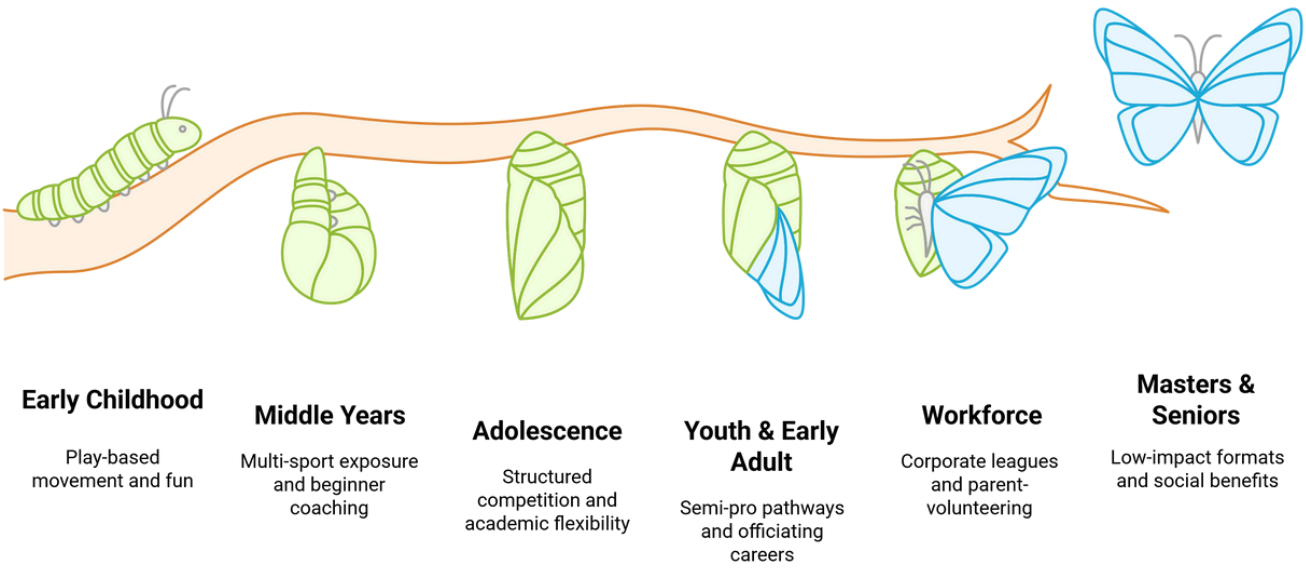
- ***Performance*** ↔ ***Economy:*** Better athletes increase viewership and merchandising; stronger industry reduces costs for grassroots players and teams.
- ***Economy*** ↔ ***Society:*** Jobs and local businesses around sport build buy-in; more volunteers and clubs lower delivery costs for events and leagues.
- ***Society*** ↔ ***Performance:*** Inclusive norms enlarge the talent pool (girls, para-athletes, late bloomers); safer, busier spaces provide more practice hours.




This is systems thinking: change one element and the others respond. Policy wins compound not linearly, but exponentially—when flywheels are synchronized.

## How the flywheels reinforce one another ?

- ***Early Childhood (3–8):*** Play-based movement; fun, non-specialized games; motor skills without pressure.
- ***Middle Years (9–13):*** Multi-sport exposure; school leagues with equal playtime; beginner coaching certifications for teachers.

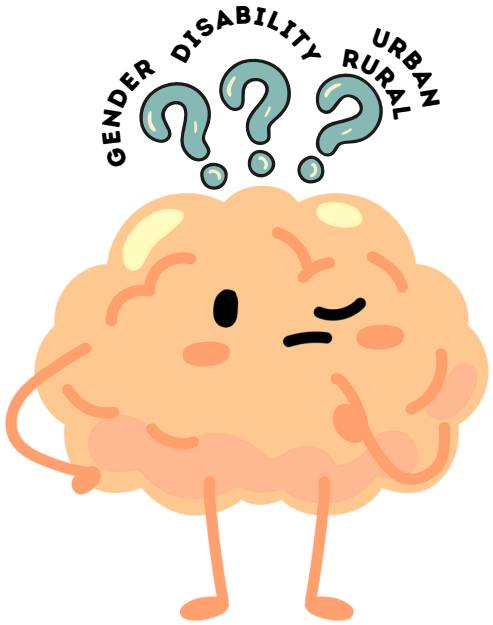


- ***Adolescence (14–18):*** Structured competition; strength & conditioning basics; academic flexibility for committed athletes; safeguarding paramount.
- Youth & Early Adult (19–25): Club depth; semi-pro pathways; university leagues; officiating/coaching careers open up.
- ***Workforce (26–50):*** Corporate leagues, community leagues, and fitness-for-performance programs; parent-volunteering sustains youth calendars.
- ***Masters & Seniors (50+):*** Low-impact formats (walk-football, badminton doubles, cycling clubs); health and social benefits sustain participation.

A culture designed for every stage ensures constant replenishment of participants, volunteers, and fans.

## THE INCLUSION DIVIDEND

- ***Gender:*** When girls have guaranteed, safe prime-time slots and female coaches/officials are visible, participation surges and so does the talent pool and audience base.
- ***Para-Sport:*** Accessible design, adapted equipment, and integrated event days mainstream disability sport, widening social empathy and discovery of elite para-talent.
- ***Rural/Urban:*** Village playfields and ward-level mini-pitches create nearby access; inter-GP/ward rivalries anchor identity and reduce travel/time barriers.




Inclusion is not an add-on; it is the engine that enlarges the base and legitimizes public investment.

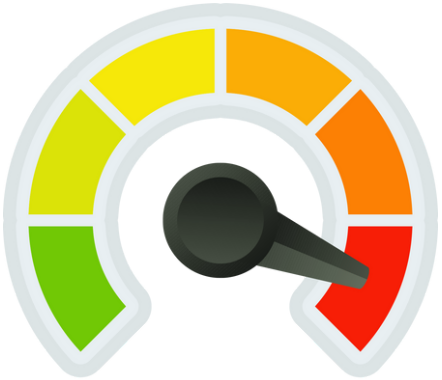
## Behavioural science underpinnings (why people actually show up)

- ***Friction Costs:*** The shorter the distance, the simpler the sign-up, the lower the fee, the higher the attendance.
- ***Defaults & Routines:*** Timetabled daily sport in schools and weekly league nights for adults convert good intentions into habits.
- ***Social Proof:*** Seeing peers play (and seeing people "like me" officiate or coach) shifts norms faster than posters.
- ***Recognition:*** Points tables, shout-outs, and small ceremonies make effort visible and repeatable.
- ***Commitment Devices:*** Team registrations, captain roles, and volunteer rosters create gentle obligations to show up.

Design the environment, and behaviour follows.

## Risks when culture is weak; and why fixing culture comes first

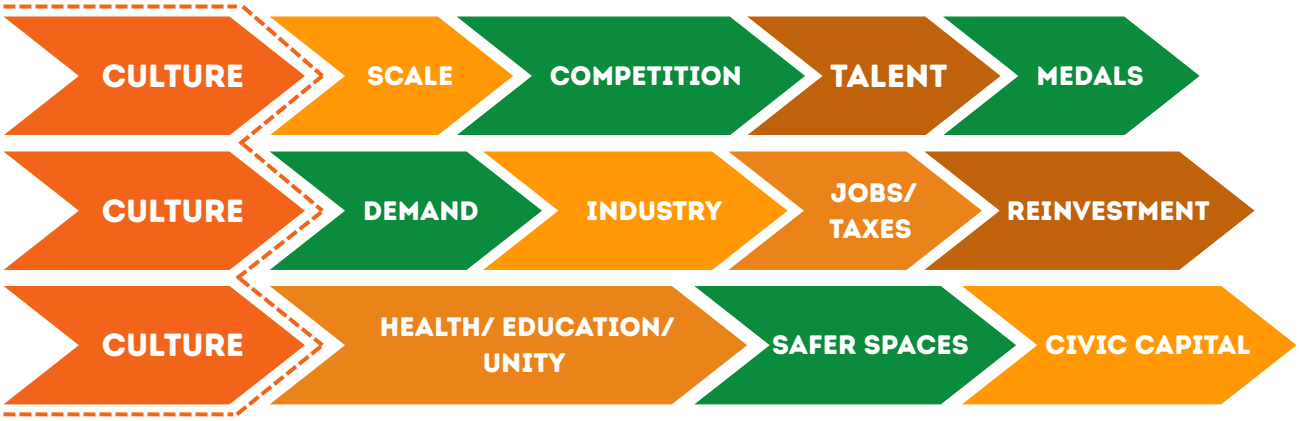
- ***White-Elephant Facilities:*** Beautiful but empty grounds; high upkeep, low impact.
- ***Thin Pathways:*** Talented youth stop at school level; no clubs, no calendars, no coaches.
- ***Inequity:*** Male-only evenings; para-athletes sidelined; pay-to-play barriers.
- ***Event-ification without Continuity:*** Grand one-offs, but no weekly leagues; enthusiasm fades.
- ***Short-Lived Talent Peaks:*** A few elite outliers without a replenishing base; public skepticism about value for money.



RISKS WHEN CULTURE IS WEAK

Strengthening culture cures these root causes by making participation inevitable, not exceptional.

## In one page: the causal chain that convinces decision-makers




This triple helix performance, prosperity, and social progress is why sports culture is the bedrock. Build it first, and everything else rises: elite results, thriving MSMEs, safer streets, healthier schools, and a confident, cohesive Uttar Pradesh.

## Practical Starter Switches to Ignite Sports Culture

- **Daily Sport Hour in Schools**
  - Mandate one hour of structured physical activity in every school timetable.
  - Attendance to be recorded (as in any other subject), but without academic grading.
  - Schools may rotate between different sports to ensure multi-sport exposure.
- **10-Minute Play Standard in Every Ward/Gram Panchayat**
  - Ensure that every child has access to a safe play space within a 10-minute walk or cycle.
  - Equip these spaces with basic lighting, open storage, and trained community marshals for safety.

- **Women-First Prime Time & Female Coaching Pipeline**
  - Reserve fixed daily/weekly play slots exclusively for women and girls at community and school facilities.
  - Create an incentive program for training women as grassroots coaches and referees.
- **District-Level Sports Calendars**
  - Publish annual sports calendars in advance for each district, covering school, inter-ward/GP, and community leagues.
  - Standardize simple league rules and cap entry fees to keep competitions inclusive and affordable.
- **Community Equipment Libraries & Vouchers**
  - Establish shared equipment banks at schools, community centers, and youth clubs.
  - Provide low-income children with vouchers redeemable for basic sports gear supplied by local manufacturers.
- **Sports Literacy Mission in Education**
  - Introduce sports-themed alphabet and story books for nursery and kindergarten.
  - Integrate chapters on eminent sportspersons and the values of sports into regular school textbooks across grades.
- **Volunteer Corps Development**
  - Train and certify village youth groups (Yuvak Mangal Dal and Yuvati Mangal Dal) as community coaches and referees.
  - Recognize contributions with certificates, badges, and opportunities for stipends or scholarships.
- **Local Broadcasting of Finals**
  - Partner with local cable networks, radio, and digital platforms to live-stream or record district and community finals.
  - Create highlight reels featuring grassroots heroes to inspire participation and pride.
- **Parental Engagement through Official Communication**
  - Issue periodic letters and circulars from schools to parents highlighting the physical, emotional, and academic benefits of regular sports participation.
  - Encourage family-based sport days and parent-child competitions.

- **Mobile Sports Literacy Vans**
  - Deploy specially branded vans across districts to conduct awareness drives on the importance of sports.
  - Vans to carry demo kits, informational booklets, and screening equipment for talent identification.
  - Regular schedules to be coordinated with schools, panchayats, and local festivals for maximum reach.

These switches are affordable, visible within months, and designed to spin all three flywheels at once.

## Bottom line

Investing in sports culture is not a “soft” choice. It is the most hard-headed systems investment a state can make: the surest pathway to deeper talent benches, stronger local industries, and healthier, safer, more cohesive communities today and for generations.



# The Case for Recognizing the Right to Sports as a Fundamental Right in India

# The Case for Recognizing the Right to Sports as a Fundamental Right in India

## The Constitutional Void of Sports

**For a nation that boasts of a demographic dividend where nearly 65% of its citizens are below the age of 35, India's neglect of sports as a constitutional right is a paradox. While education has long been recognized under Article 21A as a fundamental right,**

the equally transformative sphere of sports integral to physical, mental, and emotional development remains relegated to the periphery of policy. The recognition of the Right to Sports as a Fundamental Right is not a matter of luxury or symbolism; it is a constitutional necessity and a social imperative.

Sports are not merely about medals or elite performance. They are about discipline, inclusivity, national identity, and community building. In a world witnessing growing alienation, urban isolation, and rising stress among youth, sports serve as a unifying language that binds individuals across caste, class, gender, and geography.

## The Broader Dimensions of Sports

**Sports must not be narrowly construed as a tool for talent identification or elite excellence. To do so would be akin to claiming that education exists only to produce Nobel Laureates. Like education, sports represent a continuum of development from playgrounds in villages to Olympic podiums, from school fitness to social cohesion.**

At its heart, sport cultivates:

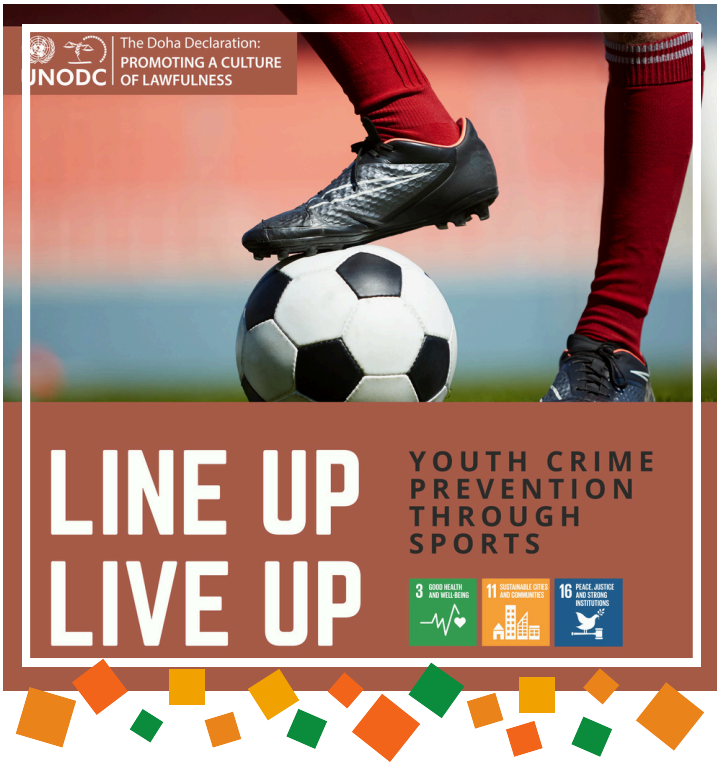
- Fighting spirit and decision-making abilities essential for leadership.
- Teamwork and cooperation, fostering empathy and respect for diversity.
- Resilience and discipline, vital for mental health and productivity.
- Community harmony, where victory and defeat become collective experiences.

These are not ancillary by-products, they are the very values on which the Indian republic is built.

## Sports as a Tool for Human and Social Development

**Empirical evidence across the globe establishes that sports are a cornerstone of community development and human welfare. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC),**

under the Doha Declaration, recognizes sports as a global tool for peace, resilience, and crime prevention. Its Line Up Live Up program across 12 countries uses sports-based life skills to reduce delinquency, enhance communication, and counter drug abuse and violence.




Similarly, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development explicitly identifies sports as a catalyst for promoting health, gender equality, education, and social inclusion.

In India's context, where challenges like youth unemployment, substance abuse, and social fragmentation persist, the constitutionalization of sports can create a structured national framework to harness sports for transformation of individuals, communities, and the nation at large.

## The Socio-Economic Imperative of Recognizing Sports as a Right

**Sports are not an indulgence of privilege, they are a pathway to empowerment. For countless young Indians, especially from marginalized and rural backgrounds, sports are a bridge out of poverty.**

Wrestlers from Haryana, boxers from Manipur, and archers from Jharkhand are living testimonies to how sports create social mobility, dignity, and economic independence.

- A Right to Sports would institutionalize this empowerment, ensuring:
  - Access to sports facilities for all, irrespective of income or geography.
  - Protection against discrimination in participation and representation.
  - Inclusion of sports infrastructure and physical education in every school and college.
  - Accountability of governments and federations to nurture, not neglect, grassroots talent.

## From Right to Education to Right to Sports

**The jurisprudence of the Supreme Court already recognizes that education under Article 21A is not confined to classrooms, it encompasses holistic development, including physical well-being.**

Key judgments have established this foundation:

- ***Miss Mohini Jain v. State of Karnataka (1992)*** — The Court held that the right to education is fundamental to life, which includes physical and moral development.
- ***Bandhua Mukti Morcha v. Union of India (1984)*** — Linked the right to health and physical well-being to Article 21, emphasizing access to activities that promote vitality and strength.

- ***Environment & Consumer Protection Foundation v. Delhi Administration (2012)*** — Stressed the necessity of playgrounds and sports facilities in schools for overall child development.
- ***Ex-Capt. Harish Uppal v. Union of India (2002)*** — Recognized sports as an instrument of national integration and discipline.

Collectively, these judicial pronouncements form an unbroken constitutional continuum from education and health to the right to sports. Recognizing it explicitly would only complete the circle.

## Sports vs. Physical Literacy- Clarifying the Conceptual Confusion

**In recent years, the term physical literacy has gained global attention, but its definition remains fluid and contested. Research identifies over 40 different interpretations of the term across countries.**

While physical literacy is valuable, it encourages lifelong fitness, it is inherently individualistic and limited. It focuses on physical competence and motivation, but lacks the social, cultural, and community dimensions inherent to sports.

Studies from the United States and Canada affirm that physical literacy emerged as a derivative goal within physical education, not as a replacement for sports.

- In Canada, physical literacy is an outcome of physical education, not an alternative to organized sports.
- In the U.S., its introduction in school curricula lacked professional consultation, leading to confusion and dilution of sports education goals.

Sports, on the other hand, integrate physical, emotional, social, and ethical education. A physically literate individual may not play sports, but a sportsperson automatically achieves and transcends physical literacy. Therefore, sports subsume literacy; literacy does not subsume sports.

## The Global Perspective- How Nations Frame Sports as Rights

**Leading sporting nations have already embedded sports within their national rights frameworks:**

- Brazil's Constitution (1988) declares sports participation a right for every citizen.
- China's National Fitness Regulations (2021) mandate state responsibility for access to public sports infrastructure.
- France's Charter for Sports Ethics and Citizenship treats sports as a civic responsibility.
- UNESCO's International Charter of Physical Education, Physical Activity, and Sport (2015) declares access to sports a fundamental right for all.

India, which aspires to host the 2036 Olympics, cannot aspire for global leadership while denying its citizens a fundamental right to the very activity that symbolizes equality, unity, and humanity.

## Sports for Mental Health and Youth Resilience

**Beyond physical benefits, sports are a proven therapeutic tool against stress, depression, and digital addiction. The rise in mental health disorders among Indian youth calls for non-clinical interventions that are accessible, communal, and stigma-free. Sports offer precisely that a daily, democratic therapy for the mind and body.**

The Model Sports Village initiative, for instance, has shown tangible improvements in community engagement, reduction in school dropouts, and enhancement of social harmony demonstrating how structured sports ecosystems can transform rural India.

## Implementation Architecture- Making the Right Real

**Recognizing the Right to Sports would not merely be declaratory; it must come with enforceable obligations, including:**

- Statutory accountability of schools, universities, and local bodies to provide sporting facilities.
- Budgetary earmarking for sports infrastructure and physical education.
- Inclusion of sports in public health and education missions.
- Independent grievance mechanisms for athletes and citizens denied access.
- Integration of sports into sustainable urban and rural planning.

Such an approach would mirror the legislative architecture of the Right to Education Act (2009), ensuring that the constitutional recognition translates into institutional action.

## A Constitutional Leap Forward

**Recognizing the Right to Sports as a Fundamental Right is not about expanding the Constitution; it is about completing it. It affirms that a healthy, active, and united citizenry is as essential to democracy as an educated one.**

In a nation where cricket unites villages and football dreams echo in the Himalayas, where sports heal divisions and build futures, denying it constitutional sanctity is to deny India its fullest potential.

The playground must now find its rightful place in the Preamble's promise of dignity, equality, and fraternity.

The time has come to move from the rhetoric of **"Khelo India"** to the reality of **"Right to Play India."**




# Recommendations

# Recommendations

## Establishment of a National Sports Fund

**The government has consistently demonstrated its commitment to financing grassroots and elite sport, through targeted schemes like Khelo India and Target Olympic Podium Scheme.**

The proposal for a consolidated National Sports Fund would further institutionalise this vision by providing a single, ring-fenced fund that insulates sports financing from periodic budgetary fluctuations. Drawing contributions from government allocations, CSR initiatives, and international partnerships, this fund could potentially ensure equal support for Olympic and non-cricket sports such as wrestling, athletics, hockey, and shooting. By including athlete representatives on the fund's oversight board, we can also ensure that resource allocation remains transparent, equitable, and tailored to genuine athlete needs.

## Taking Steps to Create a Stronger Sports Culture

**Somewhere down the line, sports culture lies at the base of everything. From social inclusion to industrial growth to performance, everything is affected by culture.**

Introduction of alphabetical sports booklets, motivational letters to parents, use of sports literacy forms can be few ways in which our population can be encouraged to participate in sporting activities. At the same time, ensuring safe, clean and accessible areas for children are equally important. It needs to be understood that something as simple as a clean and accessible playing space can drive up engagement in sports and physical activities.

## Introduction of an Athlete Rights Charter

**The NSGA has already laid down principles of accountability and athlete welfare. To deepen these protections, a statutory Athlete Rights Charter would serve as a landmark innovation as it could codify rights relating to transparent selection processes, provide protection from harassment or discrimination, give access to grievance redressal, and ensure a provision of medical and psychological support.**

Such a Charter would also prevent exploitative contracts and ensure that athletes have recourse to impartial dispute resolution. Aligning with UN and EU practices, this step would allow India to position itself as a global pioneer in safeguarding athlete dignity.

## Integration of Sports Education into Schools and Universities

**The government has consistently emphasised the integration of physical education into schools. Taking this further, embedding structured sports education into the curriculum at primary, secondary, and tertiary levels would cultivate a generation of both athletes and sports professionals.**

This approach is in consonance with the government's vision of holistic youth development under schemes like Fit India.

University-level leagues and scholarships would enable smooth progression from the grassroots to elite sports. Complementing sports itself, sports law, governance, business, and ethics modules would endow future administrators, coaches, and lawyers, thereby meeting the abiding Indian need for professionalised sport leadership.

## Harnessing Technology and Sports Science for Performance Enhancement

**Investing in sports science can greatly help the Act's objective of making governance more competent. Setting up regional Centres of Sports Science and Medicine will enable India to incorporate data analytics, biomechanics, and AI-driven training in its preparation cycles. These steps are in line with the best standards that countries like the UK and Australia have already put into place.**

India can swiftly bring the latest scientific approaches into its sports culture by working with commercial labs and foreign institutes. In addition to training athletes to perform at their best, recovery infrastructure, nutrition programs, and sophisticated injury management procedures may also help them throughout their careers.

## Replicate RTI Public Authority Status Across all Bodies

**Section 14 of the NSGA in line with the goals of public accountability has commendably brought in NSFs within the ambit of the RTI Act. However, consistency in the transparency standards can be fully achieved through including bodies like the BCCI**

which still escape the any RTI obligations due to not receiving any financial assistance from the Central Government. This move would align Indian sports administration with the government's broader objective of open governance.

## Formal Recognition and Regulation of Esports

**Esports, as already a billion dollar industry globally, offers significant opportunities for India.**

A regulatory framework under the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports could provide norms for integrity, guidelines against cheating, and athlete welfare protections. Recognition would also unlock new opportunities for sponsorships, broadcasting, and university affiliations, making India a hub for the esports industry in Asia.

## Accountability of Sports Bodies and Officials

**The Act introduces methods to make information transparent and accessible, which include the RTI requirements. Giving authorities the right to suspend NSFs or officials that breach the accountability rules or take other remedial actions.**

Such a system would strengthen the Act's promise to uphold integrity and make sure that governance problems do not go unnoticed. By allowing brief suspensions of powers or required compliance checks, the government can make penalties stronger while still supporting the spirit of cooperative federalism in sports.

## Mandate 30% Gender Representation in Leadership

**The government’s initiative to mandate the inclusion of at least four women in the Executive Committees of the NOC, NPC, and NSFs is a step in the right direction. It ensures that female voices are represented in the highest echelons of sports governance,**

thereby promoting inclusivity and diversity whilst also demonstrating a deep commitment to gender justice. To further enhance alignment with international best practices, this threshold can be elevated to the 30% benchmark prescribed by the Basic Universal Principles of Good Governance within the Olympic Movement. This would reinforce India's commitment to gender parity and also bring domestic governance in line with global expectations, invariably helping India demonstrate complete compliance with IOC standards.

## Expansion of Legal Aid and Accessible Dispute Resolution

**The Act has commendably established institutional mechanisms for dispute resolution. A further refinement could be the establishment of a dedicated legal aid mechanism, inspired by the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS).**

This would be particularly beneficial for athletes from marginalised backgrounds, who may lack the resources to navigate complex legal processes.

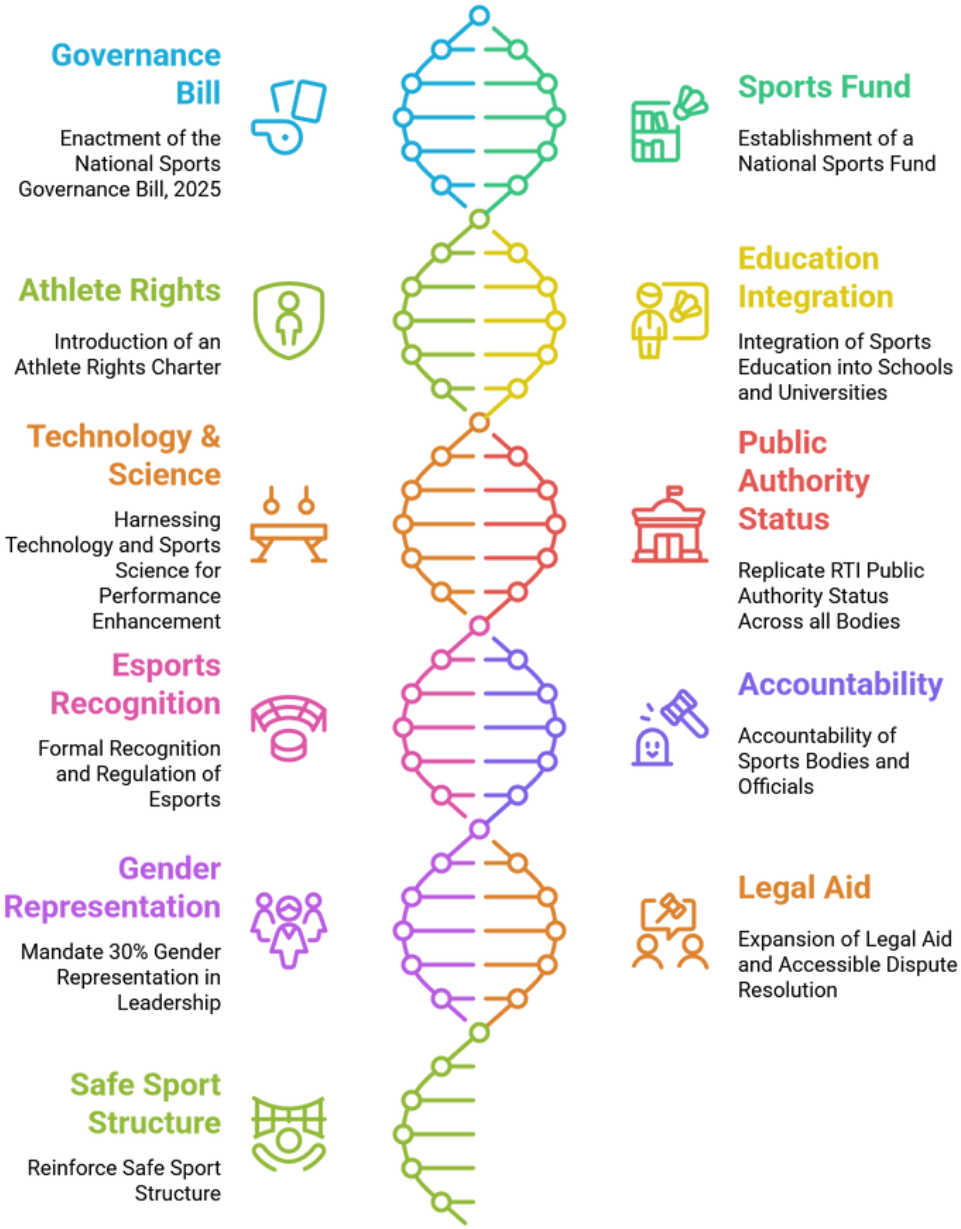
Such legal aid centres could be attached to the National Sports Tribunal and offer pro bono representation, thereby ensuring equitable access to justice. By embedding this support within the governance framework, the government can guarantee that fairness in sports law is not limited to those with means, but accessible to all athletes aspiring to represent India.

## Reinforce Safe Sport Structure

**Section 13 of the Act is a progressive measure that mandates the adoption of a Safe Sport Policy. This creates foundational safeguards against abuse and misconduct, and ensures that athlete well-being is prioritised.**

Structured mechanisms may be instituted to operationalise this further. These can be the inclusion of designated safeguarding officers in each NSF, compulsory training and sensitisation activities, and the establishment of special grievance redressal units. By making such processes formal, the government can make sure that measures within Safe Sport are not merely exercises on paper but are a standard practice for the protection of athletes throughout India.

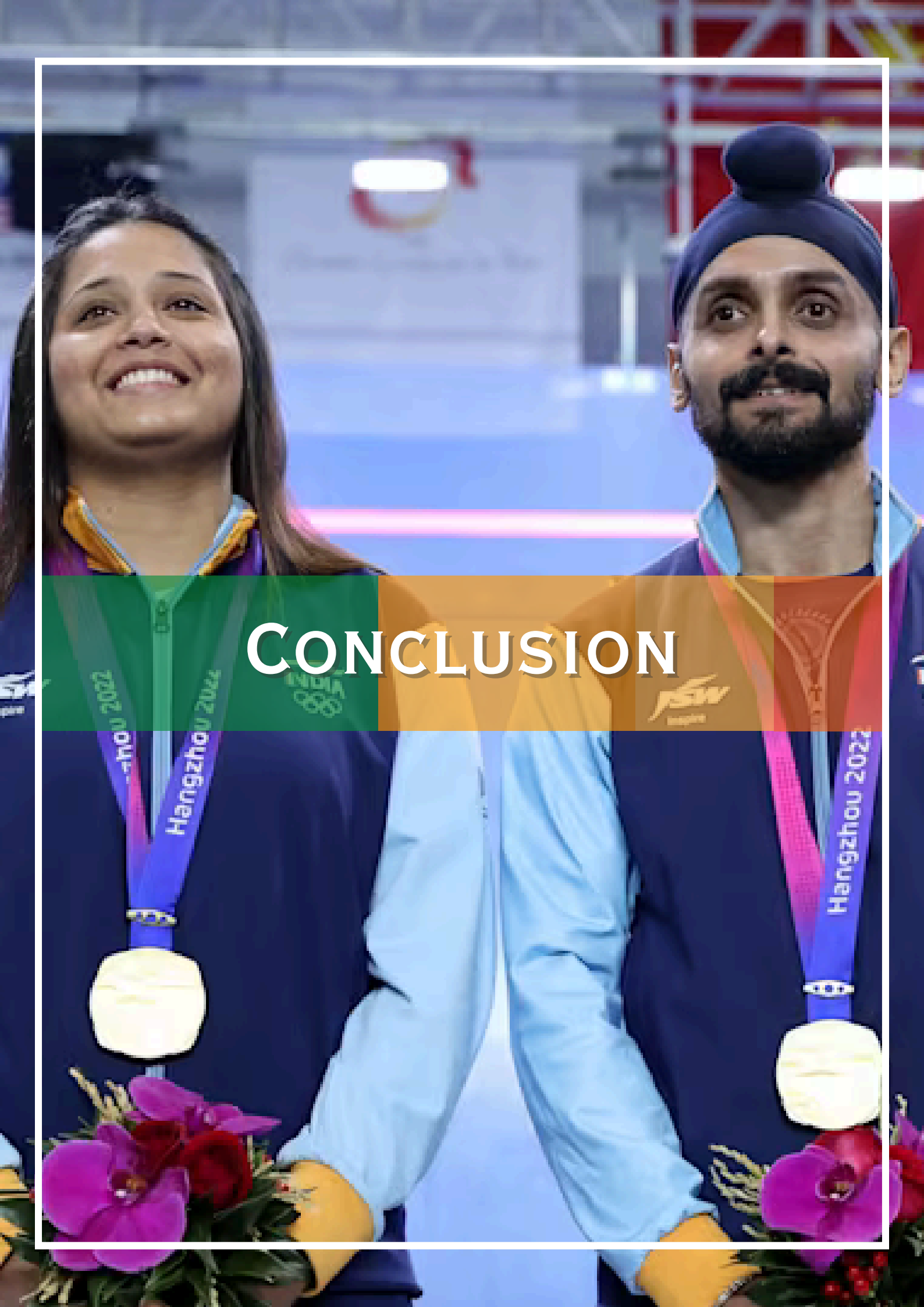
## Strengthening Sports Governance



## Creation of a Task Force

**It is deleterious to view sports in silos. It has close and deep linkages with (though not limited to) education, women and child development, urban and rural development, industries etc. As a result, any policy/strategy to drive up sports participation has a high chance of not being able to achieve the desired goals.**

Therefore it is imperative that all the concerned ministries are kept in loop and heard while strategizing. A task force can be a good starting point and may include the following: MoYS, MoE, MoWCD, MoUD, MoRD and Sports Policy experts.
Such a task force can be "tasked" with making a policy to drive up sports participation and promote sports culture.




# Conclusion

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**India's sports policy trajectory reflects both reform and ambition, signalling a conscious shift from fragmented governance to a more holistic, athlete-centred model. The recent initiatives spanning grassroots development, elite training programmes, and inclusive frameworks demonstrate India's intent to align with global best practices.**

Yet, the true transformation will depend on how effectively governance reforms are institutionalised, funding is diversified, and legal certainty is ensured through instruments like the proposed *National Sports Governance Bill 2025.*

As India looks ahead, the integration of sports education, investment in science and technology, and protection of athlete rights will be crucial in bridging long-standing gaps. By balancing inclusivity with performance, and regulation with innovation, India can redefine its global sporting identity. The decisive decade ahead will determine whether the nation merely aspires or truly emerges as a sporting powerhouse. The run-up to the 2036 Olympics will not only test India's administrative will but also shape the very narrative of sports governance in the country.

# SPORTING INDIA RISING

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Ghaziabad, Delhi NCR

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FEDERATION OF INDIAN CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY

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# MAJOR DHYAN CHAND



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