

INTERSECTION

The SCMC Chronicle Sports Magazine



EDITOR'S NOTE

News - as they say - never stops. One of the areas where this might hold doubly true is the world of sports. If you'd been expecting a lull in the aftermath of the frenzied action of the Tokyo Olympics, you couldn't have been more wrong. In the months ever since, we've seen sporting events play out with full vigour, even while overcoming the ever-changing challenges of the pandemic. The Men's T20 World Cup, the Indian Super League, the Women's Cricket World Cup, the Winter Olympics the Pro Kabaddi League - we saw all of them and much more. This magazine issue touches upon many of these events from a holistic perspective.

And the stories here are not just those about the performances and the heroics. We talk about the issues with sex-testing among athletes, the gender pay gap, the mental health struggles amidst the pandemic, and how sports are depicted in cinema. The magazine, thus, creates an intersectional narrative about the Indian sporting ecosystem. Hence, the name 'Intersection'.

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The Great Indian Cricketing Churn: Power Dynamic Shifts and Controversies

By Abhishek Anand

The richest board in world cricket has been in the news recently and it's for all the wrong reasons. It all started on 15 September 2021, when the former Indian captain across all formats, Virat Kohli, relinquished his T20I captaincy. The cricketer announced the same in an Instagram post and cited "immense workload" as the reason behind stepping down. Reports at the time claimed that several selectors were unhappy with Kohli and his team selection in the World Test Championship Final. Overall, his failure to lead India to victory in ICC tournaments reportedly raised questions about his leadership.

India's performance in the T20 World Cup was below average and the team losing a match to Pakistan for the first time in a World Cup created a flutter. Experts, including Shoaib Akhtar, claimed that this resulted from differences within the team. One camp supported Kohli, and the other Rohit Sharma, the Mumbai Indians captain.

Despite Kohli's interest in continuing as India's Test and ODI captain, the BCCI, on 8 December 2021, surprisingly announced the appointment of Rohit Sharma as the new ODI skipper. The selectors justified it by pointing out that having two captains for white ball cricket might be confusing.

In a press conference, the President of BCCI, Sourav Ganguly, said, "We (BCCI) had requested Virat not to step down as T20I captain." However, when India was leaving for their South Africa tour, Kohli, in an interview, said that he was not informed about the changes, in ODI captaincy defying Ganguly's claims. He further mentioned that the chief selector, Chetan Sharma, delivered the news right before ending the call after discussing the team for the tour. The statement from the former captain generated much criticism towards Ganguly and the BCCI, with fans asking the former to step down.



Rohit Sharma (L) and Virat Kohli (R) while stringing a solid partnership

Source: Instagram - @indiancricketteam

The Saha Saga

Not just that, the BCCI also recently found itself in a soup when the selectors announced the Sri Lanka series squad, with many senior players finding themselves dropped from the team, including Wriddhiman Saha. In an interview, he explained how the Indian coach, Rahul Dravid, told him not to expect his name in the squad. Saha said Dravid had mentioned that the board was looking for a new face and indicated that he should consider retirement. The Indian wicketkeeper further pointed out that Ganguly had texted him after his unbeaten 61 against New Zealand in Kanpur, saying, "As long as I am here, you would be in the team."

Saha's statement reinforced the belief among supporters that what Dada speaks and does are different.

With these developments over the last few months, miscommunication within the board and team seems evident. Ironically, the man known as the most fearless cricketer has regressed in his administrative role – lacking honesty and transparency.

Meanwhile, in an episode which generated further controversy recently, Saha - in February - posted a screenshot of a journalist allegedly threatening him, leading to the likes of Virender Sehwag and Harbhajan Singh expressing support for the 37-year-old wicketkeeper.



Wriddhiman Saha celebrating after scoring a half-century against New Zealand. Source: Instagram - @wriddhi

Has the IPL Auction Outlived its Utility ?

By Vijayhardik Josyula

A few weeks ago, the cricketing world watched with bated breath the mega IPL auction. The franchises bought players to build their team for the next three years. However, some of the franchises expressed their dissatisfaction with the auction.

Venky Mysore, CEO of the Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR), and Parth Jindal, co-owner of Delhi Capitals (DC), told ESPN Cricinfo that the big IPL auction has outlived its usefulness. Their grouse with the IPL auction is valid. Auctions conducted every three years do not allow franchisees to build teams. Constant chopping and changing of teams hamper the performance of the franchise. It hinders building a loyal fan base and brand value.

It is rare in the Indian Premier League (IPL) to find players who have played exclusively for a single franchise. Franchise legends are thus not a phenomenon. The Chennai Super Kings is an exception as a franchise. At an individual level, MS Dhoni and Suresh Raina from Chennai, and Virat Kohli for Bangalore are bonafide legends of their franchises.

Unlike the IPL, European football franchises have bonafide legends aplenty. People associate Steven Gerrard with Liverpool, Thierry Henry with Arsenal, and Wayne Rooney with Manchester United. It is a result of building a team where players are associated with a franchise for a considerable time.

Proposed Solution

Venky Mysore has proposed a solution - introducing a draft system or a transfer



Ishan Kishan was retained by Mumbai Indians for a whopping Rs 15.25 crores

Source: @ishankishan51

window. Another option is allowing the teams to take loans. All these are methods to help franchises build teams for the long haul.

At present, it is an idea presented by a few franchises. Neither the IPL governing council nor the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) has commented on it. The transfer window of the English Premier League (EPL) and the draft system of the National Football League (NFL) in US are models that can be adopted.

The EPL is looking to move to a draft system from the transfer window. But what suits IPL the best? In terms of popularity and the money spent, the IPL is closer to EPL. The reasons for a move away from the transfer window in EPL stem from a couple of issues. The popular teams have bigger purses and this puts the smaller teams at a disadvantage.

There is also chatter about foreign players being preferred over English players. The other issue to ponder upon is that the introduction of the draft would undermine youth academies.

What suits the IPL is still a matter of debate. The franchises, along with the BCCI, should decide the future course of action.

Along with the inability to maintain continuity, the IPL auction nullifies the efforts put in by the cricket academies of franchises to scout and nurture talent. The

franchises from Rajasthan, Chennai, Delhi, Kolkata have established academies abroad and home. They invest money hoping that the scouted talent would play for their franchise.

The recent auction validates the claims made by Venky Mysore and Parth Jindal. All franchises bid for the players they let go. There were some failures and a few successes. Delhi Capitals tried very hard to retain their Indian batting core. Chennai tried to get back Faf du Plessis. All in vain. Ishan Kishan was retained by Mumbai Indians for a whopping Rs 15.25 crores.

On the other hand, teams broke the bank to retain certain players. Chennai coughed up Rs 14 crores for Deepak Chahar. Mumbai spent Rs 15.25 crores for Ishan Kishan. Bangalore paid over Rs 10 crores to retain the uncapped Harshal Patel. It shows that the teams are striving for continuity. And maybe the auction needs a rethink!

Auctions conducted every 3 years do not allow franchisees to build teams. Constant chopping of teams hamper the performance of franchises.

With Five WC Titles, India's Dominance at U-19 Cricket Continues

By Rupashree Ravi

When it comes to the Under-19 Cricket World Cup, India is undoubtedly the most successful country, having won the trophy five times. This year, the Blues fared successfully yet again, defeating England in the ICC U-19 World Cup final at the Sir Vivian Richards Stadium in North Sound, Antigua. The team led by Yash Dhull defeated the English team in the final match by four wickets. This win was heart-warming, as the team went on to extend their record amid COVID-19-related setbacks.

In the first match of the tournament, India was pitted against South Africa, with the former winning by 45 runs as the young bowlers managed to beat the Proteas. It was definitely not an easy ride for the Indian team as six players, including captain Yash Dhull and vice-captain Shaik Rasheed, tested positive for COVID-19, before their second match against Ireland.

Despite the team struggling to pick a playing XI, several players stepped in with impactful performances. The result: India put on a score of 307/5 and won the match by 174 runs.

In the third match against Uganda, India scored its second highest total in the history of the U-19 World Cup, putting on 405/5, as they won the last group stage game by 326 runs. Stand-in captain Nishant Sindhu finished brilliantly in the absence of the captain, who recovered right



The Indian U-19 cricket team scripts history as they lay their hands on the trophy for the fifth time.

Source: Instagram @ICC

before the Super League knockout matches.

The quarter-final match was played against Bangladesh, where the team put up a strong performance. Dhull returned to the field, taking India to the semi-finals, as the team won by five wickets. During the semi-final match against Australia, the team got off to a shaky start, before Dhull and Rasheed partnered to pull off a rescue act. Australia eventually lost the match by 96 runs, making way for India to advance to the final where it would square off against England.

India's young pacers bowled first during the finals, putting England in a tough spot in the beginning. However, England recovered and later gave trouble to India. In a dramatic end, Dinesh Bana finished off in style with two consecutive sixes and took India to its fifth title.

Prior to this year's victory, India had won the title in 2000, 2008, 2012 and 2018. In 2000, the Mohammad Kaif-led team chased a target of 179 and won the final against host country Sri Lanka, with 56 balls to spare. After losing to Pakistan in 2006, India lifted its second trophy in 2008 under the leadership of Virat Kohli, winning against South Africa in the final by

12 runs. In 2012, India defeated host country and defending champions Australia by six wickets, lifting its third title after a disappointing run in 2010.

History repeated itself once again in 2018, when India bagged its fourth title by beating Australia by eight wickets. And finally, the 2022 final saw India claiming the trophy as theirs once again, this time with a hint of nostalgia for cricket fans as MS Dhoni had previously finished off with a six to seal the victory in the 2011 ICC World Cup final.



The Indian team celebrates their win at the Sir Vivian Richards Stadium in Antigua.

Source: BCCI

Overcoming the Odds: Indian Chess Prodigy Outclasses World Champion Carlsen



By Adarsh Tripathi

Praggnanandhaa, the chess prodigy Source: BBC India

When Rameshbabu Praggnanandhaa toppled the current world chess champion at the Airthings Masters, there was but one thing on his mind - sleep. At 3 am in Chennai, he had just sent shockwaves through the chess world by decimating Magnus Carlsen in 39 moves playing black, and after texting his coach and telling his father, he went to sleep.

There aren't many in the world who can claim to have done what Praggnanandhaa did that night of 20 February 2022. Only two Indians, Viswanathan Anand and Pentala Harikrishna, have managed to defeat the titan of the sport. Of the small list of people who can boast about beating Magnus Carlsen, Praggnanandhaa is the youngest.

Of course, this is nothing new to him. Praggs, as he is known, became an International Master at 10. He is the youngest chess player ever to achieve this title (breaking Sergey Karjakin's record by over a year). He became the second youngest Grandmaster in the world at the age of 12.

Speaking to Sportstar in April 2021, Magnus Carlsen said that for now, "...we can enjoy the fact that (Praggs) is playing so well at this age and I would say also fearlessly." That fearlessness was on full display back in April 2021,

when they played out an 80-move draw. Since then, he has had to adapt to playing chess at the highest level at ungodly hours, with the schedules of on-line tournaments often shaped that way.

Described by critics as an aggressive and stylish player, Praggnanandhaa is comfortable sacrificing important pieces and waiting out his opponents to get the win. A master of patience at this tender age, he is willing to wait till every possible tactic has been tried. In his thrilling draw with Carlsen in 2021, he declined a draw twice, and although the match eventually ended in a draw, critics and spectators said that Praggs' game reminded them of a young Magnus Carlsen.

It is worth noting that just before triumphing over Carlsen, he had also beaten Levon Aronian, the fourth highest-rated player. Upsetting two of the best on the same day, it is not difficult to see why many consider him the future of chess.

Praggnanandhaa did not fully realise the gravity of his win till the congratulatory messages began pouring in. Prime Minister Narendra Modi posted on Twitter, "We are all rejoicing on the success of the young genius R Praggnanandhaa. Proud of his accomplishment of winning against the noted champion Magnus Carlsen. I wish the talented Praggnanandhaa the very best for his

future endeavours." The God of Cricket, Sachin Tendulkar, also tweeted his congratulations; "What a wonderful feeling it must be for Praggnanandhaa. All of 16, and to have beaten the experienced & decorated Magnus Carlsen, and that too while playing black, is magical! Best wishes on a long & successful chess career ahead. You've made India proud!" For Praggnanandhaa, the journey has just begun. "The goal this year is to reach (the FIDE rating of) 2700," says his coach, Ramesh.

"What a wonderful feeling it must be for Praggnanandhaa. All of 16, and to have beaten the experienced & decorated Magnus Carlsen, and that too while playing black, is magical! Best wishes on a long & successful chess career ahead. You've made India proud!"
-Sachin Tendulkar

'Time to Put Mental and Physical Health at Same Level in Sports'



Psychological support, when integrated with other areas of training, becomes an essential part of a holistic athletic training program. Source: Freepik

By Prishita Das
Aarya Haresh Trivedi

Mental health carries a long-standing stigma in Indian society, especially when it comes to sports. Sportspersons are expected to have mental strength and endurance, and any infraction on their part is considered to be a personal failing. Take the example of Vinesh Phogat, who has spoken about the hypocrisy of Indian society for championing the mental health issues of international athletes like Simone Biles, while simultaneously turning a blind eye to the needs of Indian athletes. Despite this, sportspersons like Virat Kohli and Abhinav Bindra continue to speak up and shed light on this taboo topic.

Mahika Bibiyan, a national-level cricket player and Sports Coordinator at the Symbiosis Centre for Media and Communication said, "The pressure gets exponentially higher as the game progresses, especially when you aren't able to deliver in the best way possible, in accordance with your expectations and capabilities." Sportspersons face a unique set of challenges due to the nature of their jobs. In an increasingly competitive environment, they face scrutiny from both the public and the media. "Most sportspersons have a peak and a downfall. Even though you might be trying your best, some things like unconstructive criticism, disparaging opponents, bad moods, or even unsatisfactory practice sessions make

one's mental health become sporadic during the matches," Mahika added. The challenges that have come with the COVID-19 pandemic - the isolation, the cancellation of events, and the threat of illness - can make matters worse. India's Olympic gold medalist Neeraj Chopra highlighted during a media interaction how difficult it was to remain motivated when considering the stress caused by the pandemic. While society is gradually recognising mental health as a 'silent pandemic' in the times of COVID-19, sportspeople have been especially vulnerable.

An added problem is the common notion held by sportspersons that mental well-being equates to 'toughness.' For many, the term "psychology" conjures up images of mental illness or psychopathology. Many people - even athletes and coaches - still associate going to a psychologist with having a "problem," and this can be difficult to overcome.

This is where sports psychologists come in - they help athletes cope with the strains that the average person may not comprehend. Sharing his take on mental health in Indian sports, Sarthak Pawar, an exercise and sports psychologist with Reliance Foundation's Young Champs Academy, based in Navi Mumbai, said, "Historically, mental health has been the most ignored facet of professional sports all over the globe, especially due to the stigma associated with mental health and psychology. The current times, however, do hint at

change, with many top athletes going the extra mile to create awareness about various issues they have faced while performing."

Mahika, meanwhile, pointed out, "When it repetitively starts affecting your in-game performance and off-field mannerisms, mental health support becomes the best and the only resort to recover. It's time we start putting physical and mental health in sports at the same level, to get the best results, and progress both personally and professionally."

"Historically, mental health has been the most ignored facet of professional sports all over the globe, especially due to the stigma associated with mental health and psychology. The current times, however, do hint at change, with many top athletes going the extra mile to create awareness about various issues they have faced while performing."

Bio-bubbles, Fear of Positive Tests Upends Mental Well- Being of Sportspersons

By Nandita Singh Rattan

Over the last two years, there has been increasing talk about the 'silent pandemic' alongside COVID-19 that has affected the mental and emotional well-being of people around the world.

Many sportspersons around the world are feeling it too, not least because of the myriad of rules and regulations that exist at events to prevent the outbreak of cases.

Players have to go through RT-PCR tests before and during every event and game, with the fear of testing positive always looming over. And in case a player tests positive, they have to follow the COVID-19 protocol, including quarantine, that can potentially jeopardise their participation in the game. This not only impacts the emotional well-being of the players but may also have an effect on their performance in subsequent games.

Bio-bubbles have become a key part of the COVID-19 protocol for sporting events, and can have a significant effect on the well-being of athletes. Though we can now see 'normalcy' return with regard to spectators, remember that matches were being played at empty stadiums till very recently.

All this has also led to some athletes



Simone Biles's revelations during the Tokyo Olympics brought forth the increasing difficulties of battling emotional distress amid the pandemic.

Source: Instagram/Tokyo Olympics

pulling out of tournaments citing emotional distress as the reason.

Cases of mental health have been in the news for the past two years, amid the pandemic, with cricketers from Australia, West Indies, and England having gone on sabbaticals for better emotional health and well-being.

More recently, in 2021, Virat Kohli raised concerns over the state of mental health of many fellow cricketers due to bio-bubbles, and demanded that to be considered during the scheduling process of tours and tournaments.

In the same year, Veda Krishnamurthy, also an Indian cricketer, had voiced the need for mental health assistance as she recalled the trauma of losing two family members while seven of her family members fought COVID without any governmental or board assistance. "Mental strength is important. My oldest sister, Vatsala, had panic attacks before she passed away from COVID," the 28-year-old had said in an interview with The Hindu.

Outside India, tennis player Naomi Osaka spoke about her struggle with mental health in 2021, while Simone Biles's revelations during the Tokyo

Olympics 2020 also brought forth the increasing difficulties of battling emotional distress amid the ongoing pandemic.

Bio-bubbles have become a key part of the COVID-19 protocol for sporting events, and can have a significant effect on the well-being of athletes. Though we can now see 'normalcy' return with regard to spectators, remember that matches were being played at empty stadiums till very recently.

Indian Women's Hockey Team Builds On Momentum After Tokyo Triumph



After a bronze medal win against China at the Asia Cup, the Indian team is looking to continue their impressive form at the FIH Women's Pro League. Source: TheHockeyIndia/Twitter

By Sayanta Sengupta

6 August 2021 will always remain etched in the memories of countless Indian fans. It was the day when the Rani-Rampal led Indian women's hockey team were playing their bronze medal match at the Tokyo Olympics. Even though the team narrowly lost out on the medal after a close encounter with Great Britain, with the final scoreline reading 3-4, the unprecedented fourth place finish was a triumph as the team exceeded all expectations and punched above their weight. However, as the team's skipper Rani Rampal pointed out, the women's hockey team has to "build on the historic Tokyo campaign".

Several hockey pundits labelled the fairytale Tokyo campaign of the Indian women's team as a one-time affair and said that the reception of the Indian fans and the media would throw a spanner into the momentum of the team. The team knew they had a task at hand with consistency being important.

The first assignment for the 44-year-old head coach of the Indian women's team, Janneke Schopman, was the Women's Asian Champions Trophy.

However, the COVID-19 pandemic proved spoilsport and the team had to pull out of the tournament after one of its players tested positive.

The team then travelled to Oman to defend their 2017 Asian Cup victory without Rampal as she was undergoing rehabilitation for an old injury. With a young team at hand, Schopman had a mountain to climb.

India blew hot and cold in the initial stages of the tournament as they first steamrolled past Malaysia 9-0 in their tournament opener, followed by a 0-2 loss at the hands of Japan. Following another massive victory of 9-1 against Singapore, the Indian team qualified for the semi-finals. Much to the disappointment of everyone, the team failed to advance after a 2-3 loss to South Korea.

The team bagged a consolation victory in the 3rd-4th place match, triumphing over China 2-0. Forward Sharmila Devi and drag-flicker-cum-defender Gurjit Kaur netted the goals for India. Lack of practice in competitive matches after the Tokyo Olympics was one of the main reasons behind India's mediocre performance at the Asia Cup. However, Gurjit Kaur showcased her class with four scintillating goals in the tournament.

The next frontier was the Women's Pro League organized by the International Hockey Federation (FIH). India's performance in the initial stages has been convincing with wins against China and Spain, but it remains to be seen how it fares going ahead.

The Indian team has certainly ticked all the boxes in terms of having a smooth build-up of momentum post the triumph at Tokyo and will look to capitalise on all the opportunities at the FIH Pro League and other upcoming tournaments. With a team that exudes grit and fortitude, India has a strong chance of bagging a medal at the 2024 Paris Olympics.

The unprecedented 4th place finish at Tokyo 2020 was a triumph as the team exceeded all expectations.



Sania Mirza to Retire: Tracing Her Journey in Becoming the Face of Indian Tennis

In a country where cricket has dominated for years, Sania Mirza popularised tennis and inspired several Indians.

Source: Instagram/Sania Mirza

By Keerthana Unni

Sania Mirza, the former doubles world number 1 tennis player, announced on 19 January that this season would be her last.

Raised in Hyderabad, Mirza started playing the sport at the age of six with her father as her coach. In 2001, at the age of 14, Mirza debuted on the senior circuit in Chandigarh at an ITF tournament. It was at this match she was recognised for her talent. She won the match with a score of 6-0 and 6-1 against her opponent, Geeta Manohar, who was three years senior to her. By 2003, she decided to train and compete professionally.

Mirza first represented India globally as a 15-year-old at the 2002 Busan Asian Games. She, along with Leander Paes, won the bronze medal in the mixed doubles event. In 2003, she won three titles securing her status as one of India's most promising tennis players. She went on to win four gold medals in the same year at the Afro-Asian Games in Hyderabad. The same year also saw her lift the doubles title at Wimbledon Juniors alongside Alisa Kleybanova of Russia.

Mirza's performance in the 2005 Grand Slam season brought her international recognition, as she reached the third round in the Australian Open

women's singles category, the second round at Wimbledon, and the fourth round at the US Open. Following her performances, she was awarded the 'WTA Newcomer Of the Year'.

The 35-year-old reached her career high singles ranking of 27 in 2007.

Doubles Triumph

At the 2009 Australian Open, Mirza, along with her partner Mahesh Bhupathi, won the mixed doubles event.

She has won a total of six Grand Slam titles, three in the doubles category and three in the mixed doubles category. Due to a serious wrist injury, she backed out from playing singles in 2013 and focused on doubles instead. Mirza made history in 2015 after bagging the world No.1 spot in the doubles category.

After a break from 2017 to 2019 due to injuries and maternity leave, Mirza resumed playing as part of the Tokyo Olympics squad in 2020.

In January 2022, Mirza announced that it would be her last season, citing her injuries and her young son as the reason. The six-time Grand Slam winner said that the sport was taking a toll on her body and decided to retire to focus on her health.

In a country where cricket has dominated for years, Mirza popularised the game of tennis and inspired several Indians, especially women, to play the sport. Despite facing several issues, she maintained a positive attitude and performed exceptionally well. She has now become a household name that is synonymous with women's tennis in India.



Mirza representing India in International games and the first Indian to win the Fed Cup Heart Award. Source: Instagram/Sania Mirza



Closing the Wage Gap is the Only Way to Ensure the Survival of Women's Cricket ?

India's women's cricket team celebrates a win against New Zealand in the Women's One Day International match held in February. Source: Twitter - @M_Raj03

By Yukta Patwardhan

In May 2021, when the BCCI announced the revised pay categories in the annual contracts of the players, the gap between women's earnings as compared to that of their male counterparts came as a shock to many. While the highest-paid male cricketers earned around Rs 7 crore, the highest-paid women earned Rs 50 lakh. The lowest-paid male cricketers earned two times more than what highest-paid women cricketers earned.

This begs the question - what makes women's cricket so different from men's cricket that leads to such a stark disparity in the paychecks?

There are arguments such as, "women in the sport are not as skilled as men", or "women's cricket does not compare in terms of viewership". The former can be rejected on the grounds of being illogical. However, the latter alludes to a much larger problem.

The viewership and marketability of sports are an unnecessary burden on the players. A major chunk of revenue in the sport indeed comes from men's cricket. The problem arises when this is seen as an excuse for justifying the pay gap instead of an obstacle that has a solution.

There are some attainable solutions for this - one of the obstacles in their

achievement is a lack of enough effort from administrative bodies like the BCCI. For example, increasing the number of matches scheduled for the women's team will give more recognition to the female players' efforts.

Marketing the women's team more effectively, by utilising branding strategies, endorsements, etc, can go a long way in establishing the players as public icons whose journey the general public would be interested in following. Women's matches must be scheduled in such a way that they do not overlap with the men's matches.

Since men's cricket already has a considerable and immensely dedicated fan following, these viewers would not think twice about the choice between watching a men's match and a women's match. Thus, the women's matches can be scheduled more during optimum time slots wherein the chances of maximising viewership are the highest.

While these efforts would take time to bear fruit, they are essential for giving an impetus to women's cricket. Increasing visibility and viewership is an effective way to increase the revenue from women's cricket. The increased revenue, in turn, will lead to parity in wages for women and men.

Consequently, cricket will be looked at as a viable career, and an increase in participation from women can be expected.

Granted, this will take great efforts at the administrative level. However, it's time the passion put in by women's teams in cricket begins to pay off more.



India playing West Indies at the Women's World Cup Source: Twitter - @BCCIWomen

The Controversial Practice of Sex Verification in Athletics

By Yashvi Shah

Sex verification or 'gender testing' is a highly controversial practice in the world of sports. As The New York Times points out, it includes a series of tests that are conducted to identify athletes whose chromosomes, hormones, genitalia, reproductive organs, or secondary sex characteristics don't develop or align in a "typical" way.

Sex testing practices in sports, more specifically, women's sports have now existed for quite a few decades. The International Association of Athletics Federation (IAAF), now known as World Athletics, adopted a thorough, laboratory-based chromosome assessment in 1967, followed by comprehensive sex testing by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) in 1968. Although both World Athletics and the IOC ended mandatory sex verification in 1992 and 1999 respectively, women athletes are still subjected to medical evaluations based on what sports officials deem as "suspicious." This has especially led to scrutiny on non-white athletes, who might not fit the discriminatory 'eurocentric' standards of what a woman looks like.

In recent years, sex verification tests are conducted via hormone testing. In this method, the testosterone level of a female athlete is examined. If the test results ascertain that the level of testosterone is higher than the prescribed level, the athletes have to undergo medical treatment to regulate their testosterone levels or they are banned from competing in certain events. Along with the fact that it is highly unethical to administer drugs to someone who does not need them, this practice is harmful to the physical health of athletes.

Moreover, apart from the fact that there is not enough scientific basis for drawing a significant connection between high levels of testosterone and athletic performance, the practice of hormone testing is highly invasive. It violates fundamental rights to privacy and dignity. Sex-testing and hyperandrogenism policies promote a culture of surveillance in the field of athletics. Recently, just before the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, Indian athlete Seema Punia questioned her fellow discus athlete Kamalpreet Kaur's biology.



Discus thrower Kamalpreet Kaur Source: Twitter/Kamalpreet Kaur

Athletes are subjected to unprecedented scrutiny, harassment, and intimidation because of the invasive practice of hormone testing.

At the 2006 Asian Games, Indian athlete Santhi Soundarajan won the silver medal in the 800m category. However, she was dumped from the national contingent and her medal was rescinded upon failing a sex verification test. After the failed test, Soundarajan attempted to take her own life.

"I was shattered by the failed test. The Athletics Federation of India did not support me, did not fight my cause. I was hoping they would. I was depressed. I felt like I had lost everything. It still hurts. I loved the sport so much. My dream broken, I attempted suicide," Santhi told Reuters in 2009.

Over the years athletics federations like World Athletics and the Athletics Federation of India have been widely criticised by sports professionals and the general public alike for their rigidity and inability to es-

tablish a criterion that fairly divides athletes into different categories based on sex. The criticism has resulted in the suspension of certain policies on hyperandrogenism and other humiliating sex testing practices. However, it still remains a major issue in the field of athletics.

Athletes are subjected to unprecedented scrutiny, harassment, and intimidation because of the invasive practice of hormone testing.

Hyperandrogenism: Looking Back at the Case of Dutee Chand

By Shirin Pajnoo

Indian professional sprinter and national champion, Dutee Chand, has accomplished several milestones in athletics. However, she was embroiled in a controversy when her body was questioned over her talent. After being questioned over factors that lay outside her control, she was asked to take hormone-suppressing pills. While her fame, name and game have made the country proud, there was a time when she was away from the track for two years. She was asked to quit, but Chand sprinted her way back to become the first athlete to fight against the hyperandrogenism rule set by the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF).

In 2014, she was dropped from India's Commonwealth Games contingent after being rendered ineligible to compete as a female. This decision came from the 'hyperandrogenism policy' of the IAAF, which required female athletes to have their natural testosterone (male sex hormone) levels under a certain, permissible limit. The regulation implied that the difference in athletic performance between men and women is due to 'higher levels of androgenic hormones in males'. Dutee Chand couldn't pass the test and was asked to take medication to make changes in her body to compete. She decided to challenge the regulations and fought against the hormone ban.

Chand was 18-years-old when she appealed to the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS). She received support from Jiji Thomson, who was the Director-General of the Sports Authority of India (SAI) during that time. Jiji also contacted Sarbananda Sonowal, who served as the Minister for Sports and Youth Affairs in 2014 and said that he received full support from the government to bring Chand back on track.

"Did they ask Phelps to do something drastic about these advantages he was born with, or suggest medication which would have boosted his lactic levels?" Jiji mentioned in the appeal, as reported by The Print.

On 27 July 2015, the CAS ruling mentioned that the IAAF did not have any concrete evidence to

support the statement that Chand would have benefitted from having enhanced testosterone levels than others. It also said that they would deem the 'hyperandrogenism policy' null and void if IAAF did not provide enough evidence to support their claims that hyperandrogenic female athletes had an upper hand over their peers.

While men do not have to undergo any tests, despite the differences in their bodies' androgenic levels, women are asked to take medications and are subjected to unnecessary checks. "Every human body cannot be the same, can it?" said Dutee Chand, as reported by The Economic Times.

Following her return to the track after many years, the national athlete won two silver medals at the 2018 Asian Games. She became the first woman to have fought against IAAF's hyperandrogenism policy. In addition, she was also the first Indian athlete who publicly accepted her same-sex relationship in 2019, setting a precedent for many to follow.

However, in the meantime, the World Athletics (formerly IAAF) put out data to back their claims, saying athletes

did get an upper-hand in certain events. This was also accepted by the CAS, and the amended rules in 2018 banned hyperandrogenic female athletes from participating in the specified events.

While men do not have to undergo any tests, despite the differences in their bodies' androgenic levels, women are asked to take medications and are subjected to unnecessary checks.



Dutee Chand on the athletic training track at Kalinga Stadium. Source: Instagram/Dutee Chand

Sports Budget Allocation Increased by Over Rs 300 Cr



Indian Men's Hockey Team celebrate their bronze medal win at Tokyo 2020

Source - Hockey India/Instagram

By Atharva Agashe

In a country like India, where cricket is followed like a religion, the progress and success of other sports depend on a lot of factors such as funding, infrastructure, sponsorships and publicity of the games.

India had a successful run at the Tokyo Olympics 2020 that included a gold medal in athletics for the first time. The hockey teams also put up spirited performances, with the men's team winning a bronze and the women's team securing fourth place.

In the aftermath of the Olympics success, the sports Budget was given an allocation of Rs 3,062.60 crores in February 2022, an increase of Rs 305.58 crore over the revised allocation of the last financial year (Rs. 2757.02 crore).

The budget also stated that the funds might be further increased as per the needs of the athletes and the National Sports Federations.

This year's Budget is going to prove important for the sports culture in the country, as it would help build the

foundations for success.

Initiatives like Khelo India and National Youth Games are platforms for the nation to spot young talent and nurture them. Khelo India scheme has been allocated Rs 974 crore this time around from Rs 657.71 crore last year.

Keeping in mind the 2024 and 2028 Olympics, the Sports Ministry has

taken up the project to construct more than 1,000 Khelo India centres which would support more than 30,000 children in different sports. The Sports Ministry also aspires to see India in the top 10 medal tally listings by the 2028 Olympics.

With this year's Budget, Indians expect a boost to the sporting culture of the country along with support to athletes.



Odisha's CM Naveen Patnaik(hand raised) at the grand opening of Khelo India University Games. Source - Twitter Account of CMO Odisha

ISL 2021-22 Ends on a High With Spectators Allowed After 2 Years



Hyderabad FC with their maiden ISL title in Goa. Source: ISL Media Team

By Akshat Bhatnagar

The Indian Super League, also known as the ISL, is the top-tier men's football league in India, under the aegis of the All India Football Federation (AIFF). Founded in 2013, the championship has grown significantly in the past decade. In 2014, the first season of the competition started with only eight clubs and has now grown to house 11 clubs. A typical season of the league begins in November and continues until March of the following year.

A season is divided into two stages. The first is the league stage which is followed by the playoffs stage. During the league stage - similar to the format followed by the likes of the English Premier League and the Spanish La Liga - each club must play against every other club while gaining points as they win matches. After the league stage draws to a close, the club sitting at the top of the points table is awarded the League Winners Shield trophy. However, the competition doesn't end there, with the top four clubs having the maximum points getting through to the playoffs. During the play-offs stage, the four clubs must play against each other to choose the final

winner which is awarded the ISL trophy. The COVID-19 pandemic and the consequent lockdowns have affected sporting events worldwide. In India, as the government imposed restrictions on large gatherings, many popular sporting events such as the Indian Premier League, the Hockey India League, the Pro Kabaddi Tournament and the Premier Badminton League had to either conduct their matches in empty stadiums or had to cancel their matches altogether. The Indian Super League was no exception. The COVID-19 pandemic struck India in March of 2020, towards the end of ISL's 2019-20 season. The government enforced the lockdown regulations right before the season's final match that fans had been eagerly waiting for. The final game of the ISL's 2019-20 season became the first major sporting event in India to be held in an empty stadium. Since then, all ISL matches, including of the 2020-21 and the ongoing season, have been held without an audience.

As the current season was coming to an end with matches held under closed doors, there was not much hope for the fans that there would be a live audience until the next season. However, in the new guidelines announced in January

ahead of the final stage of the football league, there was some good news, with the government allowing 50% attendance for public gatherings. This enabled the ISL to allow spectators to its final for the first time in two years. In front of a crowd of 11,500, Hyderabad FC and Kerala Blasters played a nail-biting final, with the former triumphing 3-1 on penalties after a 1-1 draw.

ISL was founded in 2013 to popularise football in the country, and allowing spectators once again would surely help the sport some of its lost sheen during the pandemic.

Hyderabad FC won their maiden ISL trophy at the Fatorda Football Stadium in Goa in front of a crowd of 11,500.

After Disappointing Tokyo Outing, Indian Shooting Undergoes 'Post-Mortem'

By Hannah Sarasu John

The National Rifle Association of India (NRAI) has been seeing a major revamp in its organisation through a review of its coaches, shooters, and support staff in the aftermath of the poor performance demonstrated during the 2020 Tokyo Olympics. The evaluation was regarded as a priority considering the second successive poor performance of the 15-member Indian contingent at the Asaka Shooting Ranges despite their immense talents in the rifle, pistol, and shotgun disciplines.



Anjum Moudgil finished 15th in the Women's Rifle segment Source: (@OfficialNRAI)

Unlike the previous performance at the Olympics in Rio where the shooters admitted to being at fault, the Tokyo Olympics saw lapses in administrative duties by the NRAI, controversies, and the poor handling of coach and



The Indian shooting contingent had a poor showing at the Tokyo Olympics

Source: @OfficialNRAI

shooter conflict which lowered the group morale. One particular instance was the discord between one of the top shooters, Manu Bhakar, and her coach Jaspal Rana, which was said to have impacted her performance and the team in general. Owing to the performance at the Games, NRAI President Raninder Singh promised a 'post-mortem' of the organisational body and the performances to better prepare the players and address the issues faced by the contingent.

The review of the NRAI began in August 2021. It consisted of three parts, which included an external party that evaluated the national federation's performance. The examination was prioritised to prepare the team and the national contingent well before the 2022 season. However, before the external evaluation, NRAI also conducted an internal examination of the federation, carried out by its top office-bearers including President Raninder Singh, Secretary Rajiv Bhatia, and Secretary-General D.V. Seetharama Rao. Singh stated that he believed that the overhaul of coaching and support staff was required because of the lack of preparation that the shooters displayed at the Olympics.

The evaluation conducted by both

internal and external parties led to the drastic dissolution of contracts of all 24 coaches of the NRAI but did not see any overhaul of the positions at the top of the hierarchy. The organisation invited applications for foreign and national coaches, and performance managers for the squad of shooters in the pistol, rifle, and shotgun disciplines with a deadline of 30 January 2022. The advertisement for the newly-created position of High Performance Manager stated that the role would be to monitor training and create a development excellence programme for the national team. To maintain the quality of coaches, the appointments are subject to approval by the Sports Authority of India, which has stated that the requirements for coaches must include applicants below the age of 65, participation in the Commonwealth Games, the Olympics, or other World Championships, with prior coaching experience with established shooters in recognised global institutions.

Recently, in addition to the coaches being selected, NRAI also invited applications for support staff, including physiotherapists, physical trainers and other consultants, who would work with the coaches and assist both at the junior and senior levels ahead of the 2024 Paris Olympics.

The Wave of Online Betting in India-

Is it a Gamble Worth Taking ?



The Dream11 application has sparked the fantasy sports fandom in the country, especially during the IPL season.
Source: BCCI/IPL

By Somalika Chhabra

Across India, the questions around legalising and regulating the sports betting industry have always been a matter of contention. Illegal betting in India is an ongoing, huge profit-making business, and legalising it can allow the government to reap the profits. But is it a gamble worth taking?

It is evident from the push for legalising betting by several institutions that a sports betting industry can be a beneficial one to have. It can professionalise sports betting in terms of maximising its financial potential and providing hefty tax benefits for the government. Permitting audiences to bet will encourage a bigger sports viewership that can bring in more money for various stakeholders as well as prevent financial crimes.

10 Cric and Sportsbet.io, along with many lesser-known applications, are betting platforms that have been in the Indian market for a while now. But it is the Dream11 application that sparked the fantasy sports fandom in the country, especially during the Indian Premier League season.

The IPL is already one of the world's wealthiest sports leagues, with a market value of over \$6 billion in 2019.

Every year, cricket fans around the world participate in IPL online betting.

The impact of the government appointing a body to regulate sports betting in India would be a beneficial one to crystallise the industry. Experts believe that advertisements around sports will rise, setting a precedent for future investment in other sports.

What Are States Doing?

Currently, Assam, Sikkim, Nagaland, Odisha, Telangana, Karnataka, and Andhra Pradesh are the states that have banned the Dream11.

Karnataka, on the other hand, has outlawed all sorts of internet gaming, including betting, wagering, and gambling in any form. Dream11 will no longer be available in Karnataka as a result of the state's recent legislation regulating fantasy sports.

Andhra Pradesh did not disclose a specific rationale for its decision in 2020, but there were allegations that the pay-to-play platform for online games had been scrutinised as a result of the latest addition to the Games Act.

Dream 11 was included in this category, and users began to notice modifications in the app. In Tamil Nadu, the state has constantly changed its stance in terms of legislation governing internet gaming. Most recently, in 2021, the Gaming and Police Laws amendment in Tamil Nadu enacted a noteworthy regulation on online

gaming, after which the state is said to have permitted Dream11 to operate without any restrictions.

The future of sports betting in India seems unclear as of now, with certain states for and others against its legalisation. Regardless of what the states decide, the fad has caught on enough that it seems like one the people will take forward - either in the light or out of it.

It is evident from the push for legalising betting by several institutions that a sports betting industry can be a beneficial one to have. It can professionalise sports betting in terms of maximising its financial potential and providing hefty tax benefits for the government.

Arif Khan: Becoming the Face of Winter Sports in India

By Pranjal Nangare

From the snow-clad turfs of Gulmarg to the alps of China, Mohammad Arif Khan has come a long way. He was the sole representative for India at the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics. By finishing 45th in the men's giant slalom, he made a mark in a sport that has attracted few eyeballs in India.

Khan finished his first ski-run, recording a time of 1:22:35. He was at the 53rd spot in the first session. During his second run, the weather became turbulent. Despite the snow and winds, he completed his second run, clocking in at 1:24:89. His overall time placed him 37.89 seconds behind the race winner, the Swiss skier Marco Odermatt, placing him 45th in the tally.

"It's one of my dreams to be at the Winter Olympics, and this is my first time. It really means a lot," he had told the Olympics.com.

However, at the slalom event held days later at the Games, Khan could not finish, thereby concluding India's campaign in Beijing.

Aged 32, Arif Khan hails from the town of Gulmarg in Jammu and Kashmir. He took to skiing at the tender age of four and was already competing by ten. He was drawn to the sport very early because of his father, Yasin Khan, who runs a ski equipment shop in Gulmarg, according to reports. It was his father who began funding his journey



Arif Khan at the Beijing Winter Olympics 2022

Source: Instagram - @arifkhanskier

into the competitive world of skiing.

Khan has inspired many in India to look at skiing as a viable competitive sport. Winter sports in India still have a long way to go in terms of assistance from official sports associations, forcing athletes to spend money from their own pockets. Today, the Auli slopes in Uttarakhand are the only slopes in the country authorised for international events by the International Ski Federation (FIS).

There are other slopes in Gulmarg, Solang, Narkanda, Lahaul, and Pehlogaun awaiting due recognition. In conversation with News 18, Arif said, "The government needs to provide professional equipment and training to Indian athletes with proper financial support, then we will have the top-quality sportsmen and women in the country."

Skiing is, in essence, an expensive sport where the equipment costs can go up to 5 lakhs, and the training costs could add to the burden. To assist skiers, athletes require funding. "It's always difficult to raise funds for the sport in a country where it's not a priority among people," Khan pointed out.

However, the performance in Beijing has attracted attention. Union Minister for Youth Affairs and Sports, Kiren Rijju, has said that Gulmarg will be-

come an international destination for Winter Games in the future.

The Indian Army also felicitated Arif Khan for his performance in Baramulla on 26 February. "I feel so happy that the Indian Army organised this event. This event has a clear intention, and that is to support us and also inspire other athletes," Khan told ANI.

With his laudable performance, Arif has indeed become an inspiration for many and the most recent face of Winter Sports in India.

Khan has inspired many in India to look at skiing as a viable competitive sport. Winter sports in India still have a long way to go in terms of assistance from official sports associations, forcing athletes to spend money from their own pockets.



Pro Kabaddi League Season 8 finals winners, Dabang Delhi KC. Source: Twitter @DabangDelhiKC

After 2 Months of Frantic Action, Dabang Delhi Crowned Kabaddi Champions

By Mayura Ghate

The final match of the eighth season of the Pro Kabaddi League (PKL) was held on 25 February 2022, with Dabang Delhi KC coming out as triumphant in a scintillating final against Patna Pirates. By using skilled defence and raid techniques, Dabang Delhi won the final 37-36. Though Season 8 was supposed to take place in 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic led to its postponement to December 2021.

Not just the final, viewers witnessed some amazing performances throughout the tournament. This season also saw the introduction of several young players, who put up a creditable show. From raiders to defenders to all-round players, this season of the Pro Kabaddi League brought in a fair amount of energy and excitement to the audience.

The season began with a challenging opening match between two high-performing teams - the Bengaluru Bulls and U Mumba, with the latter winning 30-46. Various matches this season also ended with a tie between two teams. The top six teams which qualified for the playoffs this season included Dabang Delhi KC, Patna Pirates,

UP Yoddha, Gujarat Giants, Bengaluru Bulls and Puneri Paltan. Pawan Sehrawat of Bengaluru Bulls won the title of the best Raider of the season, while Mohammadreza Chiyaneh from Patna Pirates raked in the most tackle points.

In the finals, the performance of star raider Naveen Kumar, who secured 13 points, and all-rounder Vijay, who earned 14 points, for Dabang Delhi, helped the team win against the three-time champions - the Patna Pirates.

Though the eighth season started out with great enthusiasm, a few members of the league tested positive for COVID-19. Due to rising cases and the inability of teams to field players, matches during the second half of the league were rescheduled.

Pro Kabaddi League started in 2014 in India with eight teams participating. Since then, the league has created its own fanbase. Throughout the eight seasons, youngsters have been provided with an opportunity to showcase their talent and skills. The traditional game continues to create an adrenaline rush, and the tagline of 'Le Panga!' encapsulates the spirit of the game well.



Dabang Delhi all-rounder Vijay
(Source: Twitter @DabangDelhiKC)

Threats, Abuse and Violence: The Darker Side of Sports Fandom



Mohammed Shami and Virat Kohli

Source: Mohammed Shami / Instagram

By Sophia Navagaonkar

In October 2021, Pakistan recorded its first win against India at a World Cup. But after the T20 World Cup match ended, disappointed Indian fans hurled abuse online at the team's only Muslim player, Mohammed Shami. There were also reports of a rape threat against Virat Kohli's nine-month-old daughter in the aftermath of the loss.

Though the incidents set off some discourse on social media about violence in fandom, the news stories are not surprising. There have been numerous instances of violence and abuse by fans of all sports across all geographies over time.

In India specifically, there have been various incidents of violence. One of the more recognisable events was the India-Australia match of 1969. Fans set the stands on fire, and hurled chairs and bottles onto the ground after the umpire gave a decision against the Indian team.

A similar incident occurred in a match against West Indies in 2002. Indian fans got angry at West Indies's batting performance, and lit fires at

the stands, hurled bottles and ripped advertising billboards outside the stadium. Just a year later, fans hurled bombs and attacked a police vehicle over India's loss at the World Cup.

Some upset fans stormed MS Dhoni's house after a World Cup loss in 2007. They chanted 'Die, Dhoni, Die' and burnt his effigy.

However, what sets apart the two recent incidents of fan 'violence' that were cited at the outset, is that they took place in the virtual arena - that of social media.

Violence by sports fans is not novel, and is not unique to India. A study in the UK says that hooliganism in sport goes back centuries in the country. The claim is supported by horrific incidents of fan violence, where people have lost their lives. For instance, the Heysel Stadium Disaster saw 39 people dead and 600 injured.

The exact cause of the riot is disputed. The fans escaping the violence ran towards a concrete wall, crushing the people near it, leading to the collapse of the wall.

A study has also linked domestic abuse to football matches. The abuse took

place between partners regardless of whether their team won or lost.

Violence by fans has been covered extensively by the media. Both media and scientific research look at fan violence ranging from a "notable social problem" to a "moral panic". As a social problem, such incidents threaten the well-being of society. From a moral perspective, sensational treatment of such incidents by the media tends to amplify the problem of fan violence.

Though the incidents set off some discourse on social media about violence in fandom, the news stories are not surprising. There have been numerous instances of violence and abuse by fans of all sports across all geographies over time.

Sports in Films: Is it Anything Like Real Life?

By Shruti Menon and
Purnima Priyadarshini

A ball is dribbled, each thud echoing across the court, as the player makes their way to the basket. The audience leans forward in anticipation – are they going to make the shot or not? The same intensity and anticipation can be found both at a basketball game, and in the rows of a theatre while watching a sports film. Sports and film have so much in common, they're both entertainers that attract viewers and create fandoms. So, it makes sense that one of the most popular genres of film is the sports movie. But at the same time, there's something hypocritical about the sports film – the vigour and excitement of sports lie in not knowing the outcome. How is it that these formulaic sports films are still able to attract the kind of attention that live sports broadcasts do? How close do these films get to depicting the real sports experience?

To simplify, let's take the example of *Chak De! India* – probably India's quintessential sports film. Social media screamed that the women's hockey team at the 2020 Tokyo Olympics was no less than Kabir Khan's team from *Chak De! India*, showing how a fictional example can be influential enough to affect people's perceptions of the reality of sports. However, the glorious representations of sports in films often blind the world to appreciating the blood, sweat and tears that go into mastering the sport.



Mahavir Singh Phogat with his four daughters.

Source: Instagram - @geetaphogat

Chak De! India successfully highlighted the stereotypes surrounding women in sports coming from Indian households and how they are looked down upon in the game. The closest

team's World Cup winning campaign in 1983 and like *Chak de! India*, it does a good job covering individual stories and creating a sense of team spirit. It was a good example of representing sports in film with a reasonable degree of accuracy.

***Dangal* makes a film out of a relatively underrated sport in India – women's wrestling. The film has the best of both worlds; the emotions surrounding the game and social commentary on the participation of women in the game, along with the technicalities.**

And *Dangal* makes a film out of a relatively underrated sport in India – women's wrestling. The film has the best of both worlds: the emotions surrounding the game and social commentary on the participation of women in the game, along with the technicalities. But, truth be told, the film didn't create much awareness regarding the funding and incentive issues for wrestling in India. Indian wrestlers still struggle to win big matches to grab the attention of the government and media to secure better sponsorship and funding to keep playing the game.

All in all, sports film as a genre sometimes sacrifices on the technicality and the accuracy to heighten the drama, and cater to all kinds of audiences.

to the truth that the film got was by representing the players' struggles, and finding strength from something common – their love for hockey.

The film *83*, on the other hand, is a real-life account of the Indian cricket

However, by using the power of cinema, filmmakers can delve more deeply into the true situation of these sports, and ignite a change in the world of sports.

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