



**KAMARAJ IAS ACADEMY**  
Only IAS Academy by Grandson of "Perunthalaivar Kamarajar"

# India's Sporting Transformation Through Policy Reforms, Global Achievements and Grassroots Development

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## Recent Developments:

- India's sports ecosystem is undergoing a significant transformation through **policy reforms, infrastructure expansion, grassroots talent development and increased investment** aimed at making sports a sustainable career option.
- The **Commonwealth Games 2026** is being held in Glasgow, Scotland, from **23 July to 2 August 2026**, with participation from athletes representing **74 countries and territories** across **10 sports**, including six fully integrated **Para Sports** disciplines.
- India has participated with a contingent of **124 athletes**, comprising **78 men and 46 women**, reflecting the increasing participation of Indian athletes in global sporting competitions.
- Recent policy measures such as **Khelo Bharat Niti 2025**, sports governance reforms and increased focus on sports manufacturing highlight India's objective of developing a strong sporting ecosystem and supporting its ambition to host the **Olympic Games 2036**.

## Evolution of Sports in India:

### *Ancient and Medieval Sporting Traditions:*

- India has a rich sporting heritage, with references to **archery, wrestling (Malla-Yuddha), horse riding, swimming, hunting and chess (Chaturanga)** found in ancient texts such as the **Mahabharata, Ramayana, Manasollasa and Mallapurana**.
- During the medieval period, Mughal rulers promoted sports such as **Chaugan (Polo), chess, Chaupar and hunting**, while wrestling continued as a popular traditional sport.

### *Colonial Influence and Sports Nationalism:*

- The British introduced modern organised sports such as **cricket, football, tennis and golf**, which contributed to the institutional development of sports in India.
- Sports also became a symbol of nationalism during the freedom movement, with **Mohun Bagan's historic football victory against a British regiment** representing Indian confidence against colonial authority.

### *Post-Independence Sporting Growth:*

- After Independence, India achieved important milestones such as winning the **Olympic hockey gold medal in 1948**, hosting the first **Asian Games in 1951** and witnessing increased participation of women athletes in international competitions.

## India's Rise on the Global Sporting Stage:

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### *Olympic Games:*

- India's Olympic performance has shown considerable improvement between **2016 and 2024** due to better athlete preparation, institutional support and targeted training programmes.
- India improved its medal tally from **2 medals at Rio 2016** to **7 medals at Tokyo 2020** and secured **6 medals at Paris 2024**.
- **Neeraj Chopra** became India's first Olympic athletics gold medallist after winning the javelin throw event at **Tokyo 2020**.
- **Mirabai Chanu** has emerged as one of India's most consistent Olympic performers through her achievements in weightlifting.

### *Paralympic Games:*

- India's Paralympic performance has witnessed exceptional growth, with the medal tally increasing from **4 medals at Rio 2016** to **19 medals at Tokyo 2020**.
- The **Paris 2024 Paralympic Games** marked India's best-ever campaign with **29 medals**, demonstrating the growth of para-sports in the country.
- Athletes such as **Avani Lekhara, Sumit Antil and Pramod Bhagat** have played a significant role in strengthening India's position in Paralympic sports.
- Initiatives such as **Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS)** and **Khelo India Para Games** have improved financial, technical and training support for para-athletes.

### *Asian Games and Commonwealth Games:*

- India has consistently improved its Asian Games performance through larger contingents and stronger medal-winning performances.
- India increased its Asian Games medal tally from **57 medals at Incheon 2014** to **69 medals at Jakarta 2018**.
- India has remained one of the strongest performers at the **Commonwealth Games**, winning **64 medals at Glasgow 2014**, **66 medals at Gold Coast 2018** and **61 medals at Birmingham 2022**.
- Sports such as **wrestling, weightlifting, table tennis, badminton and athletics** have consistently contributed to India's international success.

### Importance of a Strong Sports Ecosystem:

#### *Social, Economic and Strategic Significance:*

- Sports provide a constructive platform for India's large young population by promoting **mental well-being, leadership qualities, discipline and teamwork**.
- The sports sector acts as an economic driver by generating employment opportunities in **event management, sports technology, physiotherapy, sports medicine, manufacturing and performance analytics**.
- International sporting success enhances India's **soft power** by strengthening national pride and improving its global diplomatic presence.
- Promotion of grassroots sports participation can help reduce **Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs)** and contribute towards creating a healthier workforce.

#### *Constitutional Framework of Sports:*

- Sports is a **State Subject** under the Constitution of India, and the primary responsibility for promotion and development of sports lies with respective **State and Union Territory Governments**.
- The Union Government plays a role at national and international levels through its **residuary powers**, including fulfilling international obligations and supporting elite sporting programmes.

## Government Initiatives for Sports Development:

### *Khelo India Scheme:*

- The **Khelo India Scheme** was launched in **2017** to create a strong foundation for sports development through grassroots participation, talent identification and infrastructure improvement.
- The scheme integrated three earlier programmes:
- **Rajiv Gandhi Khel Abhiyan,**
- **Urban Sports Infrastructure Scheme,**
- **National Sports Talent Search Scheme.**

### *Target Olympic Podium Scheme:*

- The **Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS)** was launched in **September 2014** to improve India's performance at the **Olympic and Paralympic Games.**
- The scheme was strengthened in **April 2018** through a dedicated technical support team that provides comprehensive assistance to elite athletes.
- TOPS supports athletes through **foreign training, international competitions, coaching camps, specialised equipment and a monthly stipend of ₹50,000.**

### *Khelo India Rising Talent Identification Initiative:*

- The **Khelo India Rising Talent Identification (KIRTI)** initiative identifies and nurtures sporting talent among children aged between **9 and 18 years** through scientific talent identification methods.

### *Recent Policy Measures:*

- The **Union Budget 2026–27** announced a dedicated initiative for sports goods manufacturing with an allocation of **₹500 crore** to strengthen domestic sports production.
- The **National Sports Governance Act, 2025** aims to improve athlete welfare and transparency by requiring National Sports Bodies to adopt **Safe Sports Policy, Code of Ethics and internal grievance redressal mechanisms.**
- The **Khelo Bharat Niti, 2025** provides a long-term roadmap to transform sports into a mass movement and support India's vision of becoming a developed nation.

## Challenges in Indian Sports Ecosystem:

### *Infrastructure and Governance Issues:*

- India faces unequal access to quality sports infrastructure, as world-class facilities are concentrated mainly in metropolitan cities while rural and tier-2/tier-3 regions often lack standard training facilities and equipment.
- Some **National Sports Federations (NSFs)** face challenges related to transparency, litigation, professional management and delayed implementation of athlete support programmes.

### *Skill Development and Career Challenges:*

- India continues to face shortages of high-performance coaches, biomechanists, sports psychologists and nutrition experts, creating dependence on expensive foreign specialists.
- Non-cricket sports are still perceived by many families as financially uncertain career options despite improving sponsorship opportunities and professional leagues.

## Way Forward for Strengthening Indian Sports:

### *Institutional and Infrastructure Reforms:*

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- The **National Education Policy (NEP)** should integrate sports into the core academic curriculum to identify and nurture talent from an early age.
- National Sports Federations should adopt **independent athlete representation, transparent financial audits and professional management structures** to improve governance.
- Regional sports science centres should be developed in collaboration with medical institutions to train local physical trainers, physiotherapists and performance analysts.

#### ***Private Sector Participation and Sports Economy:***

- **Public-Private Partnerships (PPP)** should be encouraged to increase investment in sports infrastructure, athlete development and specialised training facilities.
- Greater private sector participation can provide sustainable financial support and reduce excessive dependence on government funding.

#### **Value Addition for UPSC:**

##### ***Prelims Facts:***

- **Sports** is included in the **State List** under the Constitution of India.
- The **Khelo India Scheme** was launched in **2017** to promote grassroots sports development.
- The **Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS)** supports elite athletes preparing for Olympic and Paralympic competitions.
- **National Sports Day** is observed on **29 August** every year to commemorate the birth anniversary of **Major Dhyan Chand**.

##### ***Mains Answer Enrichment:***

- **GS Paper II:** Sports governance, institutional reforms, transparency and welfare mechanisms.
- **GS Paper III:** Sports economy, youth development, employment generation, infrastructure development and public-private investment.
- India's sporting transformation requires a shift from medal-focused policies towards a comprehensive ecosystem based on **grassroots participation, scientific training, professional governance and sustainable investment**.

#### **Conclusion:**

- India's journey towards becoming a global sporting power depends on strengthening grassroots systems, improving sports science, ensuring transparent governance and creating an ecosystem where sporting excellence becomes a sustainable career pathway.