
BEYOND THE PITCH

Investing in India's Sporting Dreams



KIRTANE & PANDIT





**“To demand more of yourself
than you do of others is the
first on any ladder of success.”**

- Major Dhyanchand



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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

India's diverse cultural tapestry is vividly reflected in its sporting traditions. From the physicality of wrestling to the mental acuity of chess, each sport offers a unique window into the nation's heritage. The deep-rooted indigenous games like kabaddi, kho-kho, and gilli-danda fostering physical fitness and camaraderie for generations. Beyond entertainment, these traditions instilled values of teamwork and discipline. The sheer joy and passion with which Indians embrace these games underscore sports' ingrained connection to the Indian ethos. As India evolved, so did its sporting landscape, culminating in the vibrant sports culture we see today. The nation's journey from traditional games to global athletic prominence is a testament to its sporting spirit and ambition.

India's National Sports Day is celebrated on the 29th of August to mark the birth anniversary of the legendary hockey player Major Dhyan Chand. Over the years, the government has used this day to honour those who excelled in sports with recognitions like the Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna (highest sporting honour of India), Arjuna Award (For outstanding performance in sports) and the Dronacharya Award (Award for outstanding coaches in sports). As the country embarks on a new sporting cycle to achieve greater laurels at the global stage, it is a timely reminder for all stakeholders involved in Indian sports that with a cohesive ecosystem, India being a sporting superpower can become a reality. In India's ambition and accession to become a global superpower, sports can serve as a guiding light!

Indian sports witnessed a remarkable journey in the last century, marked by both triumphs and challenges. Hockey reigned supreme, with India dominating the Olympic stage, while cricket emerged as a religion, culminating in iconic World Cup victories. Individual brilliance shone through with legends like Dhyan Chand, Milkha Singh, and Sachin Tendulkar inspiring generations. The Olympics have long been considered a barometer of a nation's sporting prowess and, by extension, a measure of its overall success. While it's essential to acknowledge that the Olympics are just one facet of a country's accomplishments, the platform undeniably carries significant weight.



To date, cricket controls 90 per cent of the Indian sports market in terms of revenue streams, including sponsorships, athlete endorsements, and media spending. What has changed, however, is the awareness and understanding that India's Olympic stars are as big as the cricketers, if not bigger. When it comes to the USA, China and other sporting superpowers, India admittedly lags-but in sporting terms, we are certainly not the pushovers in all the areas, that we once were! The rise in ambition of an Indian athlete is marked by working mechanisms in several fields. Today, apart from being the next Virat Kohli or Rohit Sharma, budding athletes also aspire to be Mary Kom, Abhinav Bindra, Neeraj Chopra or Manu Bhaker.

The government measures in infrastructure development, as well as the willingness of corporates to fuel an exciting new chapter in Indian sports present promising signs for a brighter future for Indian sports. Sports fans, for their part, have begun to recognise the athletes' contentment in their efforts on the international stage. Furthermore, sports administrators seem to have realised that they would be held accountable if their disciplines did not develop on a worldwide scale.

They are taking steps to guarantee that they plan the most effective training and competition program for their athletes. Many national sports federations now push coaches to go beyond National Institute of Sports (NIS) certifications and pursue international credentials. The new age marks the government's ambitious bid to host the 2036 Olympic Games.

The willingness of private entities to put in the money to aid Indian athletes get the best of infrastructure, coaches and training facilities can propel the country's collective push for sporting greatness. As India continues to invest in and nurture its sporting talent, the future looks promising, with the potential for even greater achievements and recognition. In the decade and a half, since Abhinav Bindra became the first Indian to win an individual gold medal at the Olympics, India has shown an intent towards taking major strides towards becoming a sporting country, as such success doesn't look impossible anymore. The country's sports ecosystem is headed up to guarantee that Indians are no longer simple spectators but also contenders at global tournaments. Indian sports, despite sporadic bursts of brilliance, have yet to reach their full potential. A significant push is required to elevate the nation's sporting stature.



2. HOW SPORTS FORGE A NATION'S SOUL

Despite an underwhelming overall performance, the 2024 Paris Olympics will remind us of another entry in record books as for the first time, an Indian athlete won two medals in a single event. Prolific young shooting star Manu Bhaker displayed extraordinary skills and temperament in winning two bronze medals in Paris. The success is not only an attribute of her hours of practice, but also the countless, nameless people who supported her – mentally, and perhaps more importantly, financially.

During the Olympic Games, many were glued to their television sets at odd hours, catching a glimpse of India's representatives on the global stage. The last time the Olympics were held in Paris, exactly 100 years ago, India sent seven athletes, who returned with zero medals. Fast-forward a century, and we have come a long way to flying out a 112-strong contingent with medal hopes in various disciplines.

Each individual has a different perspective of what sports represent. For some, it could be mere physical activity, while some would see it as a way to remain fit. Others wish to excel in their choice of sports and bring laurels to themselves and the country. Sports brings with it values, principles, and viewpoints. But most importantly it brings discipline. National and international sporting competitions play a pivotal role in shaping the country's fabric, uniting the society and inspiring generations in the process. For a multilingual country like India, sports have a unique ability to surpass religious and cultural barriers and foster a sense of unity. Over the years, the belief that 'playing sports will not put food on your table' changed. As more and more youngsters defied their mother's mantra – study first, play later – sporting clubs at grassroots levels got a new lease of life.

The cultural perspective on the history of Indian sports reveals how global accolades have an undeniable effect on galvanising the masses. As the old saying goes—nothing unites like sports! Apart from bringing global recognition to the country with World Cup wins and sparkling performances at world events, sports has always played a significant role in shaping society, reflecting its values and principles. Moreover, the sports that are traditionally associated with the regions tend to leave a profound impact on the society. For example, watching an akhada in Haryana and Punjab, witnessing a gripping bout of kusti (wrestling) in Maharashtra or a session of kite flying in Gujarat and Rajasthan has deep-rooted cultural significance. The historical perspective on Indian sports reveals the civilization's age-old tradition of physical activities. In the modern era, sporting achievements have been a pivotal part of defining Indian society and inspiring generations on the way.

India must treasure and preserve its rich sporting legacy while seizing new chances for excellence as it evolves and flourishes on the global sporting landscape. Moreover, countries like India can leverage sports to their collective essence and develop a stronger, more united nation by investing in a thriving sports culture and utilising the power of sports diplomacy on a global stage.

Sport in India is more than just a pastime; it's a unifying force that transcends regional and linguistic divides. Victories on the international stage ignite a sense of collective triumph, fostering a belief in the nation's potential. The journey towards sporting excellence mirrors India's broader development trajectory, demonstrating a capacity to overcome challenges and achieve remarkable growth. Cricket, undeniably the nation's heartbeat, has captured the imagination of millions, while football finds passionate pockets of support. As India strives for dominance in diverse sporting arenas, it signifies a holistic progress, showcasing a nation evolving not just economically but also in terms of skill, discipline, and national pride.



3. HIGHLIGHTS IN INDIA'S SPORTS JOURNEY

A good measure of a country's sporting legacy lies in its performances on the global stage. Although India's association with sports dates back centuries, its footprint in terms of glory in organised sporting events has remained limited. Having said that, the country has had its share of fairytales and milestones at quadrennial events like the Olympics, Commonwealth Games and Asian Games. It is said that nothing catches the country's imagination like sports and from the glories of the hockey team in the early 1950s to the triumph in the T20 Cricket World Cup in 2024- the country has witnessed a roller-coaster ride in the sporting arena. While India boasts of immense diversity, some of the tales of its post-independence sporting icons stem from depths of adversity. In the history of Indian sports development, select stories of sportsmen continued to inspire the following generations to pursue excellence in sports and helped restore the country's confidence from time to time. In this section, let us look at some of the diamonds in the sporting crown of independent India.

When it came to team sports, nothing quite embodied the nation as much as the football team of the early 1950s.



Credit: Olympic archives

The arrival of colonists on Indian shores brought a significant shift in the sporting culture and India's tryst with football began on maidans of the East India Company cantonment grounds. Post-independence, under the tutelage of Syed Abdul Rahim, the XI basked in the golden era of Indian football. However, nothing came easy as the players often had to pay from their own coffers to arrange for training sessions as well as travel for the tournaments. In the form of that football team, India bagged her first laurel in the sport, a gold medal at the 1951 Asian Games, defeating Iran 1-0 on home soil. Winning the 1951 and 1962 Asian Games, and finishing fourth in the 1956 Olympics remain the cornerstone achievements of the Indian football team. Significantly, India also qualified for the 1950 FIFA World Cup in Brazil, however, the governing body refused to send a team, citing "differences over team selection and insufficient practice time."





1960's

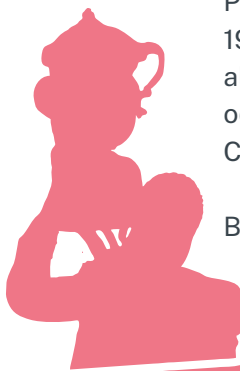


Credit: Instagram/jeevmilkhasingh

One of the most celebrated athletes of his generation, Milkha Singh was perhaps independent India's first individual glory hunter. Dubbed as the 'Flying Sikh', the legendary athlete had to endure a heart-wrenching separation from his family before scripting a glorious chapter in his sporting career. Apart from his 1960 Olympic Games heroics - where he missed out on a medal by 0.1 seconds - Milkha Singh will be remembered for his victory in the 1958 Commonwealth Games in Cardiff. He clinched gold in the 440-yard sprint in a record time of 46.6 seconds. An ace sprinter in his heyday, Milkha has four Asian golds against his name. Almost seven decades on from that eventful race in Rome, Milkha Singh continues to serve as a beacon of inspiration for budding athletes from the nation.

On similar lines, dubbed as India's first tennis prodigy Ramanathan Krishnan created a niche for himself in an era where tennis infrastructure remained as elusive as basic necessities for some. Krishnan retired in 1975 with a total of 69 titles against his name. While he reached the Wimbledon semi-finals twice, Krishnan also made it to the quarterfinals at the French Open in 1962.






Perhaps, the single greatest achievement in non-Olympic sports for India in last century, was the 1983 Cricket World Cup in England. Not only was that win an unexpected triumph on many fronts, it also opened new avenues for Indian masses. Legendary captain Kapil Dev and his team defied all odds to overcome the challenge of the indomitable West Indies in the iconic final contested at Lords Cricket Ground.

By this time, Indian hockey was on the wane and the golden generation of footballers was gone. The nation needed sporting heroes to adore and in the form of cricketers, the Indian public embraced new sporting figures to look up to. The miracle of 83 kicked off two revolutions in Indian cricket – first, emulating their heroes in an Indian cricket team, many youngsters from the middle and lower-middle classes started to see cricket as a viable option, and secondly, for the first time, this brought Indian media for TV rights and corporate sponsorships of sports events, especially cricket.

Another self-made athlete, who stood his ground and made a name for himself is Prakash Padukone. He took Indian badminton on the global stage with a remarkable career spanning three decades. Known for his exceptional work ethic and charisma, Padukone quickly gained critical acclaim with his consistent performances on the court. Such was his dominance that he became a national champion at the tender age of 16, and held the crown for the next nine years! His pinnacle of achievements though was the triumph in the prestigious All England Badminton Championship in 1980.

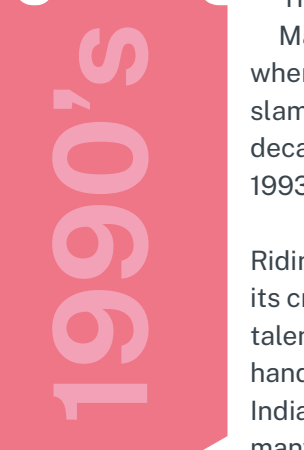
Often called India's 'queen of track and field', PT Usha is easily one of the greatest athletes India has ever produced. She brought home the 200m silver at the 1983 Asian Championships and won gold in the 400m. However, at her peak during the 1985 Asian Championships at Jakarta, Usha won a historic five gold medals and a bronze in a span of five days, her last two golds coming within a time span of just half-hour of each other.



Though board games similar to chess have always been part of Indian society, not many enjoyed success in Chess on a global level. Hailing from a middle-class background, Viswanathan Anand dominated the world of chess and became a Grand Master in 1988. Apart from creating a niche for himself in his native state Tamil Nadu, Anand dominated the world of chess, winning the World Chess Championship five times.

Anand's impact on the game of chess transcends the sport itself in India. To date, he is actively promoting the game, nurturing budding talents and fostering a following for chess among the youth. Anand marked a remarkable victory by winning the FIDE World Chess Championship in 2000. He became the first Indian to win a world chess championship.

The decade also witnessed the rise of two promising players in Indian tennis: Leander Paes and Mahesh Bhupathi. While on court, the duo complemented each other and created history whenever they played together. They reached the finals of the men's doubles in all four grand slams and the ATP Masters in 1999 and also won the French Open and Wimbledon. During the decade, India also won an Olympic medal in the sport while reaching the Davis Cup semi-final in 1993.



Riding on the wave of the 1983 World Cup triumph, the decade saw Indian masses enthralled by its cricketers and the rise of its greatest-ever cricketer, Sachin Tendulkar. With his mercurial talent, Tendulkar carried the hopes of the Indian cricket team on his shoulders almost single-handedly, bringing laurels to the country with his impeccable performances. During this period, India produced a plethora of quality players like Saurav Ganguly, Rahul Dravid, VVS Laxman, and many more. But at the same time, the country was craving for another ICC trophy, which they hadn't won since the 1983 World Cup.



2000's & BEYOND

From 1983 to 2020s, Indian cricket has changed dramatically, boasting a youth system that continues to produce brilliant young cricketers, a domestic league that is one of the best in the world, and a cricketing identity that few can ever hope to accomplish. Although the triumphs in the 2007 T20 World Cup and 2011 ODI World Cup propelled Indian cricket, the Indian Premier League (IPL) has been the real game-changer. Apart from the economic boom in Indian cricket, the tournament provided young players with a platform to showcase their talent on an international stage.

Currently, cricket generates substantial revenue for the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI). Effective management over the last 15 years has ensured that not just players, but coaches, support staff, and anyone associated with cricket benefit financially. This financial strength has fuelled the development of the sport at all levels apart from fuelling success in ICC events. Something which deserves attention is the infrastructure to promote and grow cricket in the country. From honing the youth to organizing any event, we have cracked the code.

The IPL's contribution to the Indian Economy has been astounding. And not just directly, but by indirect sources, including job creation, foreign investments, and tourism etc., it has been a boon to the country. It has also fuelled the BCCI's recent domination in the ICC revenue model as almost 70% of the ICC sponsors hail from India. Under the new financial model, the Board of Control for Cricket in India (or the BCCI) is projected to earn \$230 million per year out of ICC's estimated earnings of \$600 million per year. The BCCI, which is the world's richest cricket board, earned total revenues of Rs 27,411 crore from FY18 to FY22. As India stands at the cusp of becoming a cricketing and economic powerhouse, the nation can take pride in the parallel narratives of success.

The transformation of the Indian sports sector mirrors a larger societal transition. Traditional games like Kabaddi, coexist alongside contemporary, internationally recognised sports like Football, resulting in a diverse and vibrant sporting environment. With the rising infrastructure and financial health of the Indian sports industry, the writing is on the wall for a brighter future.

While cricket undeniably dominates the Indian sports landscape, the nation has made significant strides in other disciplines during the 21st century. Badminton has seen a meteoric rise, with players like P.V. Sindhu and Saina Nehwal securing Olympic medals. Boxing has produced world champions like Mary Kom, showcasing India's prowess in combat sports. Weightlifting, wrestling, and archery have also garnered international recognition.



4. INDIA AT OLYMPICS

The Olympic Games, widely regarded as the pinnacle of athletic ability and national pride, provide an opportunity for countries to demonstrate their sporting capability on a global platform. It is often said that the medal tally of the Olympic Games is a reflection of the prevailing world order. With steadfast economic growth since the turn of the century, India is on the cusp of leading the global growth story. The vibrant, confident young athletes are ready to take on the world, but with the heavy baggage of past shortcomings at global sporting events, the Indian sports fraternity stands at a crossroads. While India has not been a dominant force in the Olympics, there have been some notable achievements that have sparked sporting history of the country.



4.1 THE GLORY YEARS OF FIELD HOCKEY

Hockey holds a special place for India in terms of its Olympic legacy. Fetching 12 of the total 35 medals won by India on the biggest sporting stage, the story of the Indian hockey team is one of perseverance, determination, and unprecedented glory.



Credit: Wikipedia commons

The Indian hockey team made its Olympic debut in 1928, and to prepare for its opening act, the team was sent to Britain to get accustomed to European weather conditions. It would mark the beginning of a glorious streak of six Olympic editions in which India finished on the podium and six consecutive Games in which India won gold.

The golden era of Indian hockey ended with a gold medal at the 1980 Moscow Olympics, however, ending a 41-year-old wait for a medal, the Men's hockey team won a bronze medal in the Tokyo Olympics, narrating a story of resurgence of sorts. However, beyond the glory and accolades, hockey was the first colonial sport that caught the imagination of the Indian masses. Introduced into the British Indian Army as early as the 1850s, its uncomplicated nature helped the sport gain recognition in Indian communities early on.



According to the official data available on the Olympic Games portal, "The availability of large plots of land as playing fields and the uncomplicated nature of equipment meant that hockey gradually became the popular sport of choice among children and young adults in India." The first hockey club in India was created in Calcutta in 1855, and similar clubs soon spread throughout the country, helping the masses, especially the youth get accustomed to the sport.

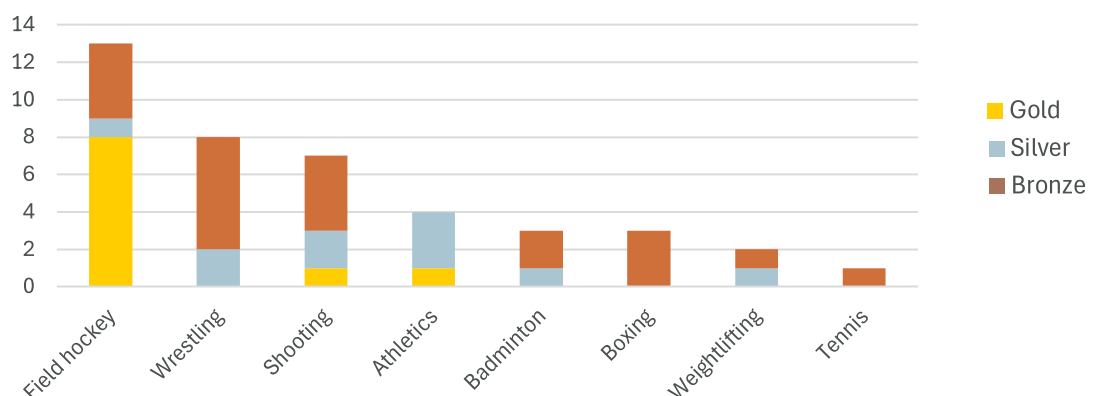


Credit: Getty Images & Official Olympic Website

Of the eight gold medals won by India, the most iconic would be the one at the 1936 Berlin Olympics. Determined to bring home a gold under his captaincy, Dhyan Chand scored three goals in the 1936 Olympic final against hosts Germany. This despite losing a tooth after a collision with German goalkeeper Tito Warnholtz. Dhyan Chand returned to the field after seeking medical attention and in the second half, he reportedly played barefoot to run faster.

Players like Dhyan Chand, Balbir Singh, Leslie Claudius, and Udham Singh became household names for their exceptional contributions during this golden era. As India chases hockey supremacy, its glorious history will serve as a source of pride and motivation for future generations.

India's Olympic medals by sports



4.2 ROUND UP OF OTHER OLYMPIC ACHIEVEMENTS



WRESTLING

After hockey, wrestling has been India's most productive vertical at the Olympic Games, fetching seven medals till the 2020 Games. Khashaba Jadhav holds the distinction of winning India's first-ever Individual Olympic medal. With a bronze medal in 1952, Jadhav put Indian wrestling on the world map long before its modern champions. His name might not have the same lustre or renown now, but for a generation gone by Khashaba Dadasaheb Jadhav was a star they adored and wanted to emulate. Jadhav's first Olympic appearance was 1948 London Games where he finished sixth. However, four years later, the gutsy Jadhav bought about glory in Finland in the bantamweight category. Having lost the semi-final Jadhav was greatly dejected, but no one could deny, that it was Jadhav who had earned Indian wrestling its earliest recognition in Olympic history.

After Jadhav, India had to wait 56 years for another medal in wrestling. Sushil Kumar broke the jinx in the 2008 Beijing Olympics with a bronze medal. He followed that up with a silver medal in the 2012 London Olympics, both in the men's 66kg wrestling. By that, Sushil holds the unique feat of winning two individual Olympic medals. Following Sushil's heroics, Yogeshwar Dutt (Bronze, 2012), Sakshi Malik (Bronze, 2016), Bajrang Punia (Bronze, 2020), and Ravi Dahiya (Silver, 2020) have also brought honours to the country with their tenacious performances over the years.

Wrestling is arguably India's most successful Olympic sport today and Haryana is the crucible that churns out the country's champions. When it comes to Wrestling, Indian women have not been far behind. The revolution, that was pioneered by the now-famous 'Phogat household', is now turning into an unstoppable force. Sakshi Malik famously won the 2016 Olympics bronze medal to give the first proof of this.



BOXING

Boxing is another sport that has seen a late bloom in our country. However, unlike other sports, India's women were the flag bearers of the evolution of boxing in India. While Vijender brought India its first Olympic medal in boxing when he clinched the bronze at the Beijing Games in 2008, Mary Kom stood on the podium at the London Olympics four years later. While an Olympic medal followed Mary Kom in 2012, she was forced to jump weight categories to be eligible to compete at the Games (only three weight divisions were included for the Olympics), Mary Kom was in for some tough competition as she began her Olympic quest. Though she returned to the ring soon after, it wasn't until the 2018 World Championships in New Delhi that Mary Kom was once again on top of the world.

That was followed by Lovlina Borgohain as she scripted history, winning the women's 69kg bronze medal at Tokyo 2020, and becoming the third Indian boxer to win a medal at the Olympics. The medal-winning feat put Lovlina Borgohain amongst some of the greatest boxers in the world who have won an Olympic medal as well as a world championship medal.





SHOOTING

Shooting is another discipline which has brought laurels to the country at the quadrennial event. Rajyavardhan Singh Rathore was the first shooter to win an Olympic medal for India. His silver medal in men's double trap shooting in the 2004 Athens Olympics was also India's first-ever individual silver medal at the games. Four years later, Abhinav Bindra was all set to take another shot at glory. The Indian shooter finished fourth in the qualifying round but blazed through in the final to tie with Henri Hakkinen from Finland with one shot remaining.

In the final attempt, Abhinav Bindra shot an almost-perfect 10.8 to bag the gold medal as Hakkinen managed only 9.7. It was India's first-ever individual Olympic gold and remained the only one till Neeraj Chopra joined the exclusive club at Tokyo 2020. At the London 2012 Games, India won two more medals in shooting with Gagan Narang (Men's 10m air rifle, bronze) and Vijay Kumar (Men's 25m rapid fire pistol, silver) adding to the impressive tally.

At the Paris 2024 Olympics, Manu Bhaker became the first Indian woman to win a medal in shooting at the Olympics (women's 10m air pistol shooting event). She later became the first Indian to win two medals at a single edition of the Olympics after she clinched a bronze with Sarabjot Singh in the mixed team event. Kolhapur's Swapnil Kusale added India's third medal at Paris 2024 - the most in shooting for the country in a single edition at the Olympics - when he picked up a bronze in the men's 10m 50m rifle 3 positions event.



OTHER SPORTS – WEIGHTLIFTING, TENNIS, BADMINTON, JAVELIN THROW & ATHLETICS

Mirabai Chanu, an ace weightlifter, overcame her disappointment at Rio 2016 to win the silver medal in the women's 49kg category at the Tokyo Games. It is her maiden Olympic medal, and she is the second Indian weightlifter after Karnam Malleswari to earn a medal in the sport.

Leander Paes, an Indian tennis legend, is the only tennis player in history to compete in seven Olympic Games between 1992 and 2016. He won the bronze medal in men's singles at the 1996 Olympics in Atlanta, while staying with racket sports, PV Sindhu and Saina Nehwal have been the game-changers when it comes to women in sports in India. Apart from bringing home 3 medals, Saina Nehwal (Bronze, London 2012) and PV Sindhu (Silver, 2016 Rio & Bronze, Tokyo 2020) - the two of them have given impetus to women's sport in India.

During the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games, Neeraj Chopra became an overnight superstar, winning India's first-ever track-and-field medal in Olympic history. With a massive throw of 87.58m, Neeraj scaled India's first-ever Olympic medal in athletics and the realisation of a long-standing dream - one which legends like Milkha Singh and PT Usha had also chased but fallen short of by agonisingly narrow margins. In the final, Neeraj Chopra started with 87.03m in his first attempt and improved it to 87.58m in his second.

With 38 medals at the Olympics in as many as 8 sports thus far, India has shown that there's more to the sporting spectrum apart from cricket. From the ruggedness of wrestling and boxing to the subtleties of badminton and precision of shooting, Indian athletes have shown their prowess in a variety of sports and with collective efforts, the future will bring more laurels to the country!



4.3 INDIA AT THE PARIS OLYMPICS

India sent a 117-athlete strong contingent to the Paris Olympics hoping to build on an impressive medal haul in Tokyo, where it won seven medals including a historic gold. However, a return of six medals including a silver and five bronze may make for a somber reading amid lofty expectations. With several world-class athletes in good form heading into the quadrennial event, the Indian contingent was quietly confident of fetching its best-ever medal tally, however, the near-misses, while offering a glimmer of hope, signal a need for a shift in mindset. On the brighter side, India won six medals and had six fourth-place finishes-which could've easily added up to a double-digit medal haul. Moreover, Vinesh Phogat's disqualification just before a historic final offered a downcast feeling to the expectant sporting aficionados.

One name that was the biggest talking point at the Olympics 2024 was that of Indian shooting star Manu Bhaker. The 22-year-old became the first Indian to win multiple medals at the same Olympic Games since Independence.



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Javelin sensation Neeraj Chopra bagged another Olympic medal in the Paris Games, this time silver behind Pakistan's Arshad Nadeem. The Indian hockey team also defended the bronze medal at Paris 2024 it had won in the Tokyo Games, while grappler Aman Sehrawat took home a bronze in the 57kg freestyle category as India finished 71st in the medal tally, its worst performance in terms of standings since Sydney 2000 edition. While on the face of it, the Paris Olympics have been a mixed bag of emotions for India, a more nuanced look offers hope for a brighter future. A slight hiccup in Paris may serve the Indian athletes in good stead to be better prepared come the 2028 games in Los Angeles.

Between the Tokyo and Paris Games, the Indian sporting sector saw a combined effort by all stakeholders to excel at the top level. From meaningful government initiatives to the corporate sector investing financially, and rising infrastructure development, Indian athletes were surely better prepared for Paris than in the previous edition. Months and years leading to the Olympics, the sports ecosystem worked as a cohesive unit. Now, the next step should be a strategic, multi-tiered approach, including dedicated funding and consolidated programmes for the Olympic Games. Choosing fewer sports but going deeper could be the path the Indian Olympic Association (IOA) chooses to tread. The pursuit of Olympic medals must be managed as a separate programme by the appropriate stakeholders. And with cricket being one of the five new sports set to feature at the Los Angeles 2028 Olympic Games, Indian sports fans would be already dreaming of a medal in a sport that catches the country's imagination unlike anything else.

Touted as early candidate to host the 2036 Olympic Games, India left no stone unturned to showcase its rich history and culture at the India House on the shores of the river Seine at the Paris Olympics it's about time India showcases its sporting might for greater things to come!

5. CURRENT STATE OF INDIA'S SPORTING LANDSCAPE

Building a sporting nation is a process that involves investment in infrastructure enabling grassroots development, efficient scouting process in place and effective coaching systems. The mechanism takes years or even decades to bear fruits and all the stakeholders have to work in tandem to achieve the desired results. Over the past decade and a half, India has taken meaningful strides from being a spectator sporting nation to a sporting nation. There's a long way to go before the nation catches up with powerhouses like USA and China, but the country has experienced a paradigm shift in the realm of sports. There has been a notable trend of adopting, popularising, and promoting other sports, culminating in a change from a cricket-centric nation to a more diversified culture. Sports such as badminton, shooting, wrestling, boxing, and athletics are experiencing an upsurge.

We cherish when our sporting icons bring laurels to the country, but it is equally important to lay a foundation for the next generation of athletes to shine on the global sporting stage. For that to happen, India needs to build a strong talent pool if it has to compete with the likes of the USA, China, Japan and other Olympic giants. The country has seen a rise in many professional leagues over the past few years, however the development has to spread across the sports. For instance, the US boasts a developed sports industry with professional leagues like the NFL (American Football), NBA (Basketball), MLB (Baseball), and NHL (Ice Hockey) that work as a talent feeder outlay when it comes to global sporting events like the Olympics. China runs a system where it absorbs its former Olympic medal winners into an ecosystem where they are tasked with moulding the next generation of champions. The Chinese model is a case study of how to enhance global influence with heavy government investments in sports. Although India will have to find and implement its own version of system for its sports revolution, it can certainly take some inspiration from the leading countries.

5.1 INDIA'S SPORTING ECOSYSTEM: A COMPLEX TAPESTRY

India's sporting ecosystem is a complex interplay of passion, potential, and challenges. The nation boasts a billion-plus fan base, creating immense commercial opportunities. Cricket, in particular, is a religion, driving substantial revenue and sponsorship. However, the overreliance on cricket often overshadows other sports. While disciplines like badminton, tennis, and hockey have produced world-class athletes, the overall sports infrastructure remains underdeveloped. Government initiatives and private investments have been on the rise, but inconsistencies in implementation hinder progress.



Despite these hurdles, India's sporting landscape is undergoing a transformation. A new generation of athletes is emerging, driven by ambition and exposure to global standards. The increasing popularity of sports beyond cricket, such as kabaddi, football, and mixed martial arts, is a positive sign. To truly harness its sporting potential, India needs sustained focus on grassroots development, improved coaching infrastructure, and equitable distribution of resources across various sports. In presence of Indian Premier League (Cricket), Pro Kabaddi League (Kabaddi), Indian Super League (Football) and a host of other professional leagues, the Indian sports spectrum needs to build a platform for amateur athletes to excel and transition to professional ranks via age-group tournaments. Going ahead, India would do well to replicate a strong collegiate system based on the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA, USA) paving the way for a deep-rooted sports culture with a high participation rate across various age groups. Similarly, Europe boasts of a thriving sports culture with countries like Britain, Germany, France, Spain and Italy successfully running multiple professional leagues. These nations have a rich tradition of football, golf, rugby, tennis and winter sports which is down to immense popularity, grassroots participation and potential financial benefits in these sports. Football, in particular, has a strong club system in these countries with a massive fan base and significant global economic impact.

To simulate a similar impact, India needs to inculcate sports from the school level and build a mass movement through professional leagues that attract young talent. The rise of sports in India is not just a phenomenon; it will illustrate the country's changing identity on the global stage.

5.2 CHANGE IN MINDSET

Beyond infrastructure and government support, a fundamental transformation in the cultural mindset towards sports would be critical in the rise of sporting fervour in India. This mindset is a blend of passion and paradox. Cricket, in particular, enjoys a near-religious status, generating immense enthusiasm and commercial potential. However, this overemphasis on one sport often overshadows other disciplines.

Traditionally, in India, sports were seen as extracurricular activities rather than professional careers, leading to a delayed focus on overall structured training and development as required to excel in this aspect. While this mindset is gradually shifting, with more parents encouraging sporting pursuits, challenges persist in terms of balancing academics with sports. Nevertheless, the growing number of Indian athletes achieving global recognition is slowly altering perceptions, creating a more conducive environment for aspiring sportspersons. Parents and educators today acknowledge the value of sports in promoting discipline, teamwork, and resilience in youngsters. Sports is now part of the school curriculum thus exposing pupils to sports in a systematic way. Given the crucial change in perspective, many see sport as an important component of the socio-economic development of the country.

To add to that, a rise in professional leagues in multiple disciplines has made sports a viable career option. Athletes are getting paid a lot more than before, if not handsomely, due to this growing stature of leagues, thus providing them with financial stability. Importantly, the stakeholders in India have realised that efficient grassroots infrastructure is the backbone of the sports ecosystem. A perspective change has enabled numerous new training centres, academies and other sports facilities across the length and breadth of the country.

To rise out of its notorious reputation of red-tapism and bureaucracy, the establishment is putting in a lot of effort, thought and funding to create a sustainable training environment for the athletes in the country. As India's socioeconomic environment evolves, the synergy between sports and the economy will become even more significant.



5.3 CRICKET AND THE REST

Cricket isn't just a sport in India; it's an emotion. From bustling cities to remote hamlets in the country, the sport has a deep-rooted connection to the country's cultural fabric. But what makes this sport so immensely popular in India? When the Indian team plays a cricket match, it's a family affair filled with memorable moments that contain victories, defeats, incredible performances, and unexpected twists.

Over the years, the Indian cricket team has had its share of glories, having recently won a T20 Cricket World Cup in the Caribbean. However, the passion for the sport at times transcends the passion of the masses towards the sport. Over the years, the Board for Control of Cricket in India (BCCI) has built a strong grassroots zonal system that allows equal opportunity for players to showcase their talent and make a case for selection. Due to its very strong financial condition, the BCCI has ensured that every corner of the country gets ample infrastructure for talent to shine through. The Ranji Trophy, the pinnacle of Indian domestic cricket-allows grassroots players to be in the reckoning for selection to the national team. The authorities have succeeded in creating a strong talent pool owing to the healthy competitive nature of domestic cricket.



Since the turn of the century, cricket has not only become financially more lucrative but has transformed the lives of individuals. In purely sporting terms, Indians have contributed enormously to a game once regarded as quintessentially English. The prosperity and prestige of India in cricket have been nurtured by various factors. Money, television, and effervescent spectators are important ingredients that have prodded India to great achievements. While cricket enjoys the support in India, other Olympic sports are painstakingly trying to catch up. While the Indian Super League (ISL) has successfully managed to establish itself in terms of viewership and engagement, sports such as hockey, kabaddi, wrestling, badminton, tennis and volleyball have managed to garner a significant following.

However, unlike cricket, these sports are yet to garner mass movement on a grassroots level, that would see the development of substantial infrastructure and talent pool. In comparison to the global leaders, India remains an emerging force when it comes to sports other than cricket. The government and the corporates are chipping in with a substantial rise in funding, but the process will take time to fruition. Running professional leagues is a step in the right direction, as it will create buzz around non-cricket sports and will enable mass participation. With all the stakeholders working in unison, the future looks promising for even greater achievements on the global stage. In days to come, sports will provide greater potential for employment and contribute wholesomely towards the Indian economy. Looking at the current scenario, we may say that the trend is getting better than ever before.



5.4 MAJOR GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES

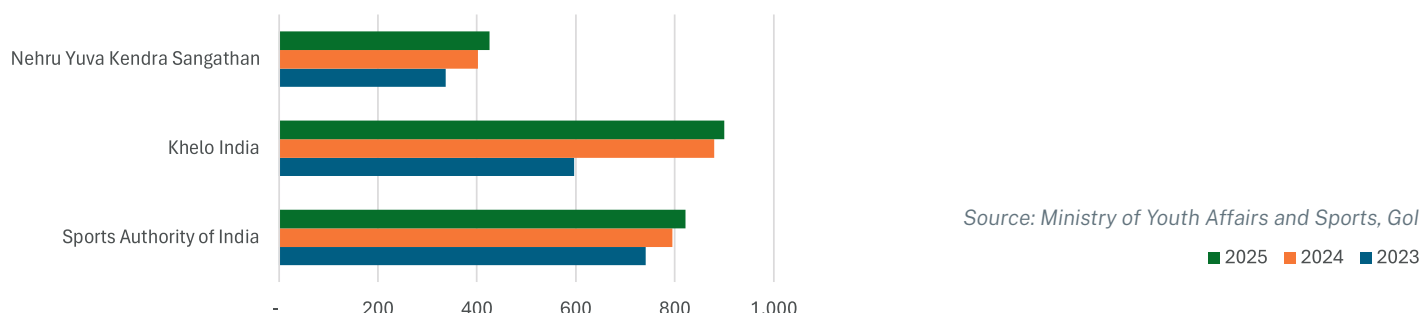
The consensus amongst sports aficionados is that there is no dearth of promising young sportspersons in India. However, the authorities must create an effective mechanism for identifying and nurturing the raw potential in world-class athletes.

Over the past few years, several Indian sports associations have been tasked with administering and promoting Indian sports to propel it to new heights. Sports bodies such as the Indian Olympic Association and the Sports Authority of India have set out to improve the quality of Indian sports through a variety of talent development programmes. An array of sports academies and institutes are actively involved in fostering the growth of Indian athletes. Sport is now playing an increasingly important role in a country's socioeconomic growth. Going forward, India would have to invest significantly in establishing a cutting-edge infrastructure that integrates the best global standards in sports training.

At the heart of India's sports programmes are government entities and institutions dedicated to developing talent and promoting sport. The Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports (MYAS) has had an important influence in establishing the country's sporting environment.

- The Sports Authority of India (SAI) collaborates with it to provide training, infrastructure, and other facilities for athlete development.
- National Sports Federations (NSFs) manage the growth of various sports, assuring their effective organisation and support.
- The Indian Olympic Association (IOA) is the governing body for the country's participation in the Olympic Games and other international competitions.

Gol spends / budgets on sports initiatives (Rs. Crores)



These organisations form the backbone of India's sports ecosystem. Their joint efforts have not only elevated athletes to global prominence but have also created a platform for the country to demonstrate its athletic excellence. Strategic partnerships between government agencies and sports organisations have helped numerous athletes around the country turn their ambitions become reality.

While the role of corporations in promoting Olympic sports has received adequate traction, the sector works in collaboration with the government, the country's largest shareholder in sports, and the different sporting federations. That the lion's share of the funding for sports comes from the government is evident from its ₹3,442 crore provision in the Union Budget of 2024. (*)

- The SAI, which conducts national camps, supplies athletes with infrastructure and equipment and picks coaches, is allocated 822 crore in the latest sports budget.
- The National Sports Federations (NSFs) will be granted ₹15 crore extra this time around, compared to the ₹325 crore revised budget for 2023-24.
- The National Anti-Doping Agency (NADA) was given a rise in the budget, with the government providing ₹22.30 crore in the interim budget.

(*) <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/sports/sports-budget-2024-khelo-india-once-again-gets-lions-share-in-union-budget-for-sports/articleshow/111958370.cms?from=mdr>

KHELO INDIA GAMES



Youth are the most energetic and vibrant element of the population. India is one of the world's youngest nations, with over 65% of the population under the age of 35. In 2018, the government introduced “Khelo India” scheme to restore India's grassroots sports culture. It seeks to revitalise the sports culture by developing a robust framework for all sports practiced in India and promoting our country as a sporting nation. It aims at mainstreaming sports as a tool for national, community and individual development along with economic progress. The Union Cabinet recently approved the revamped 'Khelo India' program by consolidating the National Sports Talent Search System Programme, Urban Sports Infrastructure Scheme and Rajiv Gandhi Khel Abhiyan (formerly called the Yuva Krida and Khel Abhiyan).

The Khelo India scheme strives to promote 'Sports for Excellence' and 'Sports for All'. Through the annual Khelo India Youth Games and University Games, athletes of age groups U17 and U21 have a chance to showcase their sporting talent annually, at the national level. Moreover, specific schemes are put in place to empower women to make a mark in sports, as well as strengthened support to divyangs in the form of financial grants, and better training facilities.

The Khelo India Programme has emerged as a revolutionary force in the field of sports development. By discovering and cultivating youthful talent, this effort has created a pipeline of future sports champions. Scholarships and financial aid for athletes have further reduced the financial load on ambitious athletes, allowing them to focus on training and competitions.

TARGET OLYMPIC PODIUM SCHEME (TOPS)

The Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS) was launched in September 2014 to identify, groom, and prepare potential Olympic medallists. It is a flagship programme of the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports that aims to aid India's finest athletes. The initiative intends to give an impetus to these athletes' preparations so that they can win medals at the Olympics.

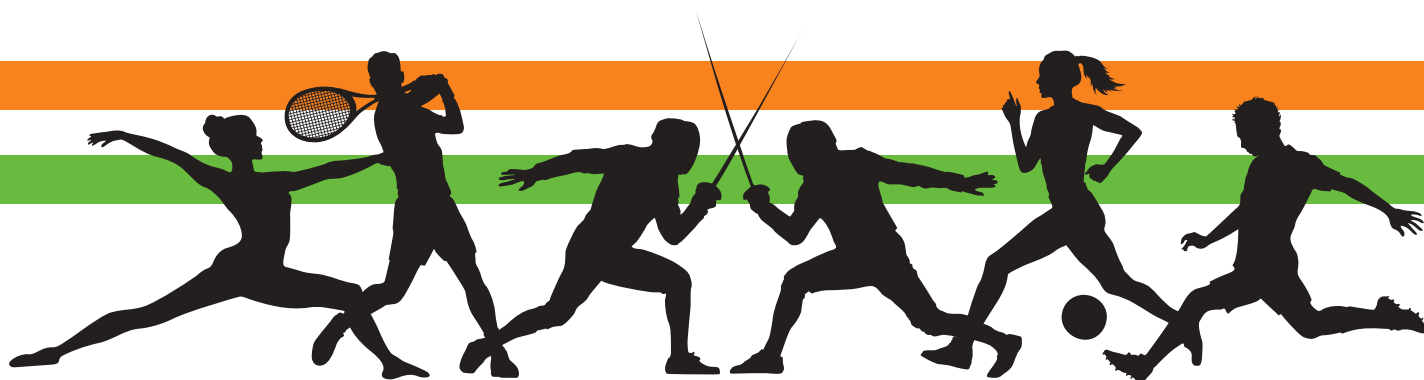




To achieve this goal, the Department of Sports is in charge of identifying athletes with the potential to win medals at the Olympics. The program aims to fund a group of athletes in the formative stage who have the potential to win sporting laurels. It has propelled India's pursuit of Olympic glory, offering specialised training and support to athletes with medal-winning potential. Moreover, investments in sports science and sports medicine have elevated athletes' performance and well-being. In January 2023, the Mission Olympic Cell (MOC), under the MYAS, added 10 athletes to raise the TOPS tally to 301 athletes, with 107 in the Core Group. India's Tokyo Olympic medallists Mirabai Chanu, PV Sindhu and Neeraj Chopra have been the key beneficiaries of this scheme over the years. Apart from that, the Mission Olympic Cell (MOC) is a dedicated body created to assist the athletes who are selected under the TOP Scheme MOC is under the Chairmanship of the Director General, Sports Authority (DG, SAI). The Committee meetings are attended by representatives of respective National Sports Federations (NSFs) and Project Officers of the SAI among other members. The idea of the MOC is to debate, discuss and decide the processes and methods so that the athlete receives the best assistance.*

NATIONAL SPORTS TALENT CONTEST SCHEME (NSTC)

The National Sports Talent Contest Scheme has been formulated for talent identification in the age group of 8-12 years and nurturing of identified talented sportspersons. Under the said Scheme, schools having good sports infrastructure and a record of creditable sports performances are adopted by SAI. The Scheme enables the budding sportsperson to study and play in the same school. In addition to the main scheme of NSTC wherein regular schools are adopted, a few distinct sub-schemes were launched to further reach out to sports talent in India, even those participating in Indigenous sports and games. Beneficiaries of the initiative are trained in line with the program rules. However, a maximum of 1000 students are selected annually to be part of the program. The government of India's Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports (MYAS) has launched a portal to spot the best talent from among the young population, and those interested can apply online using the portal for various schemes of the Sports Authority of India (SAI). This program plays a crucial role in alignment with the government's sports policy, wherein budding athletes are identified and are given a chance to hone their skill sets early on.



(*) Source: Government of India, Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports



NATIONAL SPORTS POLICY

India's National Sports Policy serves as a guiding framework for the country's athletic objectives. This approach emphasises grassroots development and talent identification, recognising that a solid foundation is critical for long-term success. Athletes, coaches, and the development of world-class sports infrastructure are all incentivised and supported, resulting in a multifaceted approach that addresses the wide range of difficulties confronting India's sports sector.

The National Sports Policy establishes a clear road map for the country's overall athletic development. It emphasises the importance of developing potential at a young age and offers principles for establishing sports academies and training centres. The policy's emphasis on developing a sports culture at the grassroots level demonstrates its dedication to laying a solid basis for the future.

As per the latest modulation in the policy in 2001, the integration of sports and physical education with the educational curriculum, making it a compulsory subject of learning up to the Secondary School level and incorporating the same in the evaluation system of the student, will be actively pursued. The policy further states, that the availability of adequate sports facilities throughout the country is basic to the development and broad basing of Sports. While the broad basing of Sports remains a responsibility of the State governments, the Central government will supplement their efforts in this direction and tap the latent talent, including in the rural and tribal areas, the policy further adds.

According to the 2001 policy, the promotion of mass participation was to be led by the central government, whereas the central government and the SAI collaborated with the Indian Olympic Association (IOA) and NSFs to promote elite sports excellence.*

5.5 PUBLIC PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP IN SPORTS

By embracing sports' transformative power, India can open up new avenues for economic development, and the corporate sector plays an important role in this regard. In recent years, India has seen substantial improvement in sports infrastructure, with numerous projects aimed at promoting sports at the grassroots level. However, there are still obstacles that must be addressed to make sports accessible to all while stimulating the development of young sporting talent. This is where the sports management sector comes in.

Sporting Institutions like 'The Olympic Gold Quest' and 'Lakshya Sports' play the role of a mediator that involves a wide range of activities in the administration, planning, organization, and marketing of sports events, teams, and athletes. Representing the interests of professional athletes, private sector can help athletes manage their careers, secure contracts with teams and sponsors, and even advise them on financial planning and personal branding. Sports agencies can open doors for their clients by connecting them with teams, sponsors, and other opportunities that can boost their careers. These companies play a pivotal role in identifying budding young athletes, fostering their potential, and ensuring their overall growth on and off the pitch. Accordingly, evolution of such institutes will certainly unlock the promising potential of the Indian sports sector.

Going forward, a departure from the old model of relying on public support is vital to ensure the long-term development of the sports industry and the Public Private Partnership (PPP) model may be the best possible solution. PPPs enhance, develop and deliver sporting opportunities to communities, including rural areas where the establishment does not need to pay the initial capital. The old culture of 'quota raj', after going through the motions, has given way to a professional one, in which goals, infrastructure creation and funding support have become important elements in nurturing & developing the available talent. Private enterprise and state participation are the most significant drivers in this regard and these need to work hand-in-hand to create highly successful & sustainable model.









(*) Source: <https://yas.nic.in/sites/default/files/National%20Sports%20Policy%202001.pdf>



5.6 INDIA vs THE WORLD IN SPORTS

India's sporting landscape, while brimming with potential, is still evolving compared to traditional global powerhouses. Nations like the United States, China, Russia, and several European countries have established robust sports ecosystems with substantial investments in infrastructure, talent identification, and scientific training. These countries boast a rich sporting history, producing world-class athletes across multiple disciplines consistently. Their dominance is often attributed to early specialization, intense competition, and a strong emphasis on sports as a profession.



Features					
Professional Leagues		Highly developed	Strong, Diverse	Developing	Emerging
Government Support		Moderate	Substantial	Heavy	Increasing
Sports Culture		Deeply Ingrained	Strong Traditions	Emphasis on National Pride	Growing
Commercialisation		Highly commercialized	Balanced Approach	Increasing	Growing

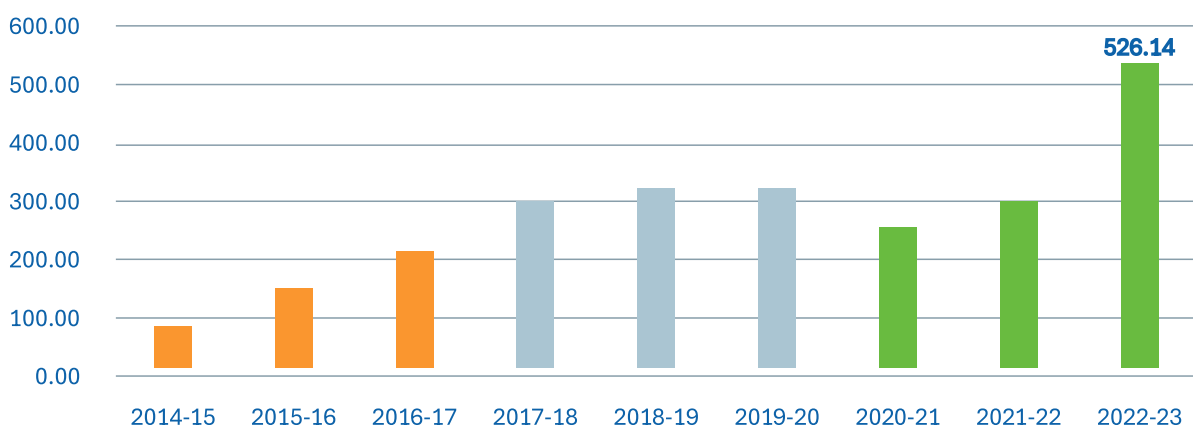
6. CORPORATE SPONSORSHIP: FUELING INDIA'S SPORTING DREAMS



Come the Olympic Games every four years, millions of Indian sports enthusiasts are glued to the TV sets in anticipation of Indian athletes doing well. However, an athlete's journey to every Olympic is a culmination of goal-setting, planning and executing the targets for almost three years before the Games. For Indian athletes, the challenges are even bigger, as they have to garner financial support to train at world-class facilities with a suitable coaching system. This is where government support and private funding play a major part. The rise of sports in India is a confluence of various factors, and the corporate sector is playing a major part in the tale. Many Indian businesses have already taken on the responsibility of developing and marketing sports in our nation, but the corporate sector's untapped potential is so large that it still remains significantly unattended.

The corporate sector's initiatives to invest in sports have yielded lucrative dividends. Last year's Asian Games in Hangzhou, China, saw 12 of India's 107 medal winners sponsored by Reliance Foundation, while 17 were supported by JSW Sports. Corporates and investors are actively seeking prospects to invest in sports franchises, infrastructure, and sports technology corporations. According to the Ministry of Corporate Affairs' database, CSR funding for sports increased from ₹57.62 crore in FY14-15 to ₹526.14 crore in FY22-23, demonstrating that many of the prime business entities in India have started investing increasingly in the sports sector.

CSR Spent on Sports (Rs. Crore)



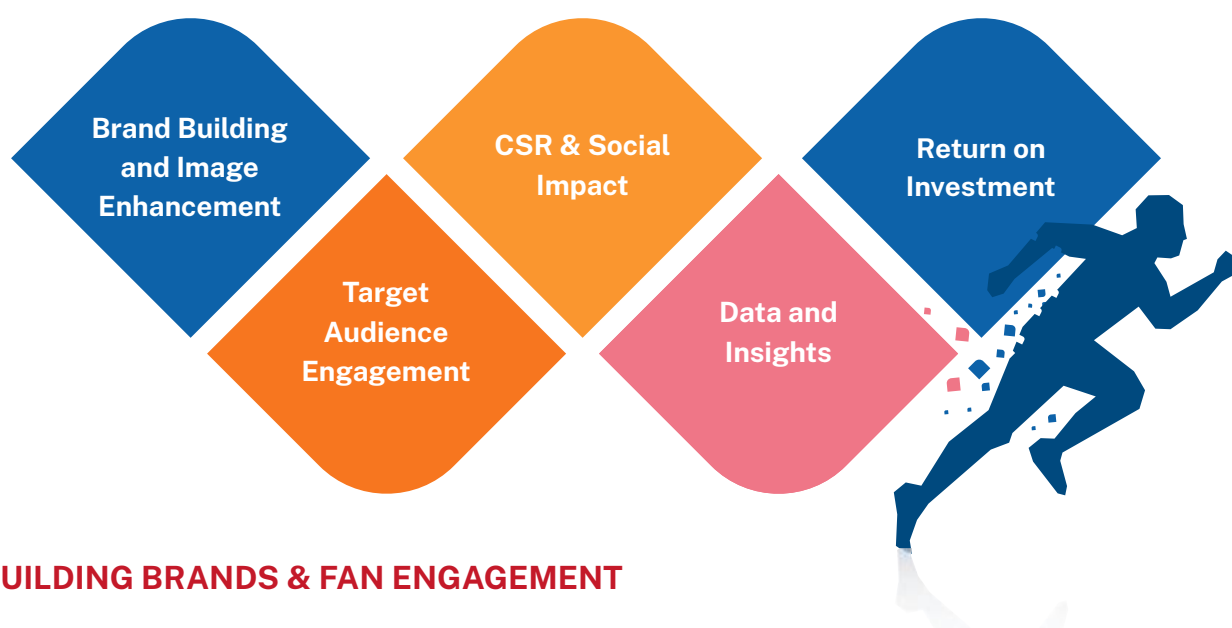
6.1 WHAT'S IN IT FOR INC?

A few years ago, the corporate sector rhetoric would be: Why invest in Indian sports?

The pleasant shift over the past decade or so has been: Why not invest in Indian sports!

What has brought about the paradigm shift? Is it the mentality of the investors, the potential of the athletes, the state of infrastructure in the country or the marketing feasibility in India? The honest answer would be the amalgamation of all these scenarios.

Over the years, sports in India have indeed become profitable projects for a diverse range of stakeholders, including athletes, corporations, advertisers, and sports governing entities. Million-dollar deals have become the norm rather than the exception, benefiting everyone involved. Evidence from the foreign sports industries is there to see for all. This shift towards turning even the least commercially feasible sports into lucrative businesses indicates the strong and broad interest in these disciplines across all stakeholders. A deep dive into the topic shows why India is a lucrative market for not only Indian businesses but for Multinational conglomerates. Also, considering investments in sports industry as a part of the mandatory CSR requirements as well seem to have attracted further funds from the private sector.



6.2 BUILDING BRANDS & FAN ENGAGEMENT

In a highly competitive marketplace where businesses want to get into consumers' minds, engaging in sports events / infrastructure is an excellent approach to connect simply because sport is widely socially acceptable. Cricket in specific and other franchise leagues, such as the ISL and the PKL, are among the most popular sports activities in India. The sport enthusiasts watch sports events religiously because they are 'real', as opposed to other popular types of 'fictional' entertainment. As a result, it is an excellent opportunity for a brand to connect with its target audience.

Another reason why entrepreneurs use sports to increase brand awareness is the emotional connect that fans have with sports and players. The numerous fan clubs (for teams and athletes) that have formed on social media channels attest to this. Sponsorship and other types of affiliation with teams and athletes transform brands into 'partners' over time. The fan engagement process has evolved from simply putting logos on team outfits and merchandise to having meaningful conversations about the sport and players. It's about developing and building a bond with fans at an emotional level. Brands have started to develop and create narratives around the sport, which form a solid bridge between them and their audiences, where they delve deep into their psyche to develop an affinity for the brand through a socially acceptable channel.

Over the years, it has become a common practice for global giants to rope in Indian cricketers and other athletes as their brand ambassadors. Not only it is financially rewarding for the players, but by having associated themselves with an 'icon', MNCs tend to get immense traction. One of such deals in India was when Mark Mascarenhas, a marketing tycoon cracked a deal with Sachin Tendulkar in the early 2000s. When Tendulkar was at the peak of his prowess, Mascarenhas signed him up for a five-year contract valued at nearly Rs 25 crore. By then, Sachin was already one of the richest cricketers, but with the contract, his value skyrocketed beyond bounds. An impressive roster of brands signed on with Tendulkar: Adidas, MRF, Philips, and Visa to name just a few. Each coughed up more than Rs 1 crore annually to be associated with 'Brand Tendulkar' in India. Apart from Sachin Tendulkar, Indian cricketers like MS Dhoni were able to utilise their sporting stature to dabble in the field of sports management. Holding a stake in sports and event management company Rhiti Sports, Dhoni made a foray in the field with the company managing the commercial aspect of 'Brand Dhoni'. However, later due to alleged conflict of interest, the former Indian captain gave up stakes in the firm. Such partnerships are beneficial for both the players and the corporates.

With ever-evolving marketing strategies, brands have various marketing objectives when they partner with sports and sportspersons as sponsors. The majority of brands use sports to launch long-term marketing campaigns that span years if not decades. Coca-Cola, for example, has been linked to the FIFA World Cup (football) and the Olympics for decades. The top-tier brand has been developing marketing campaigns around these high-profile events, providing fans with a chance to experience the emotional roller-coaster ride of the sporting event, which is completely consistent with the brand's values.

Through placements on jerseys, sports stadia and advertising material, the sponsor gains an assertive visual presence and becomes a part of the action. Depending on the goal, visibility takes precedence in the stadium, on TV, or online. Furthermore, the internet reach has increased as a result of the rights holders' increased content on their social networks. For the past 13 years, IPL has been the benchmark for exemplifying what private investments can do to a sport, paving the way for further corporate involvement in other sporting ecosystems.

The Indian Super League (ISL) has also successfully managed to establish itself in terms of viewership and engagement. Furthermore, sports such as hockey, kabaddi, wrestling, badminton and volleyball have managed to garner a significant following and enthusiasm in the country their respective sports league.



6.3 MAJOR CONTRIBUTORS OF INDIA INC

The upward trajectory of sports in India affords several investment opportunities for not just Indian but global conglomerates to be part of the lucrative market. Owing to stellar performances in the Tokyo Olympics by the likes of Neeraj Chopra, Mirabai Chanu, PV Sindhu, Manika Batra and Manu Bhaker, companies are now competing to sign them, propelling commercial valuations and impact connected with their particular sports to new heights of profitability. This way, India seems to be an ideal ground for significant investments in the field. Below are prominent Indian conglomerates which have taken the first steps towards elevating India's sporting journey, with many more now willing to follow them.

TATA GROUP



The Tata Group's tryst with Indian sports dates back to a century. It was in Pune, at a sports meet of the Deccan Gymkhana in 1919, that Tata Group's Dorabji Tata decided to finance the Indian team for the Antwerp Olympic Games the following year. Later, Dorabji Tata, Chairman, of Tata Group would go on to become the first President of the Indian Olympic Association in 1927. Later that year, the Tata group established the Jamshedpur Athletic Club in 1927 and started sports competitions for working women and children.

Apart from that, the Tatas have played crucial roles in forming clubs for hockey, cricket and football in the country. Dorabji Tata, was a founding member of the Willingdon Club in Mumbai, while Naval Tata headed the Indian Hockey Federation during the golden age of the game in the country in the 1930s onwards.

Ever since, the senior leadership at the company has worked towards fruition of the JRD Tata's vision of sports being an integral part of Tata Group's corporate philosophy. The Company has endeavoured to promote and develop an array of sports and has set up state-of-the-art sports infrastructure not only in and around its areas of operations but beyond. Today, very few cities in the country can boast of the kind of sports infrastructure that exists in Jamshedpur. Apart from that, the Tatas have been one of the foremost corporate promoters of Indian sports – having built academies for archery, athletics, hockey and sport climbing.

RELIANCE GROUP



One of India's biggest businesses has established the country's largest grassroots sports program. Reliance Foundation, Reliance Industries' CSR vertical, has been actively involved in nurturing budding athletes and watching them grow. The vision of the group is to build not one or two or a few champions, but a nation of sportspersons.

Launched in 2019, the foundation's scholarship program supports athletes and organizations in pursuits for Olympic success. The program currently supports over 50 athletes across 10+ sports, to create a pipeline of young athletes capable of achieving international success. Since 2013, the Reliance Foundation's sports chapter has been working to create a world-class sporting ecosystem and enhancing athletes' performance to help them excel at the highest levels of global sport, all the way to the Olympics. With a vision to uplift the Indian sports sector, the foundation has expanded from a single program in 2013 to support over 200 athletes across 10 sports disciplines. To improve India's prospects at the Olympic Games and other prestigious international sporting events, Reliance Foundation Sports provides sports science and related support to sports federations and organizations, including the Athletics Federation of India (AFI) and the Indian Olympic Association (IOA) through development partnerships aimed at achieving Olympic success.



JSW GROUP



A brainchild of JSW's Parth Jindal, the Inspire Institute of Sport (IIS) is India's first privately funded High-Performance Training Centre that trains talented young athletes across five Olympic disciplines - wrestling, boxing, judo, athletics and swimming. Spread over 42 acres in Vijayanagar, Karnataka, IIS brings together 23 corporate donors who are collectively funding the operations of the institute through CSR funding.

Through IIS, the group has managed to increase the number of athletes apart from contributing to the investment on National Federations and Associations. Some of those who have already benefited from a stint at IIS include Commonwealth Games medallists Neeraj Chopra, Vikas Krishan Yadav and Vinesh Phogat, Rio Bronze medallist Sakshi Malik and talented young athletes like boxer Nikhat Zareen and High Jumper Tejaswin Shankar. JSW group has invested Rs 300 crore in operational expenses through this Paris Olympic cycle for training, exposure camps, rehab and recovery across its athletes at IIS (Inspire Institute of Sport - JSW) and its satellite centres in Himachal, Manipur, Odisha and Hisar.

Apart from IIS, the Sports Excellence Program (SEP) is the flagship endeavour of JSW Sports, which currently supports 49 athletes across four disciplines. Since its inception, JSW-SEP athletes have achieved consistent success on the international stage and have contributed multiple medals to the nation's tally at the Commonwealth and Asian Games.

("Corporate identities used here are solely for representative & design perspective. These identities do not display any kind of professional association of the entities with this Report")



7. A BLUEPRINT FOR INDIAN SPORTS FRANCHISES: IPL

India's sports panorama is rapidly changing from the age-old passion for cricket to the burgeoning interest in football, kabaddi, badminton and other sports. This evolution is not confined to the growing number of athletes and viewers, but also reaches deep into the financial side of sports. In India, businesses are increasingly using sports to boost brand visibility and consumer engagement, as discussed in sections above. The draw of large audiences, particularly during high-profile events such as the IPL, makes engagements in sports an appealing platform for advertisers in the Indian sports industry. Digital streaming platforms have expanded their reach considerably, allowing businesses to communicate with audiences throughout the country. Furthermore, the government's efforts to expand sports infrastructure have created new prospects for private-public collaborations in the Indian sports industry.

The success of franchise-based leagues has demonstrated the potential of investing in sports teams, as IPL franchise values have skyrocketed in recent years. The IPL is without a doubt the pioneer of franchise competitions in the country, having debuted in 2008. The number of fans has steadily increased over the years. IPL has a global fan base that extends beyond India. The league also produces a lot of funds through lucrative annual sponsorship and broadcast rights deals. According to Forbes, each IPL franchise is now projected to be valued over \$1 billion, with the value increasing by nearly a quarter (24%) per year since the first season. (*)

In comparison, during the same thirteen-year period, NFL franchises' growth rate increased by about 10% every year. The average NFL team is now worth about \$3.5 billion, and the growth rate for NBA teams has increased by approximately 16% per year, with each team projected to be valued around \$2.48 billion. Surprisingly, the Mumbai Indians, the IPL's most valuable club, are currently worth more than \$1.3 billion, surpassing every MLS team, 27 NHL teams, and six MLB teams.

7.1 SPORTS' MEDIA RIGHTS: THE VALUE OF AIRTIME

Apart from being a professionally run league, the IPL has also established a model for leveraging media rights, which account for the majority of sports league earnings. Many things contribute to the high value of IPL franchises today, one of them is the sheer number of people that enjoy watching. Last year, over to 400 million people watched their beloved teams play on television, with approximately 260 million live-streaming the action online.

Sponsorships and advertising are the backbone of the sports industry, providing vital income and support for events, teams, and players. In India, businesses are increasingly using sports to boost brand visibility and consumer engagement. The success of the Pro Kabaddi League (PKL) exemplifies how sports leagues may capitalise on rising popularity. When the PKL was launched in 2014, there were many doubters, as few people knew how a league based on a traditional Indian sport would do. However, a clever marketing strategy and innovative ideas to make the league more TV-friendly, combined with the sport's widespread popularity across the country, quickly propelled PKL to the second most-watched sports league after the IPL, with 222 million viewers in 2022, according to Broadcast Audience Research Council (BARC) data.

7.2 GROWING BEYOND MAINSTREAM SPORTS

When several companies spend heavily on sports teams, players, and leagues, it has a ripple effect on the sports ecosystem as a whole. The professional leagues, which help to develop, nurture, and elevate youthful talent in India, are a blessing to the country's grassroots economic development. The impact of these leagues extends beyond the players; they provide evolutionary foundations for the country's sports culture while also opening up many other sports-aligned avenues.

(*) <https://www.forbes.com/sites/mikeozanian/2022/04/26/indian-premier-league-valuations-cricket-now-has-a-place-among-worlds-most-valuable-sports-teams/>



As discussed earlier in the report, the sports industry has diversified to include along with professional sports leagues and teams, an array of extensions in the form of sports media, sports equipment and apparel manufacturers, sporting events and tournaments, sports marketing and sponsorship, sports technology, and sports tourism etc. As per a report by GroupM ESP, the sports industry in India logged a remarkable surge in 2023, posting a combined revenue of ₹15,766 crore, which worked out to an 11% growth over 2022. The IPL established a template for how a league could be designed and marketed to attract funds in the tune of thousand crores into the Indian sport economy. Moreover, it also opened up numerous sports-related job opportunities in the Indian economy. Most of these are specialist jobs, which help professional teams and athletes achieve last-mile excellence.

With the advent of professional hockey, kabaddi, badminton, tennis, football, and cricket leagues in India, athletes requires a proper support system including nutritionists, trainers, medical team, analysts, psychologists and so forth. This has paved way for alternative careers for many, who were not able to make the cut as athletes, but have risen through the ecosystem to support other athletes. Today sportspersons rely on the expertise from a wide network of support personnel in order to maximize their potential and achieve their goals.



Modern-day sports are all about results and a scientific approach towards the game. Today, for a professional athlete, physical fitness is paramount and to have a cutting edge, the role of support staff becomes extremely crucial. Athletes' performances in sport are multifactorial and require an integrated cohesive support team of coaches and practitioners across medical, sports science, and technology disciplines to achieve results at the highest level of competition.

Sports psychology is a relatively new sport science that has only begun to emerge in recent years in India. As the country realises the importance of mental toughness and well-being in sports, sports psychology has evolved as a critical subject that supplements physical training and skill development, creating new opportunities across sports sector. Indian athletes are among the most talented and hardworking of their peers, but they must have the right mentality to perform on the biggest stages, that is where sports psychology and sports medicine play a crucial part. With the incredible amount of data accessed from coaches and mentors in modern sport, analysing and interpreting that data has become extremely important. To upgrade the level of training and strategy, professional teams and players are seeking help of data analysts.

Apart from these supporting systems, the sporting goods and apparel industry in India has been in existence for more than a century and has managed to flourish due to a skilled workforce. For example, the towels produced every year for the prestigious Wimbledon Grand Slam tennis tournament are produced in a factory in Gujarat, while footballs used in many of the international football tournaments across the globe are manufactured in the city of Jalandhar. The sector employs over 500,000 people due to its labour-intensive nature. All in all, it needs to be understood & appreciated, that the burgeoning sports industry & changing sports culture in India is just tip of the iceberg and a whole set of ancillary industries & professions are interlinked with the growth of the sports developments in India in the coming years.



8. OVERCOMING HURDLES, SEIZING POTENTIAL: THE PATH AHEAD

While India's progress in sports is evident in recent years and even creditable to an extent, it is not still devoid of hurdles in its path. Despite being the world's most populous country, with a growing economy and infrastructure, India's underperformance in international sports is perplexing. The lack of cutting-edge infrastructure in many remote locations across the country impedes talent development. Although the country is taking giant strides towards equal opportunities, gender disparities remain a concern, necessitating greater opportunities for female athletes. Enhancing coaching and training facilities is imperative to refine athletes' skills and enhance their competitive edge. Encouraging continued private sector participation in sports promotion can provide new energy and resources to the ecosystem.

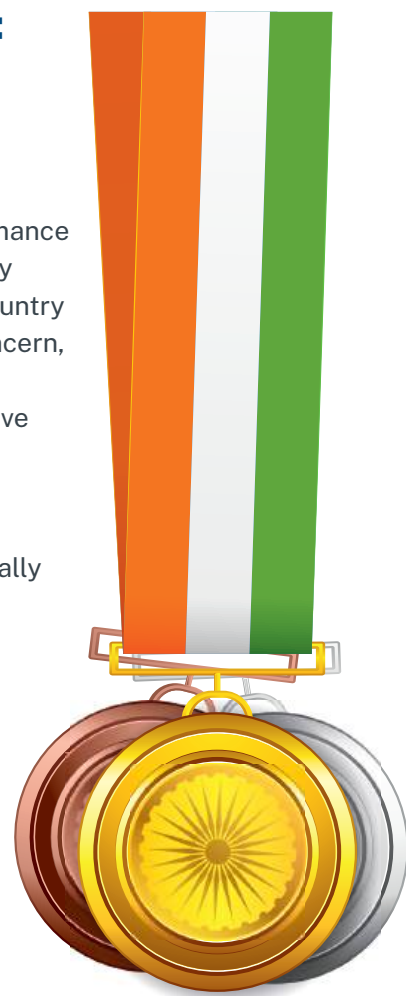
The Indian Cricket Control Board collects two-thirds of the total funds earned globally for this sport; meanwhile, other sports are so underfunded that players have been forced to crowdsource their sporting adventures. This comes at a time when the National Institution for Transforming India (NITI) Aayog has announced ambitious initiatives for sporting development in the country. The authorities have to acknowledge that the majority of Indian athletes compete against circumstances rather than their sporting peers. They should be given favourable conditions to nurture themselves in order to make the dream of "Sports for All" a reality.

Addressing the challenges of infrastructure, grassroots growth, sporting culture, mental conditioning, money, bureaucratic impediments, and worldwide exposure combined can pave the path for a better future in Olympic sports. It is critical that the government, sporting organisations, the corporate sector, and the general public work together to create conditions in which athletes can thrive, bringing home not just medals but also a renewed sense of national pride.

Looking ahead, India's sports vision is focused on long-term goals and methods. Enhancing athletic performance necessitates a comprehensive approach that includes training, infrastructure, and mental preparation. Leveraging technology and innovation can transform training methods and increase athletes' skills. This requires embracing advanced data, wearable technology, and virtual training platforms. As India moves forward, sports will continue to serve as a source of inspiration, cultivating not only physical excellence but also national pride.

In conclusion, India's sporting landscape is evolving, with a growing interest in various sports beyond cricket. Kabaddi, field hockey, shooting, wrestling, and archery each have their unique stories to tell. India, along with the whole world is becoming more aware of these sports, and with promising statistics and exceptional individuals, they are here to stay. Embrace the diversity, witness the passion, and celebrate the magnificence of Indian sports.

Unlocking India's sporting potential requires a concerted effort from all stakeholders – government, private sector, sports federations, and civil society. Until we establish ourselves as a sports superpower, India's aspiration to become a world power would remain unfulfilled. A century since first participating in the Olympic Games, India, with a 1.4 billion population has 41 medals to its name. To put things into perspective, the United States of America (USA) has won 2,968 medals during the same time. Money isn't a problem in Indian sports - the government and the corporate sector have enough. The challenge is streamlining expertise and creating a healthy ecosystem where all parties involved benefit from the last-mile competitive advantage. To apply a sports analogy, the path to becoming a sporting superpower is a marathon, not a sprint.



B E Y O N D T H E P I T C H

Investing in India's Sporting Dreams

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