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Transforming India's Sports Ecosystem for Global Sporting Excellence

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Abstract

In today's world, sports are no longer just an entertainment medium or physical activity but have become a powerful tool for Health, Educational Development, Employment Generation, and Social Inclusion, National Pride, Economic Progress, and Youth Empowerment. It has thus been necessary for India, being a large and young country, to create a sound, inclusive, and sustainable sports ecosystem. A sports ecosystem refers to a linked system in which various factors such as sports infrastructure, talent detection, coaching, sports science, medicine, education, competitions, finance, and employment come together to form a whole. Though there is no dearth of sports talent in India, what is missing is an effective system for talent identification, cultivation, and elevation to the international level. Khelo India, Fit India, and the Olympic Podium Scheme are some of the steps taken in this direction. Khelo Bharat Niti-2025, launched in this year, stresses the need for connecting sports to national building, economic growth, social development, and mass movement. This article discusses the importance of creating a strong sports ecosystem in India, its current situation, the main challenges it is facing, the opportunities and ways for developing it. It concludes that a holistic sports system from grassroots sports to elite sports is necessary for India, instead of focusing only on winning medals.

Keywords: Sports Ecosystem, Sports Development, Sports Talent, Sports Infrastructure, Khelo India, Youth Development, Sports Science, Employment, Inclusivity.

1. Introduction

In ancient India, sports and physical activity are very much a part of the lifestyle, culture and social life. Kabaddi, wrestling, Kho-Kho, Mallakhamb and many other traditional games are indicative of the Indian sports culture. Sports are prevalent in India today. Today cricket, hockey, badminton, athletics, wrestling, boxing, shooting, weightlifting and football are all very popular. Sports lead to discipline, leadership, team spirit, decision-making skills, goal setting and social engagement among kids and youth. The 'Khelo India' official description is also related to the holistic development of children and youth, gender equality, healthy living and economic opportunities. India's large young population is full of potential to develop the sports sector; however, turning this potential into a reality will require a holistic sports ecosystem that goes from the school to the national and international level. India cannot be a superpower of sports just because some top athletes perform so well; it will require millions to be involved, quality training, modern facilities, a scientific approach and institutional frameworks [1-4].

Sports are now a major part of our country, and not only recreation, physical fitness and entertainment. A strong sports sector has been a key to public health, education, employment generation, social inclusion and youth development, community involvement, economic growth and national identity today. The international stature of a country is also enhanced by good performance of the sports in the international arena. So world countries increasingly consider sports as a key factor in public policy and human capital development over the long term. For a large and youthful country like India, the development of the sports sector is not just about a higher number of medals but also about the development of a healthier, more skilled, productive and socially connected society [5]. India has many young people and considerable sporting potential in different regions and socioeconomic groups. India has produced international stars in sports such as athletics, badminton, wrestling, boxing, shooting, weightlifting, hockey, archery, etc., and is now among the top performers in the world. India's performance at the Olympics, Asian Games, Commonwealth Games and World Championships shows that Indian athletes can succeed in the Olympics if they are trained, supported by the government, competition experience, scientific support and institutional support. But talent alone does not guarantee long-term success in international competitions [6]. Elite athletes need to be educated and developed by a systematic process that includes participation and talent identification at the grassroots and then in an organized way and also systematic training and competition, sports science, sports medicine, education, nutrition, psychological support, high-performance coaching and a variety of post-career opportunities [7].

As such, the concept of a sports ecosystem offers a more general understanding of sports development. A sports ecosystem is the interaction of athletes, coaches, physical education professionals, education institutions, sports federations, government agencies, private organisations, sponsors, sports scientists, medical professionals, technology providers, media and communities. The success of such an ecosystem depends not only on the presence of the infrastructure but also the quality of coordination among those stakeholders. Any of the major pieces of infrastructure (e.g., poor grassroots facilities, inconsistent coaching, low support for sports science, poor competition opportunities, governance problems, and weak access to

finance) can have a negative impact on the development of athletes. India has promoted several initiatives to strengthen this ecosystem [8-10]. Programs such as Khelo India, Fit India, and the Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS) have helped to increase participation, identify talent, promote fitness, and provide support to top-performing athletes. And with more involvement in the private sector, professional leagues, sports academies, digital technologies and sports analytics, there is a lot of opportunity for both athletes and sports organizations. The launch of the Khelo Bharat Niti-2025 is another key policy development, reflecting a more holistic perspective of sports as a medium for the development of the country, economic opportunity, social development and youth empowerment [11-12].

Despite these improvements in India, structural concerns still limit India's capacity to translate its demographic and sporting potential into sustained global success. Sports infrastructure is still unequally distributed from urban to rural population. Talent identification mechanisms are not uniformly implemented without equal opportunities for young athletes to get the most out of their high-quality coaches, scientific training, nutrition, sports medicine, and regular high-level competition. Sports integration with education and career development must be improved as well. Governance, institutional coordination, funding, accountability, gender participation, accessibility and athlete welfare are among the issues of concern. To address these issues we need to move from isolated schemes and event-based strategies and interventions around sports development systems, rather than focused on isolated schemes and events, to an integrated, athlete-centred, evidence-based and sustainable sports development model [14-16].

In this context, we investigate how India's sports ecosystem should change to achieve global sporting excellence. We analyse the current state of play in India's sports development system, identify key obstacles to overcome, identify new opportunities, and recommend ways to enhance the path from grassroots to elite performance. Infrastructure, talent identification, coaching, sports science and medicine, education, technology, financing, governance, competitions, inclusion and employment are all of the attention of this research. The paper argues that India's long-term success in sport will depend on a holistic ecosystem in which mass participation and elite performance are linked. A sustainable sports system should be developed so that not only are the champions of the world produced, but also young people are educated and empowered to become productive and contribute to the development of India as a whole.

2. Need and Objectives of the Research

In order to understand the requirements for building a sports ecosystem in India, the following objectives have been outlined—

1. To study the need for a strong sports ecosystem in India.
2. To analyse the social, educational, health, and economic dimensions of sports.
3. To outline the big challenges in the Indian sports system.
4. To analyse the current government sports policies and schemes.
5. To analyse the need for sports facilities in rural and urban centres.

6. To suggest measures for women, differently-abled athletes, and economically weaker sections to increase participation in sports.
7. To examine the role of sports science, technology, and the private sector.
8. To outline recommendations for a long-term and sustainable sports ecosystem in India.

3. Research Methodology

The present study is descriptive, analytical and policy-based to address the transformation of India's sports ecosystem and the key factors to sustain global sporting excellence. Secondary data and documentary evidence are used in the study to critically assess the institutional mechanisms, government programs, policy priorities, structural problems, and new opportunities in the Indian sports sector.

The secondary information has been collected from official government publications, policy documents, institutional reports, programme guidelines, statistical publications, press releases and other credible documentary sources. The Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, Government of India, and official documents related to Khelo India, Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS), Fit India Movement and Khelo Bharat Niti-2025 have been taken into account. Government notifications, administrative decisions, parliamentary and institutional documents, and authorised communications around sports development and the sports industry have also been taken into account. These sources were chosen to ensure that the analysis is still in line with the policy and institutional framework of sports development in India [17-21].

The methodology has been to conduct a systematic review and thematic analysis of the information and policy that is available. The data collected has been organized along different dimensions of the sports ecosystem as sports infrastructure, grassroots participation, talent identification and development, coaching and athlete support, sports science and medicine, education, competitive opportunities, financing, technology, governance, inclusion, employment and high-performance development. The study then explores the interrelationship among the various perspectives so as to determine how they can help athletes to progress from the grassroots to national and international competition.

A comparative and critical analysis has also been applied where appropriate to the gap between policy goals and actual implementation. Rather than assessing all the schemes on the basis of their objectives, this study looks at how they have contributed to a cohesive and sustainable sports environment. Accessibility, coordination of institutional frameworks, continuity of athlete development, resource utilization, inclusion and the availability of support systems necessary to achieve international-level performance are the key issues discussed.

The study also uses a policy analysis model of the research to examine the extent that recent policy directions (especially in the context of Khelo Bharat Niti-2025) represent not just a single medal-oriented policy direction, but a broader picture of connecting sports with health, education, youth development, employment, social inclusion, economic activity, and national development. It will provide information on the strengths and weaknesses of current interventions in terms of structural change that need to be addressed [22-23].

Since the research is primarily based on secondary information, there has not been a primary survey, interview, experimental intervention, or field data collection. The findings and recommendations are based on the interpretation, synthesis and critical assessment of the documentary evidence. Where possible, we take the recent and credible sources into account and the analysis is based on the current policy environment. The study acknowledges that secondary data-based analysis can be limited by data availability, reporting practices, definitions of institutional definitions and the nature of official statistics, but the methodology is a good basis for developing a comprehensive strategic roadmap to shift India's sports culture from an enabler of participation to sustainable global sporting excellence [24].

4. Concept of the Sports Ecosystem

The concept of a sports ecosystem is an interdependent but organized ecosystem in which institutions, stakeholders, resources, policies and support is all working together to ensure the sustainability of sports and sport. It is not just about building stadiums and arranging sports events but also the whole life-cycle of an athlete from one start to the next; talent discovery, systematic training, competitive experience, high-performance preparation and career development. A strong sports ecosystem is the setting from which someone can get involved in sports, develop their abilities, get supported, compete at higher levels and progress towards a career in sports and life.

The success of a sports ecosystem depends heavily on coordination and continuity among the parts. Schools and colleges make physical activity, physical education and organised sports the basis for children and young people. Community-level sports facilities and local playing fields provide regular participation and high-performance stadiums, specialised training centres and elite sports venues are the places for athletes to train at competitive and elite levels. Coaching and guidance from the right people in the fields of physical education, trainers and technical expertise are required to ensure athletes are trained properly based on their age, ability, sport and stage of development [25].

Another key part is the identification and nurturing of sporting talent. A good talent-development system should identify potential talent early and provide them with access to coaching, training, competition, equipment, nutrition, medical care and financial support. Specialised sports schools and sports academies can help in bridging the gap between grassroots participation and elite performance. Regular competitions at school, district, state, national and international levels are just as important because competition gives athletes experience, confidence, tactical understanding and the ability to perform under pressure.

In the current field of sports development, sports science and sports medicine will also have to be brought to the forefront of athlete training. Exercise physiology, biomechanics, sports psychology, performance analysis, physiotherapy, injury prevention, rehabilitation and scientific monitoring can significantly improve training quality and athlete performance. Nutrition and health support are also very important, especially for athletes who are doing high-intensity and long-duration training. A modern sports ecosystem must move away from the old coaching approach and adopt evidence-based and technology-based methods to develop athletes.

Education and career support are another key component of the sports ecosystem. Young athletes may find it difficult to balance education and competitive engagement. Flexible educational arrangements, scholarships, vocational opportunities and career coaching can help young athletes continue their education while pursuing sporting ambitions. Financial support through scholarships, grants, sponsorships, incentives and performance-based support can further reduce economic barriers and help young athletes from various socioeconomic backgrounds to remain in sport. The sports ecosystem also has a broader economic and institutional dimension. Sports equipment and apparel manufacturing, sports technology, sports management, event organisation, broadcasting, media, marketing, sponsorship and sports tourism are all sectors where investment, innovation, professional knowledge and new job opportunities can be created. Government institutions, educational institutions, sports federations, private organisations, athletes, coaches and communities have to work together on how to manage these resources in a way that is efficient and equitable.

And so a sports ecosystem needs to be considered as a whole and connected to the development in the sport, not just a collection of individual programmes or facilities. The aim of this ecosystem is to produce a clear and sustainable development trajectory from participation to performance from a child learning a sport at school or in the community on their own to systematic development, competitive success, global recognition and a sustainable career. India, and for this reason, must strengthen this ecosystem because in the long run the success of sport will be linked to the quality of athletes as well as the opportunity that many people have to participate, to develop, to compete and to benefit from sport.

5. The Need for a Sports Ecosystem in India

The development of a comprehensive sports ecosystem is important for India because sports have implications beyond just competitive excellence. The development of a well-organized sports system can impact youth development, public health, social inclusion, employment generation, human capital development and national identity and will also create a framework for the development of international sporting success. India's demographics, growing economy, interest in sports and the growing participation in international competitions make a full-fledged sports ecosystem especially necessary.

5.1 Harnessing Youth Potential for Positive Development

India has a huge and dynamic young population and youth are by far the most important resource that we have for social development and the development of the economy. Sports is an effective way to harness youth energy into productive and positive activities. Sport is associated with discipline, hard work, teamwork, responsibility, self-confidence and goal-oriented behaviour. Such qualities, in addition to athletic performance, are essential for education, employment and personal development.

A structured sports ecosystem can provide young people with opportunities to be physically active, develop sporting skills, and choose a competitive career based on what they like and can help reduce disengagement from productive social activities, as well as at school, community and institutional levels. So sport investment should be viewed as investment in youth growth and human capital as opposed to a competitive sport investment.

5.2 Health and Fitness

The growing prevalence of sedentary lifestyles has increased the importance of physical activity as a public health priority. Rapid urbanisation, increased screen time, changing occupational patterns and fewer opportunities for active recreation can contribute to insufficient physical activity among children, adolescents and adults. A complete sports ecosystem can address this challenge by integrating physical activity, sports, fitness and health into everyday life. Schools and educational institutions play a crucial role, as the habits of children and adolescents can lead to the same physical activity patterns in their adulthood. Community and recreational centres with sports facilities can broaden participation beyond schools. Fit India Movement and Khelo India have also been part of this movement in order to encourage more active lifestyles and participation in organized sport and the country is moving towards a more physical and healthy way of life. Sports policy can be leveraged and integrated with public health policy and the country can take the step from competition-based to a more physical and healthy lifestyle.

5.3 Talent Identification and Development

India has great sporting potential in rural areas, small cities, tribal communities and economically diverse parts of society. However, talent is often not identified because young athletes may not have access to the right facilities, coaches or competitive opportunities, financial support or talent assessment in place. Therefore, the lack of a mechanism for identifying talent can lead to the depletion of talent before athletes can reach the high level of specialization. A national sports ecosystem can address this gap by setting up talent identification mechanisms at school, block, district and state levels. Talent assessment should include sport-specific physical, technical, psychological and performance indicators and should be followed by sustained development rather than one-time selection. Educational institutions, state governments, national sports federations, sports academies, private organisations and local communities can collectively contribute to creating a continuous talent-development pathway.

The policy direction outlined in Khelo Bharat Niti-2025 also highlights the importance of better coordination among various stakeholders and the development of mechanisms to nurture, develop and advance sporting talent. There is a need for such an integrated approach to make sure that sports opportunities are not limited to the big cities and established sporting centres and for the talented athletes from less developed regions to have similar opportunities for development.

5.4 Enhancing International Sporting Achievement

International sporting success is so much more than the ability or willpower of individuals. Elite athletes are in highly competitive environments where even minor training, recovery, nutrition, psychological training, technology and performance analysis can affect performance significantly. Successful sporting systems generally provide athletes with constant coaching, scientific training methods, sports medicine, physiotherapy, nutrition, psychological support, performance analytics, advanced equipment and international competition exposure.

The transition from talent identification to elite development must be systematic and long-term to ensure India can achieve continued improvement in global sporting performance. Athletes with international talent need individualised training plans, specialist coaching, injury prevention and rehabilitation, nutritional assistance, psychological preparation, regular international exposure and evidence-based performance monitoring. Institutional mechanisms are also crucial to avoid any administrative disruption of the athlete's career and to ensure that athletes have continuity in their sporting life. A good high-performance system must also complement grassroots participation rather than take a back seat to it. The ultimate goal should be to create an easy path for the young athletes to get to world and state level competitions and ultimately world championship and Olympic level events in a seamless fashion. This way India is able to translate its large population and sporting potential into international-level performance at the same time that the entire population is benefiting from sport.

6. Role of Sports in Social Development

Sport in social development. Sports are key to social development and the formation of cooperation and community. Sports are not restricted by socioeconomics, language and culture, gender or geographical background but a place where people and communities come together and play for the same goal. Sports are about cooperation, mutual respect, discipline, leadership, tolerance and acceptance of diversity and will build community (the values and beliefs of sports). Sport can also be a great tool for social inclusion. When people of different social, economic, cultural and geographical backgrounds play the same sports, social interactions and integration are enhanced and increased. Schools, colleges, community clubs, local competitions and national sporting events can bring people together who may not have the chance to interact. So sports are a building block of social cohesion and support young people and communities.

One of the most important aspects of social development and gender equality is women's participation in sports. Access to sports facilities and coaching, competitions, scholarships and jobs will also help girls and women in sport. Sport professionals can help in improving confidence, leadership, physical fitness, decision making and independence. And the visibility of successful women athletes will only help to debunk gender stereotypes and encourage women to take part in the competitive and professional sports arena in the world. An integrated sports ecosystem should have equal access to infrastructure, training, competitions, financial assistance, coaching and employment for women.

Psychological and social factors in inclusive sports can help contribute to human development and inclusion. Participation in para-sports is a way to show off athletes with disabilities that they

can achieve success at sport, have confidence, have a good life and feel proud and get recognition. Accessible infrastructure, specialized coaching, adaptive equipment, medical and rehabilitation support and competitive opportunities are all important for real inclusion in sport. Inclusivity in sport will move people with disabilities' social perceptions from being limited and dependent to having equal opportunities and acceptance.

Social development in sports is particularly crucial to marginalized and disadvantaged communities. Young people from economically weaker areas, remote territories, tribal communities and underprivileged communities face obstacles to participation (not many facilities, limited resources, low coaching and lack of competitive exposure). This decentralized sports ecosystem can help us to address these inequalities by giving opportunities beyond the big cities. The policy that focuses on wider access to sports facilities and competitions for women, persons with disabilities and marginalized communities helps us to make sports more inclusive.

Sports can also support rural areas' development through young people at village, panchayat, block and district level. Local playing fields, multipurpose sports facilities, training centres, equipment and community competitions are ways to increase participation and make space for promising athletes. And rural sports infrastructure can create local jobs and support associated activities such as coaching, sports management, event organization, equipment supply and maintenance. And for talented young people in rural areas, sporting success may be a route to a job that is often invisible.

So sports should not only be a way to produce elite athletes but it should also be a tool of social change. An inclusive sports system can build social cohesion, gender equality, empower people with disabilities, uplift marginalized communities and support rural development. For India, how to embed these social objectives in sports policy would help to share benefits of sports development with the country and build a better platform for long-term national sport excellence.

7. Integration of Education and Sports

In India, sports and education have been regarded as two distinct fields for a long time but this perspective needs to change in the current sports landscape.

Schools must ensure adequate time for sports through the use of qualified sports teachers and sports facilities and by arranging regular sports competitions. There should be methods to maintain a balance between education and training for promising sportsmen.

The Khelo Bharat Niti-2025 focuses on the interconnection of sport with education and developing physical fitness and life skills of students.

Ultimately, it should create an understanding among students that sports and education do not counter one another but are rather complementary.

8. Employment and Economic Development

Today's sports industry is poised to turn into a major source of jobs. In addition to sportspeople, there are countless other jobs such as coaches, physiotherapists, sports psychologists, nutritionists, fitness trainers, referees, sports writers, commentators, sports managers, analysts, designers of sports equipment, and event organizers in the sports industry.

The areas of sports tourism and events, manufacturing of sports goods, and sports technology will also rake in money. The Khelo Bharat Niti-2025 program lays out the connection of sports with its contribution to economic growth in tourism, manufacturing, and technology industry.

As per forecasts based on data in the budget put forward by the government in February 2026, the emphasis has been made on sports equipment manufacturing to make sports an employment and skill development sector.

9. Current Indian Sports Ecosystem and Government Initiatives

India has increasingly recognised sports as an important aspect of national development and has intensified policy and institutional interventions to strengthen the sporting ecosystem. A move from the traditional focus on competition and only a few elite athletes to more holistic engagement in the field and the development of the community, talent identification, infrastructure development, coaching and sports science, fitness, inclusion, and high-performance development has been made in the last decade. This approach reflects the understanding that sustained international sporting success requires a concerted ecosystem that spans from the community level to the highest levels.

One of the most significant steps taken by the Khelo India program to develop the sporting culture at the grassroots and enable young talent to reach higher levels of competition is the development and upgrading of the sports environment, sports competitions, talent identification and development, Khelo India Centres, sports academies and schools, and the promotion of participation in sport. By linking grassroots participation and structured talent development, the programme is an important institutional mechanism to build up the base of Indian sport.

Fit India Movement has supported this by promoting fitness and active lifestyles among the general population. It is important to broaden the scope of sports and physical activity from competitive athletes to children, young people, educational institutions, communities, and even the general public. And that is important because a culture of physical activity would help to develop a base of potential talent for the sport that we will see in the future. It also sees sports as a means to prevent illness, to be healthy, and to have a healthy life rather than only medals and rankings. At the elite level, the government has increasingly focused on providing athletes with the resources necessary for international competition. Financial support, training support, international exposure, specialist coaching, equipment, sports science, medical services, and other forms of assistance have become an integral part of India's high-performance plan. The Target Olympic Podium Scheme and other approaches to support athletes and disciplines that could be able to contend with world-class competitions are all aimed at it. The interventions are especially important as elite performance requires sustained investment and a support system beyond regular coaching.

A major policy approach in this direction is the Khelo Bharat Niti-2025, which brings in a more holistic view of the development of a sports ecosystem in India. Sports are embedded in the national development agenda for the development of India in the context of building a nation to

better develop our country, the country's economy, wealth creation, social development, education, youth empowerment, health, and community participation. While the ecosystem-oriented approach recognises that excellence in sports can't be achieved by individual sports at the national level and needs to be integrated with government organisations, educational institutions, sports federations, private sector organisations, athletes, coaches, and communities, it is also about taking sports as a part of national development and this is a very important step in the direction of the future.

Financial commitment is another sign of a greater emphasis of the government on sports. In July 2026, the Government of India sanctioned a total investment of ₹36,441 crore for the Khelo India initiative and supporting National Sports Federations during 2026–27 to 2030–31. A multi-year programme like this indicates that sports development programmes are being maintained at a higher level of continuity and predictability. Long-term financial planning is important because the development of athletes, infrastructure, coaching programmes, and high-performance programmes should be sustained for a long time and not funded in short-term or on an event basis.

The Indian sports ecosystem today is characterized by the convergence of grassroots participation, fitness promotion, talent development, elite athlete support, infrastructure development, institutional programmes, and policy reform. However, the efficacy of these efforts will ultimately depend on their implementation, coordination, geographical reach, transparency, monitoring, and sustainable outcomes. Government investment is a strong base to build upon but strengthening state-level systems, local sporting institutions, coaching capacity, sports science, athlete welfare, private sector participation, and performance evaluation will be key to translating policy ambition into tangible sporting outcomes.

The latest policy and investment measures certainly show some movement towards the development of a better system of sports in India. The challenge for the next few years will be to make sure that this investment leads to a continuous trajectory of mass participation and grassroots talent discovery to the top international teams and also that the social, health, educational, and economic benefits of sports reach a much broader region of our society.

10. Major Challenges Facing the Sports Ecosystem in India

Despite big policy interventions, increased public investment and growing interest in sports, the Indian sports ecosystem still faces a number of structural, institutional and social barriers. From grassroots participation and talent acquisition to elite performance and post-career development that are to be addressed in the sports landscape. To address them, government institutions, educational institutions, sports federations, private-sector players and local communities need to come together.

10.1 Disparities in Sports Infrastructure

An ongoing issue that requires attention is the unequal distribution of sound sports infrastructures throughout the country. Cities enjoy better access to sports facilities, designed for various purposes, than small towns and rural regions, which lack plenty of sports fields, all necessary equipment, changing facilities, indoor facilities, and maintenance capacity. Even where sports facilities exist, there is no guarantee they will yield necessary infrastructure for intensive training practices. However, many of them may not be offered for the use of facilities.

The geographical gap limits the capabilities of young sportsmen, thus making it impossible for gifted individuals from poor regions to join the official sport industry. Therefore, the development of sports infrastructures should not only focus on building great stadiums; it should also lead to the construction of well-functioning sport facilities at the community level.

10.2 Shortage of Qualified Coaches

It is common knowledge that coaching plays an important role in the success of an athlete. A successful athlete needs to be trained by qualified coaches who have specializations in different aspects of athletic coaching, biomechanics, prevention of injuries, performance analysis, psychology, and innovations in training. The problem is that most countries, apart from advanced sporting world, do not have many qualified coaches available to them.

India, therefore, should work towards widening the scope of coaching education, certification, and training of coaches. Availability of experiences in international coaching will help India to achieve a much higher level of training for its sportsmen and having the proper career paths for coaches will help recruit and retain specialists in sport.

10.3 Gaps in Talent Identification and Development

India has a huge potential talent pool but the identification of promising athletes is not always systematic, consistent, or scientifically driven. Rural, economically weaker and geographically remote children may not be able to stand out in formal scouting networks due to insufficient facilities, limited competition exposure, financial challenges and lack of information on available opportunities.

As such, talent identification should be based on objective and sport-specific criteria, supported by physical assessment, technical evaluation, performance data, and appropriate developmental monitoring. Identification must also be further supported by ongoing support. A selection of an athlete without providing the quality coaching, nutrition, equipment, competition, medical assistance and education necessary to achieve a real talent-development pathway is simply not an ideal approach.

10.4 Balancing Education and Sporting Careers

In the long-term, the perceived conflict between education and intensive sports training remains a major barrier to long-term participation. Many families still regard conventional academic and professional pathways as more secure than sporting careers, especially when the probability of

achieving elite-level success is uncertain. Young athletes may therefore stop training when academic demands increase.

Therefore, better integration of education and sports is required. Flexible academic schedules, sports-friendly educational institutions, distance and digital learning opportunities, scholarships, academic support, and career counselling can enable athletes to pursue education alongside intensive training. Such arrangements may also alleviate parental anxiety about the dangers associated with pursuing sports as a career.

10.5 Limited Sporting Opportunities in Rural and Remote Areas

Rural India is a vast talent pool for sports, but the opportunities for systematic development are scarce in many parts of the country. Young athletes may have informal participation but lack specialised coaching, appropriate equipment, structured competitions, sports science services or regular contact with top-level athletes and coaches.

A decentralised model of sports development is required to address this issue. Village, panchayat, block and district-level sporting structures at the grassroots should be connected with state and national development paths. Regular competitions and scouting camps can help identify promising athletes and digital platforms can help to monitor and communicate better performance among grassroots programmes and higher-level institutions.

10.6 Participation and Retention of Women in Sports

While Indian women athletes have achieved great success at national and international levels, there are considerable barriers in terms of participation and sustained involvement. Safety concerns, lack of facilities, social attitudes, limited coaching access, lack of competition and the challenges of balancing sports and family duties, among others, can affect participation for women.

A gender-responsive sports ecosystem should provide safe, accessible and well-maintained facilities, appropriate training environments, qualified coaches, medical and nutritional assistance and equal opportunities for competition and financial assistance. Greater representation of women in coaching, administration, technical roles and sports leadership can help to enhance institutional responsiveness to women's sporting needs.

10.7 Limited Integration of Sports Science and Technology

Today's elite sports increasingly depend on scientific measurement, data analysis, technology, and multidisciplinary support. Performance analysis, biomechanics, exercise physiology, sports psychology, nutrition, physiotherapy, recovery science, and sports medicine can help athletes optimise performance while reducing injury risks. But access to these services remains uneven across India's sporting system.

The integration of sports science should not be limited to a small pool of elite athletes. A phased system should be implemented in which basic scientific assessment is introduced at

developmental levels and advanced services are provided as athletes progress. Investing in sports science laboratories, qualified professionals, athlete-monitoring systems, performance analytics and research collaborations with universities can enhance India's high-performance capabilities.

10.8 Governance and Sports Administration

Good governance is critical for the sustainability of the sports ecosystem. Transparency, accountability, professional management, institutional coordination, selection processes, financial management and long-term planning are key to athlete development and public confidence in the sport. The fragmentation among different organisations may also result in duplication of programmes or gaps in responsibility. India needs to develop better governance mechanisms in terms of transparency, accountability, professionalism, clearly defined institutional responsibilities, and measurable performance indicators. Sports organisations should now implement evidence-based planning, digital record management, independent monitoring, and outcome-oriented evaluation in every aspect of sports. The focus on stronger governance is in line with the larger policy agenda of Khelo Bharat Niti-2025, as well as institutional reform and financial investment.

The arguments presented indicate that investing funds in infrastructure, facilities, and elite athletes will not be enough to solve India's sports problems. India requires an integrated model of sports management that ensures connection of all parts involved in sports' development: participation at the grassroots level, identification of talented athletes, training, sports education, competitions, and even politics. The solution to the issue lies in bridging the gaps present in the existing infrastructure of the sports ecosystem.

11. Suggestions for Building a Modern Sports Ecosystem

An integrated model of sports management should be used in designing India's sports sector so that local people's participation in sports leads to the emergence of elite champions. It is important not to just build stadiums and to train athletes, but to create a functioning mechanism that brings together all aspects of the sports sector: participation in sports, talent identification, education, and others.

11.1 Establishing a Sports Development Pipeline from Village to International Level

India must have a clearly defined and institutionally connected athlete-development pathway:

Village → Panchayat → Block → District → State → National → International Level

Such a pipeline would also allow for a systematic process of identifying promising athletes at the grassroots and linking them to top-level coaching, competitions, infrastructure, and financial support. Each stage should have clear responsibilities, selection criteria, performance benchmarks, and mechanisms for moving athletes to the next level. A decentralised pipeline

would help reduce dependence on the big cities and allow young athletes from rural and remote areas to progress.

11.2 Making Schools Hubs of Sports Development

The Khelo India Centres, local sports centres, and any community sports facilities must be enhanced and multiplied especially in rural as well as less-developed areas. Such centres must be created in such a way that people can easily approach them and avail the benefits of qualified training by qualified trainers at very reasonable rates.

The training could be provided based on the local sports as well as the sports that have the capability of becoming popular internationally like athletics, swimming, gymnastics, football, hockey, badminton, boxing, wrestling, and shooting.

In developing such centre, local sporting interests, availability of the human resources, characteristics of the population and the existing infrastructure have to be taken into consideration in each case.

11.3 Expanding Local Sports Centres and Community Academies

The Khelo India Centres, local sports centres, and any community sports facilities must be enhanced and multiplied especially in rural as well as less-developed areas. Such centres must be created in such a way that people can easily approach them and avail the benefits of qualified training by qualified trainers at very reasonable rates.

The training could be provided based on the local sports as well as the sports that have the capability of becoming popular internationally like athletics, swimming, gymnastics, football, hockey, badminton, boxing, wrestling, and shooting.

In developing such centre, local sporting interests, availability of the human resources, characteristics of the population and the existing infrastructure have to be taken into consideration in each case.

11.4 Establishing Regional Sports Science Centres

Sports science must be included in athlete development thus being more than a mere element of elite training support in its final step. Sports science centres representing each state or region need to provide various services—including physiotherapy, sports medicine, exercise physiology, biomechanics, nutrition, sports psychology, training, injury prevention, rehabilitation, and performance measurement.

They can also cooperate with universities, medical institutions, and research agencies in the aim of creating scientific evidence for successful athlete training under Indian conditions.

11.5 Expanding the Use of Digital Technology and Data Analytics

The utilization of digital technology can enhance talent identification, athlete monitoring, performance evaluation, and program management. A national or federation secure digital

platform can build athlete profiles that comprise necessary details on performance, competition acquisition, training advancement, fitness assessments, and development points.

With the assistance of data-based systems coaches and administrators can track progress in athletes, find new talent, analyse performance trends, and make data-supported decisions. In addition, digital technology is to be used in providing transparency in selection and monitoring programs. However, it demands the use of data upholding, ensuring confidentiality, defining standard ways of evaluation, and having professionals in charge of the system operation.

11.6 Strengthening Public-Private Partnerships

The vast scale and variety of India's sports development requirements emphasize the importance of cooperation between both government and non-government players. To complement funding by the public sector, private organizations, as well as, like-profit sports organizations, colleges, athletic academies, foundations, and non-government organizations can bring learnings, innovations, and infrastructure that otherwise would be unavailable or costly.

The public-private partnership mechanism can be used for improvement of training facilities, while high-performance centers can complement one another like academic institutions. Both segments must operate according to transparent agreements and strict accountability rules and guidelines.

11.7 Prioritising Women's Sports and Para-Sports

An inclusive sports environment needs to give equal chances to women and athletes with disabilities to participate, train, compete and build sports careers. One should improve training facilities and accessible infrastructure, proper coaching, competitions, scholarships, medical assistance, equipment, and welfare mechanisms for athletes' welfare.

#Women-athletes should be given specific attention to the issues of safety and availability of necessary facilities, coaching and competition opportunities, and pathways to achieving professional sports. The availability of para-athletics opportunities and adaptive sports equipment is also very important. The increase in the number of women and persons with disabilities at coaching, administrative, technical, and sports management positions will be also beneficial for the development of an inclusive sport culture.

11.8 Integrating and Promoting India's Traditional Sports

Traditional Indian sports and indigenous physical approaches like Kabaddi, Kho-Kho, Mallakhamb, wrestling, and other regional disciplines should be preserved while being integrated with modern coaching and sports science. Science-based conditioning, nutrition, injury prevention, biomechanics, performance analysis, and competition management can improve the performance and international competitiveness of these disciplines without compromising their cultural identity.

The professionalisation and international promotion of traditional sports can be both cultural preservation and youth participation, tourism, employment, and economic development. Standardised rules, coaching programmes, competitive structures, certification systems, and international promotion mechanisms can help Indian-origin sports gain wider global recognition. Construction of a modern Indian sports ecosystem can take a holistic view and not just a fragmented one which is more about athlete-centred and development. For that, there needs to be a continuous pathway by which every child is identified, trained, educated, supported and developed according to their talent. At the same time, the system will be to promote mass participation and benefit from sports as well as health, education, employment, social inclusion and community development. And this is the kind of holistic approach that can take India to the next level of sporting excellence.

12. Sports Ecosystem and Atmanirbhar Bharat (Self-Reliant India)

The progress of the sports sector should include all parties involved in sports not only players. The areas related to the production of sports gear, sportswear, fitness devices, digital education systems, and sports medicine can be developed further in India.

Growing the local manufacturing of sports equipment can create jobs and lessen dependence on imports. Promoting innovations and start-up culture within the sports sphere can help our country strengthen its position in the area of sports technologies.

Thus, the sports sector can be included in the large-scale vision of Atmanirbhar Bharat (Self-Reliance In India) and a developed India.

13. The Way Forward

In the future, India needs a sports model that connects between mass participation and high-level performance. This involves getting normal people to enjoy sports and fitness on one hand, while at the same time ensuring that athletes get elite infrastructure.

Under this holistic vision, the Khelo Bharat Niti-2025 links sports to public involvement, social and economic growth as well as to world-class performance.

The purpose of this policy is to establish an inclusive sporting environment that will lead to young athletes from every segment of the society becoming successful at sports events.

14. Conclusion

In the modern age, building a robust sports ecosystem is not just a choice but a must. India has a large number of youth population, sports culture and talent. The task at hand is to develop these skills in a structured and scientific way. An effective sports ecosystem needs to have clear mechanisms for talent identification (from the village to the international stage of sport), quality training, modern infrastructure, trained coaches, sports science, health and nutrition, education, competitions, job opportunities and more. The 'Khelo India' and the 'Khelo Bharat Policy-2025' have been the most important steps towards sports development in India. As a country, the current policy sees sports as a tool for nation-building, social development, economic development, and, as such, healthy people. So, India needs to move beyond the term 'sports for

some' and move towards 'sports for all and excellence for the best athletes.' If the government, schools, universities, sports federations, private sectors, local communities and athletes all come together to build a healthy, inclusive and world-class sports ecosystem in India then this would not only enhance the international medal tally but would also lead to a healthy, disciplined, skilled and self-reliant generation of young people.

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