



Empowering India Through Sports

This editorial is based on “[Make sports integral to school education](#)” which was published in Hindustan Times on 28/11/2024. The article brings into picture the transformative role of sports in shaping an aspirational India, emphasizing its integration into education to nurture vital life skills. By fostering talent through inclusive programs and school-based infrastructure, it envisions a more competitive and united nation.

For Prelims: [Sports](#), [Fit India Movement](#), [Gender pay parity](#), [SDG-13 \(Climate Action\)](#), [Draft National Sports Policy 2024](#), [Indian Olympic Association](#), [UNESCO](#).

For Mains: Role of Sports in Aspirational India, Key Issues Hindering the Development of Sports Culture in India.

In an **aspirational India**, [sports](#) must transcend mere **extracurricular activity and become an integral part of our educational ecosystem**, nurturing life skills that academic learning alone cannot provide. Champions like **Abhinav Bindra** emphasize that sports teach invaluable lessons of resilience, teamwork, and handling pressure, which are critical for personal and national growth.. The stories of young achievers like **para-athlete Kumari Jyothi** demonstrate that **sports can be a powerful equalizer, offering pathways to excellence for children across different abilities and social strata**. By embedding sports into our educational and social fabric, we can build a **stronger, more united, and globally competitive India**.

What Role Can Sports Play in Advancing India's National Development?

- **Enhancing Public Health and Productivity:** Sports promote physical fitness, reducing the prevalence of **lifestyle diseases such as diabetes and hypertension**, which cost India **₹6 trillion annually**.
 - Sports reduce **stress, depression, and anxiety, promoting mental well-being** in an increasingly urbanized and digitalized society.
 - The [Fit India Movement \(2019\)](#) is an example of a government initiative encouraging mass participation in fitness activities.
 - **Improved public health decreases healthcare expenditures and enhances productivity**, contributing to economic growth.
- **Economic Growth Through the Sports Industry:** The sports industry, including **equipment, apparel, and media rights**, contributes significantly to GDP.
 - The Indian sports goods' market is estimated to grow to **\$6.6 billion by 2027 from \$ 3.9 billion in 2020-21**
 - Mega-events like the **Indian Premier League attract foreign investments and boost tourism**, with the Board of Control for Cricket in India recording a **₹5,120 crore surplus from IPL 2023**.
- **Fostering National Unity and Social Inclusion:** Sports serve as a unifying force, transcending

barriers of **caste, religion, and region**.

- Events like the **Cricket World Cup and Olympic victories** instill collective pride and patriotism.
- For example, **Neeraj Chopra's gold medal at the Tokyo Olympics (2021) and India's T20 World Cup 2023** victory brought the nation together and highlighted India's talent on the global stage.
- **Strengthening Gender Equality:** Sports empower women by challenging stereotypes and providing a platform for success.
 - Female athletes like **PV Sindhu, Manu Bhaker and Nikhat Zareen** have inspired millions.
 - The **women cricketers are paid the same match fee as their male counterparts** highlighting the [gender pay parity](#).
 - Programs like **Khelo India Women's Leagues** are fostering female participation and bridging gender gaps.
- **Diplomatic and Soft Power Projection:** Sporting achievements enhance India's global image, bolstering soft power.
 - For example, during the **India-Australia Test series**, the presence of the **Indian and Australian Prime Ministers** showcased the role of sports in fostering bilateral ties, while India's hosting of the **Chess Olympiad (2022)** demonstrated organizational excellence and promoted cultural diplomacy.
 - **Iran under-19 cricket coach** has requested the BCCI in 2023 to build the country's first stadium in Chabahar.
 - The **IPL 2020 in UAE** and **recent IPL auction held in Saudi Arabia** further highlights India's growing influence in global sports diplomacy.
- **Boosting Infrastructure Development:** Investment in sports infrastructure catalyzes broader economic benefits, especially in urban and semi-urban areas.
 - The **National Sports University in Manipur** and state-level stadium projects under Khelo India have created jobs and improved regional development.
 - For example, to establish **Odisha as a 'Sports Hub' nationwide**, the State Government has allocated **Rs 1315 crore for sports and youth services**.
- **Fostering Innovation and Technology Development:** Sports drive advancements in technology, including **wearable tech, AI-based training, and broadcasting solutions**.
 - Companies like **Cricbuzz and ESPN CricInfo** are revolutionizing sports news and culture. These innovations contribute to India's growing digital economy and employment generation.
- **Environmental Sustainability and Awareness:** Sports events are increasingly linked to sustainability, promoting eco-friendly practices.
 - In 2023, **Tata partnered up with the BCCI to plant 500 trees for every dot ball that was bowled** during the IPL playoffs and finals.
 - **M. Chinnaswamy stadium in Bengaluru** boasts a 400 kWp rooftop solar capacity on top of its eastern side stands.
 - By leveraging the reach of sports, India can advance environmental education and align with global sustainability goals like [SDG-13 \(Climate Action\)](#).
- **Reducing Crime and Antisocial Behavior:** Sports channelize youth energy into constructive activities, reducing their likelihood of engaging in crime or drug abuse.
 - Programs like the recent **National School Games in Jammu and Kashmir** have provided an alternative for at-risk youth, with a marked reduction in stone-pelting incidents.
 - Sports thus act as a **tool for rehabilitation and peace-building**. A former drug addict, **Pankaj Mahajan** now leads a team of ten football coaches under the **NGO Slum Soccer**, dedicated to uplifting communities.
- **Promotion of Indigenous Sports and Cultural Heritage:** Traditional sports like **Kabaddi, Kho-Kho, and Mallakhamb** preserve India's cultural identity and bring inclusivity to modern sports frameworks.
 - The Pro Kabaddi League (PKL) has revived interest in Kabaddi, with the **league valued at ₹100 crore per franchise**. Indigenous sports also showcase India's heritage to global audiences, enhancing cultural tourism.
- **Encouraging Entrepreneurial Ecosystems:** The sports industry stimulates entrepreneurship in areas like **apparel, fitness equipment, and sports-tech startups**.
 - Companies like **Cult.fit and Playo** have emerged as market leaders. Such ventures

contribute to **India's booming startup ecosystem and create job opportunities.**

- **Breaking Stereotypes and Marginalization:** Sports challenge societal stereotypes, promoting inclusion for marginalized groups like tribals, Dalits, and people with disabilities.
 - Athletes like **Navdeep Singh, a Paralympic gold medalist**, have redefined perceptions of differently abled in India.
 - Policies like the [Draft National Sports Policy 2024](#) **emphasize inclusivity**, funding infrastructure for para-sports and underserved communities.

What are the Key Issues Hindering the Development of Sports Culture in India?

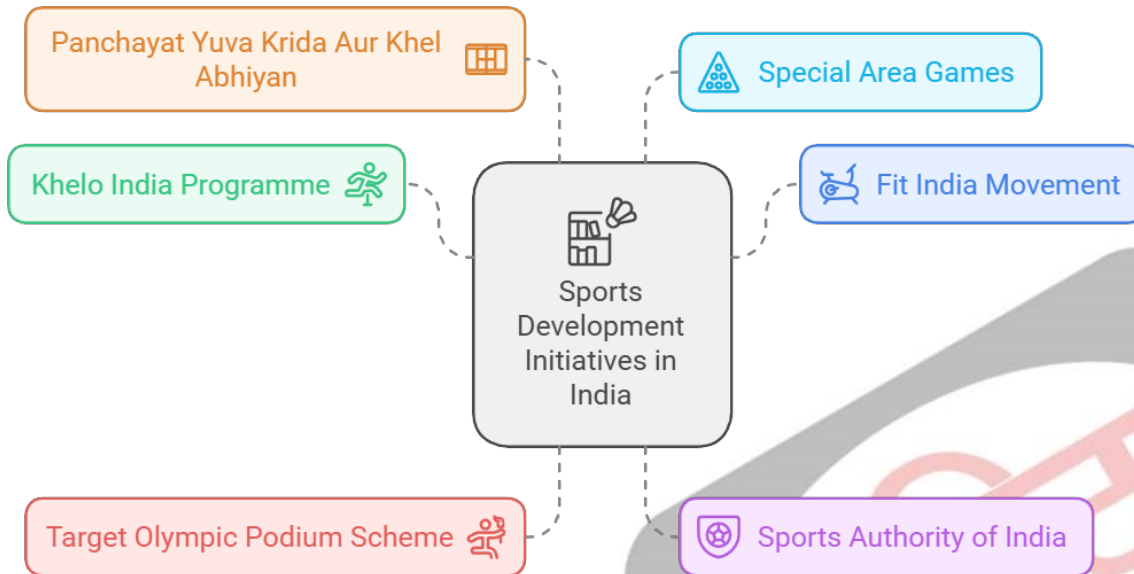
- **Inadequate Infrastructure and Facilities:** The lack of quality sports infrastructure, particularly in rural areas, **hinders the development of grassroots talent.**
 - Many aspiring athletes face challenges such as poorly maintained facilities, limited equipment, and inaccessible training centers.
 - The **Standing Committee on Human Resource Development** observed that during **2018-19 and 2019-20**, the actual expenditure on the Khelo India scheme was Rs 324 crore and Rs 318 crore, respectively.
 - However, the estimated allocation was **Rs 520 crore and Rs 500 crore, respectively, highlighting the inefficiency in utilization of funds.**
- **Overemphasis on Academics over Sports:** India's cultural focus on academic achievement often sidelines sports, treating it as an **extracurricular rather than a career option.**
 - Parents and schools prioritize academic success over physical education, limiting participation in competitive sports.
 - According to a 2022 report by the **Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports**, **less than 20% of Indian schools have sports facilities that meet the minimum required standards.**
- **Poor Governance and Bureaucratic Inefficiencies:** The functioning of sports federations in India is marred by **red tape, mismanagement, and lack of professionalism.**
 - Key positions in sports bodies are often occupied by politicians with little expertise, affecting decision-making and athlete welfare.
 - The **suspension of all payments to Indian Olympic Association (IOA) by the International Olympic Committee in 2022** for governance issues is a stark reminder of these systemic inefficiencies.
- **Gender Disparity in Sports Participation:** Women athletes face systemic challenges such as **inadequate training facilities, pay gaps, and societal stigma.**
 - Despite recent successes like **Neeraj Chopra and P.V. Sindhu**, gender parity in sports remains far from achieved.
 - According to a **UNESCO report (2024)**, **49% of adolescent girls drop out of sports, and 21% of women athletes have experienced sexual harassment.**
 - With women comprising 48.5% of the population (Women and Men in India 2022), the country cannot hope to achieve significant success in sports if nearly half of its population is excluded from participation.
- **Lack of a Structured Talent Identification System:** India lacks a streamlined system for identifying and nurturing talent at the grassroots level.
 - **Many talented athletes remain unnoticed** due to the absence of scouting mechanisms, particularly in rural and tribal areas.
 - **Tulsidas Balaram**, one of India's greatest football players during the golden era of Indian football, who was discovered only because a local coach happened to see him playing barefoot in a remote area.
 - His story highlights **how talent might get overlooked in the absence of structured systems** to identify potential athletes.
- **Dominance of Cricket Over Other Sports:** The overwhelming focus on cricket in India has led to the neglect of other sports.
 - This disparity reflects in **sponsorships, media coverage, and fan engagement**, creating an uneven playing field for non-cricketing disciplines.
 - For example, in 2021, **cricket accounted for 88% of national spending on sports revenue** in India, leaving minimal resources for other sports like hockey, badminton, or athletics.
- **Short-Term Approach to Sports Policy:** India's focus on short-term achievements rather than

sustained growth has hindered the creation of a strong sports culture.

- Celebrations of **individual achievements, such as Olympic medals, often overshadow the need for consistent investments** in grassroots development.
- The **lack of a comprehensive, long-term strategy for preparing athletes** is reflected in India's underperformance in Paris Olympics 2024.

What are the Key Initiatives for Sports Development in India?

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What Measures can be Adopted to Enhance Sports Culture in India?

- **Enhancing Grassroots Infrastructure:** The government should prioritize the development of sports infrastructure, especially in **rural and semi-urban areas, through public-private partnerships (PPPs)**.
 - Initiatives like **mini-sports complexes in every block**, equipped with multi-disciplinary facilities, can ensure accessibility for all.
 - Emphasis should be laid on the **timely utilization of allocated funds under schemes like Khelo India**.
 - **Regular audits and transparent mechanisms** must be instituted to monitor fund usage and prevent inefficiencies.
- **Promoting Sports as a Viable Career Option:** Incorporate sports into the school curriculum with **equal weightage to academics and physical education**, backed by mandatory infrastructure.
 - Launch nationwide awareness campaigns showcasing the achievements of athletes in diverse sports to **inspire youth**.
 - **Offering scholarships, career counseling, and skill-based training** for retiring athletes will make sports an appealing career choice.
 - Incentivize schools and colleges that produce national and international-level athletes to create a pro-sports environment.
 - Bihar youngster **Vaibhav Suryavanshi**, just 13 years old has become the youngest player to earn an IPL deal, **worth INR 1.10 crore can inspire millions**.
- **Strengthening Governance in Sports Federations:** Introduce reforms mandating professional qualifications for sports administrators and eliminating undue political interference.
 - **Establish independent regulatory bodies** to oversee governance and ensure accountability in federations.
 - **Regular performance audits of sports bodies** and a whistleblower mechanism can improve transparency.
 - Following international governance benchmarks, as the **International Olympic Committee mandates**, should be a cornerstone of reform efforts.

- **Addressing Gender Disparity in Sports:** Set up **women-exclusive sports academies to ensure a safe and conducive environment** for training.
 - Increase funding for **women-centric sports programs** and provide financial incentives for female athletes.
 - Enforce **strict policies against harassment and discrimination**, along with fast-track grievance redressal mechanisms.
 - Promote campaigns to challenge stereotypes and showcase successful women athletes as role models to encourage participation at all levels.
- **Implementing a Structured Talent Identification System:** Launch a nationwide talent scouting initiative, leveraging school-level competitions and local tournaments in underserved regions.
 - **Establish partnerships with NGOs and local bodies to identify hidden talent**, especially in rural and tribal areas.
 - **Create a database of potential athletes**, linked to specialized training academies equipped with advanced coaching and facilities.
- **Balancing the Focus Across Sports Disciplines:** Diversify sponsorship opportunities and **provide tax incentives for companies investing in non-cricket sports.**
 - Increase media coverage for diverse sports, particularly during international events like the **Olympics and Asian Games.**
 - Introduce a central sports broadcasting platform to highlight achievements in sports beyond cricket.
 - The government should also encourage **state-level leagues for sports like hockey, kabaddi, and athletics** to build fan bases and attract corporate investment.
- **Utilizing Technology and Digital Platforms:** Adopt advanced technologies like **AI-based performance analytics to improve training and scouting.**
 - Set up online portals for registering budding athletes, with access to resources such as e-coaching, training videos, and fitness tips.
- **Integrating Sports into Urban and Rural Development Policies:** Incorporate sports **infrastructure into urban planning policies**, ensuring open spaces are preserved for sports activities.
 - In **rural areas**, link sports development to employment generation schemes like **MGNREGA**, where building sports facilities can be included as an employment activity.
 - Offer subsidies for setting up sports academies in underserved regions to attract private sector participation.
- **Fostering a Holistic Sports Ecosystem:** Establish **sports science and medicine centers to provide athletes with world-class facilities** for injury management and performance enhancement.
 - Promote **research and innovation in sports equipment manufacturing** to make India a hub for affordable, high-quality sports gear.
- **Sports Tourism Development:** Encourage states to develop world-class sports tourism hubs by building **stadiums, sports museums, and training facilities that double as tourist attractions.**
 - Host international sporting events in underdeveloped regions to bring economic growth and inspire youth.
 - Promote adventure sports in areas like the **Himalayas or coastal regions, offering employment opportunities** and boosting the local economy.
 - **Link sports tourism to initiatives like "Incredible India"** to create global recognition for India's sporting potential.
- **Youth and Grassroots Talent Exchange Programs:** Collaborate with international sports federations for talent exchange programs, especially for niche and Olympic sports.
 - Enable young athletes to train abroad under renowned coaches and bring back advanced skills.
 - Similarly, **invite international experts to train Indian coaches and athletes domestically.**
 - **Government-to-government (G2G) partnerships** can facilitate scholarships for promising athletes to participate in global training camps and competitions.
- **Linking Sports to Health Policies:** Integrate sports promotion into public health campaigns to emphasize its role in **reducing lifestyle-related diseases like obesity, diabetes, and hypertension.**

- Establish collaborations between the **Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports and the Ministry of Health** to design programs encouraging physical activity in all age groups.
- Conduct regular community-level fitness and sports camps to promote healthy living, with incentives for participation in competitive and recreational sports.
- **Creating Sports Incubators and Startups: Support the establishment of sports-focused startups through government-backed incubators.**
 - These startups can work on innovations like affordable training equipment, sports analytics, and fitness technology tailored for Indian athletes.
- **Sports into Workplace: Incorporating sports into the workplace can play a pivotal role in improving mental health.**
 - By organizing regular **physical activities, team sports events, and fitness challenges**, employers can reduce stress, boost morale, and enhance collaboration among employees.
 - Offering **incentives for participation and providing dedicated spaces for physical activity** can promote work-life balance and overall well-being.

Conclusion

Integrating sports into India's education system and national development framework is vital for holistic growth. Sports can enhance **physical and mental well-being**, foster unity, promote gender equality, and serve as a tool for social inclusion. With strategic reforms, grassroots talent development, and inclusive policies, India can **unlock sports' transformative potential to build a healthier, more resilient, and globally competitive society.**

Drishti Mains Question:

Discuss the role of sports in driving India's socio-economic growth. Highlight the initiatives undertaken by the government to promote sports and the challenges that need to be addressed for realizing its full potential.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Q1. Consider the following statements in respect of the Laureus World Sports Award which was instituted in the year 2000: (2021)

1. American golfer Tiger Woods was the first winner of this award.
2. The award was received mostly by 'Formula One' players so far.
3. Roger Federer received this award the maximum number of times compared to others.

Which of the above statements are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Ans: (c)

Q2. Consider the following statements in respect of the ICC World Test Championship: (2021)

1. The finalists were decided by the number of matches they won.
2. New Zealand was ranked ahead of England because it won more matches than England.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

(a) 1 only

(b) 2 only

(c) Both 1 and 2

(d) Neither 1 nor 2

Ans : (d)

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