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Time to restructure our sports policy

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Abstract

Excellence in sports is closely linked to national pride. We should resolve to make the 21st century India's century. India should become a world power in economy, education, science and technology, arts and culture and global diplomacy. It also means that India should rank high among the top nations in the Human Development Index, and lowest in the Global Corruption Index. A prerequisite for any nation to perform well in international sports is for that nation to first make sports a mass activity. India must launch a national mission to provide opportunities and facilities for sports to its entire population. Unless the bottom of India's sports pyramid becomes broad and strong, it cannot send adequate number of sportspersons to higher levels of that pyramid who can compete successfully at international levels. In other words, expansion at the bottom is absolutely essential to achieve excellence at the top. This calls for creation of sports facilities on a massive scale. Our housing, habitat and urban planning policies must have an in-built and mandatory provision for creating open spaces, playgrounds and sports amenities for all.

Keywords: Sports performance, talent identification, talent selection, talent development

Introduction

As India is now eyeing for 2016 Olympics its past performance is though encouraging but not at all satisfying considering its huge population base, a good pool of talent facilitated by varied gene pool, culture, geographical conditions along with an extremely favourable demography. An effective participation is the percentage of population which actually has access to, and participates in sporting activity. So, despite India's giant population, its effective participation level is abysmally low. And sports are cruelly pyramidal, with very small percentage of participants winning through to the top. If our base is small, the peak will naturally be short. In terms of population size and medals won, there is no worse Olympic performer than India. It seems strange that a country of more than 1.2 billion people can only collect an average of less than one medal per Games. It would be untrue to say that India does not produce good sportsmen and women: in cricket, the country's passionate obsession, it has in Sachin Tendulkar one of the sport's greatest ever players. The Indian cricket team holds the world one-day title and was until recently the Number 1 Test team in the world. The Indian men's field hockey team won six consecutive Olympic Golds in the mid-20th century (field hockey accounts for more than half of India's historical total of 20 Olympic medals).

Our Performance in Sports

Our Past Glory Looking back at India's record in the Olympics, since 1928 when Indian competed in Hockey for the first time under the captaincy of Jaipal Singh, our country has won gold in Hockey eight times – in Amsterdam 1928, in Los Angeles 1932, in Berlin 1936, in London 1948, in Helsinki 1952, and, in Melbourne 1956 (these six Olympics at a stretch) and later again at Tokyo 1964 and Moscow 1980.

A nation of 1.2 billion people, accounting for one-sixth of the global population, winning only six medals and no gold in the London unlike the one gold Abhinav Bindra had won in Beijing is a highly disconcerting fact. This meant that, of the total 962 medals in London, India could win a mere 0.06 percent of them. Indeed, in all the Olympic Games held so far, India has won only 26 medals. Compare this to the fact that the United States (population: 31.5 million) won 104 medals; China (which is now only slightly ahead of India in terms of population) won 88

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medals; and even Britain (population: 62 million), bagged 65 medals, with 29 Golds, greatly improving its tally in Beijing Olympics (47 medals, 19 of them gold). Countries, much smaller than India that ranked much higher in the medals tally. South Korea, which lagged behind India in development until the 1960s, and has a population of only 50 million, won 28 medals, with 13 Golds. Even North Korea, the world's most isolated nation that is ruled by a dictatorial communist regime, won four Golds in its overall tally of six medals. Smaller countries like Cuba (population: 11.2 million) that is living in a different kind of isolation. Its performance in sports has always been very impressive.

Problems Faced By Indian Sports

The Planning Commission of India estimates that the country will emerge as the youngest country in the world by 2016 by becoming the home of approximately 510 million people of the age group of 15- 35 years. It will certainly be a challenge to the nation to provide sporting opportunities to this large youth population to achieve two objectives. One objective is to make the nation fit. The second objective is to produce champions. To achieve these purposes, a strong sports policy is required. All resources must be arranged to ensure the successful implementation of the sports policy, which is essential to make the country a sporting nation.

The Sports Authority of India (SAI), through its various schemes, such as National Sports Talent Contest (NSTC) Scheme, SAI Training Centre (STC) Scheme, National Coaching Scheme, etc. caters to the need of the country. India is one of most consistent countries of the world in terms of participating in the international events. Despite all these attempts, our country fails to achieve sustained success in the international arena of sports. The possible reason for this is the country's failure in identifying and nurturing the talents at the right age which is compounded due to the prevalence of following problems:

- Lack of infrastructural facilities
- Lack of maintenance of the existing infrastructural facilities
- Lack of career direction in sports
- Lack of educational support, which is an obstacle for an athlete in building a career after completing a career in sports
- Lack of transparency and accountability in the system of sports, which impact upon the career of the sportspersons
- Lack of coaching programs to produce qualified coaches to identify, nurture and produce sporting champions
- Lack of technological applications to improve motion, force, movement, muscle activities of a sportsperson for the preparation for an international event
- Lack of psychological analysis to drive the sportspersons towards achieving excellence
- Lack of application of sports medicine to improve fitness, to reduce injuries and to undertake recovery and rehabilitation.

What Needs To Be Done

Our national policy must prioritize provision of sports facilities in schools and colleges. Sporting talent in India cannot blossom unless our children and youth begin to participate. Our national policy must prioritize provision of sports facilities in schools and colleges. Sporting talent in India cannot blossom unless our children and youth begin to participate in sports in large numbers.

It is important to emphasize, again and again, those making

sports a mass activity is also a prerequisite for building a healthy nation. To build a culture of fitness and health as a national movement, there is nothing more effective, more low cost, and more widely accessible as Yoga.

This certainly needs a complete overhaul in professionalism, which will start with comprehensive planning and continue until a proper system of control is established. This will need "money" or "financial resources" that cannot be generated without converting the amateur sports system of India into a revenue-making model. In India, the Governing Bodies are still dominated by the political leaders and bureaucrats, who hardly devote any time to introducing a professional set-up. Even the management positions are occupied by local-level leaders, who are usually associated with the system to fulfill their political motives. They neither have the time nor the willingness to generate and allocate funds for the overall development of sports of India. It is the high time to change the registration of these bodies from a "society" to a "company," except Clause 25, and to force them to abide by all provisions of the Companies Act 2013 in order to become a commercial entity. A complete revamp in the structure would be the first step to initiate a change and the rest will follow.

We have to make it mandatory for all sports bodies to submit a Long-term Development Plan (LTDP) to a higher body, based on which they will receive grants. The LTDP must include a systematic infrastructure, developmental and marketing plan for the overall development of that discipline of sports. We should make an attempt to shift sports from the "State" list to the "Concurrent" list of the Constitution to ensure uniform sporting opportunity to the sportspersons throughout the country. We have to create sports culture and have to accept that champions cannot be produced on a sustained basis if a sports culture with a revenue system cannot be generated. The government has to play a pro-active role, but we all can play a role by encouraging at least one child to participate in sports by adopting a bottom-up approach which must include:

Talent Identification

The screening of children and adolescents using selected tests of physical, physiological and skill attributes in order to identify those with potential for success in a designated sport. Previous involvement in the sport is not a pre-requisite for identification.

Talent Selection

The screening of young athletes currently participating in a sport using experienced coaches and/or physical, physiological and skill tests in order to identify those most likely to succeed in that sport.

Talent Development

Following the talent identification and/or selection process the athlete must be provided with an adequate infrastructure to enable them to develop to their full potential. This includes the provision of appropriate coaching, training and competition programmes along with access to facilities, equipment and sports science/medicine support.

Conclusion

After so many years of implementing various schemes it seems that we have not yet harnessed our potential in the field of sports. It is high time we should switch over to new policies based on talent identification, talent selection and

talent development. Although the recent performances of our sportspersons have gone to higher levels but still that is not sufficient to satisfy our urge to be among top sporting nations. We certainly require an all-out effort from smaller to higher level with contribution of schools, government, parents and the civil society to encourage sports in India. It has now become necessary to remove the huge and costly asymmetry between cricket and other sports in mass consciousness and also in resource allocation. This requires a strong national level intervention in the policy for corporate sponsorships, advertising, allocation of TV time, etc. We are still in the developing phase. Young Indians are given opportunity but the facilities and opportunities are not enough; we still have to improve a lot. Things are definitely changing now and are changing for the better.

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