



# SPORTS LANDSCAPE & POLICY IN INDIA

---

*Daniel Flynn*

**Policy Analysis**

December, 2022

 **Swaniti** Initiative

---

# INTRODUCTION

With the second largest population in the world, India should have no shortage of world-class athletes. In fact, it could logically be argued that India likely does have more world-class athletes than any other country – if only they had the means and opportunity, as well as the national infrastructure, to train in a given sport from an early age. In reality, however, India has produced just 35 Olympic medals, 10 of which were gold. In the Commonwealth Games, India has seen greater success, bringing home 503 total medals, including 181 gold. While this is the 5th-highest medal count among all competing nations, the top four countries – England, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand – all have much smaller populations and the top three have won two or three times as many medals in total. Similarly, India has won the fourth-most medals overall in the Asian Games, but smaller nations like Japan and South Korea have significantly higher totals. The country has, of course, seen greater success in cricket. The men's national team is one of only three nations to have won the Cricket World Cup two or more times, has won three other major ICC tournaments, and was victorious in seven of 13 total Asia Cup competitions. The women's national team won the first six Asia Cup championships in a row before ending as runners-up in the seventh and most recent competition.

The wild popularity of cricket in India and the dedication that many of the country's top athletes have towards the sport may go some way towards explaining why there is such a vast difference in the quality of competition compared to athletics events and other sports at the Olympics, Commonwealth Games, and Asia Cup as well as Athletics World Championships. That said, more insight can be gained through a deeper look at various national and state policies that have shaped the sports landscape and history in India, especially as compared to other nations that have turned much smaller populations into much greater success on the international stage.

---

# SPORTS POLICIES IN INDIA

## State-by-state Disparities

In looking at the policies and programs that have shaped the international landscape of sports for India, it is also important to note that there are large disparities between states in terms of the number of athletes they produce who go on to compete on the world stage.

At the most recent summer Olympics in Tokyo, India sent a contingent of more than 120 athletes to compete. Haryana sent 25% of all of these athletes, twice as many as the next highest state, neighboring Punjab, which sent 15 athletes. Furthermore, 30% of all Indian Olympic medals have been won by athletes from Haryana; of the 19 total medals won by Indian athletes at the 2021 Olympics and Paralympics, Haryana accounted for nine of these, including the sole Olympic gold won by Neeraj Chopra. At all multi-sport international games over the last 15 years, Haryana has consistently brought home one-third of all medals won by Indian athletes. All of this begs the question of why Haryana in particular, along with Punjab, is such a sports powerhouse despite the two states having just under 5% of the total population. While some coaches and athletes claim that there is simply more "raw talent" in Haryana than in other states, this is a fairly dubious assertion that can't be placed in scientific fact. A more accurate answer lies, in short, in funding and the various ways it is employed.

## Incentivizing Athletic Success

At Rs 6 crore for an Olympic gold, Rs 4 crore for silver, and Rs 2.5 crore for bronze, the Haryana government's monetary incentives for Olympic hopefuls have consistently been the highest among all states.

---

They were, in fact, the highest in the nation until 2018, when a few other states began offering equivalent cash prizes. Haryana also awards Rs 50 lakh for a fourth-place finish, and Rs 15 lakh to any athlete qualifying for the Olympics. This is significantly higher than the awards from the national government – Rs 75 lakh for gold and Rs 1 lakh for qualifying – and those from other state governments. Most states' gold medal awards are around Rs 2-4 crore, but Atanu Das – world ranked no. 9 in archery and one of India's brightest medal hopes at the 2021 Olympics – would have received just Rs 25 lakh from his home state government in West Bengal.

According to Haryana's minister for Sports and Youth Affairs, Sandeep Singh, "Many of these sportspersons come from economically weaker backgrounds and cash prize acts as an assurance to focus on the sport while taking care of their family." The same could almost certainly be said for aspiring athletes around the country (as it is true for others the world over).

Additionally, because of Haryana's history as an Indian sports powerhouse, there is great local pride taken in the up-and-coming athletes in communities around the state. Many of the most promising athletes are given government jobs early on that provide a financial security that allows them to focus on developing in their sport. Haryana was also the first state to formalize a policy that would offer successful international athletes government jobs. This system has since been replicated in other states across the country, even as Haryana has changed its own policy to lower the level of offered positions, to the dismay of some athletes.

### ***Developing and Ensuring Usage of Athletic Infrastructure***

One aspect of the sporting ecosystem that often comes up in discussions around India's lack of success on the international sporting stage is infrastructure and training facilities. It is argued that fewer state of the art facilities or insufficient infrastructure such as playing fields, tracks and athletic surfaces, or gyms prevent proper training or are not easily accessible for prospective athletes.

---

However, other experts note that inadequate infrastructure has not prevented, for example, Kenyans dominating the distance running events or South American countries like Brazil and Uruguay from being football factories despite many players coming from low income areas and learning to play on the streets in slums. While this is factually true, there is a counter-argument to this in that distance running requires little to no infrastructure; proper gyms or rehab facilities would certainly help athletes develop but the sport requires nothing in and of itself. Likewise, many of the best South American footballers have spent years training and playing in Europe from a young age, and learning the game in close quarters at street level may even help develop their skills. For other sports that Indian athletes have found success in – hockey, wrestling, shooting, and athletic events like javelin – infrastructure and equipment are key. As such, it has been noted that states like Karnataka have relatively well-developed athletics infrastructure including multi-surface running tracks, and Haryana and Punjab have facilities for sports such as wrestling, boxing, shooting, and others. [source] The Sports Authority of India (SAI) provides funding for sports hostels and other equipment, and there is an ongoing push to continue funding development in this area from the Central Government.

The Khelo India program has become the centerpiece of sports policy over the last few budget cycles; its large umbrella encompasses funding for infrastructure development and upgrades, support for various levels of sports academies, and school sports programs and curriculum among other areas. One of the key parts of the program, which has garnered strong support from state governments, is the creation of Khelo India State Centres of Excellence (KISCES). These are athletic and sporting facilities that will be established in each state, with the individual facilities focused on one sport that the state has been particularly strong in historically.

---

By focusing on local success and tradition, establishing KISCEs has the potential to address an issue of infrastructure as well as what many experts see as the true hindrances to India's international sports progress: a lack of importance or recognition of local sporting cultures and a need to encourage sports and athletics among children and young people.

### **Promoting Local Sports Culture and Athletics among Young People**

Promoting local sports culture, athletics, and exercise among young people and in schools is one of the twelve pillars of Khelo India. The intention is to encourage the physical fitness of school children and ensure a conducive environment that can nurture those who are most interested in and excel at sports. Another aim is to encourage parents to support physical activity for children along with studying and education.

Along with the development of physical education and athletics in schools, investing in sports among local communities by focusing on local success should be beneficial to developing local and national sporting cultures. As an example, Sansarpar, Punjab was known as the birthplace of Indian hockey and the community has taken a lot of pride in this, helping to further develop the sport in the region. Some experts have suggested that, outside of cricket, there may not be an opportunity for an overarching national sports culture and identity, so a focus on local favorites and the development of culture and pride around that may be a better avenue toward overall improvement.

Lastly, placing a greater emphasis on sports as an educational tool and a way to develop important life skills in young people such as communication, teamwork, and self-confidence will have numerous benefits beyond nurturing future athletes and building a program of athletic success. Programs that use sports to bring youth together for broader educational activities around health, gender equality, community development have seen success in other countries and can be a positive way to work towards multiple goals at the same time.

---

## National Investments in Athletics

Overall, the budget for sports initiatives for 2022-23 increased by Rs 305.58 crore to a total of Rs 3062.6 crore (\$399m USD) from last year's budget. Much of that increase was towards Khelo India, which saw an increase of 316.29 crore to Rs 974 crore (\$126m USD); awards to notable sports persons also notably increased by Rs 112 crore to Rs 357 crore (\$46m USD). While other areas saw their allocations reduced including the National Sports Development Fund and the Sports Authority of India, it appears that some of their primary functions are now encompassed under the Khelo India initiative, and there may be opportunity for further streamlining of some of these areas.

Overall, this budget demonstrates a significant commitment to India's sporting future, and most of the initiatives seem to be focused in the right direction. A look at the way other countries approach their sports policies and performance provides greater context and insight, as seen in the next section.

# International Sports Policies

## United Kingdom

The UK government has been on a 25 year mission to improve its international sporting performance, taking a "no-compromise" approach that saw the country spend more on preparing its athletes for the Tokyo Olympics (\$480m USD) than India will spend on its sports budget for 2022-23 (\$399m USD). This effort, which takes funds from the money brought in by the National Lottery, has seen the UK finish third in total medals in 2012, second in 2016, and fourth in 2021 after winning just one medal at the 1996 Olympic Games. While this has been an undeniable success in terms of the medal count, it has also been rather controversial among athletes.

---

The number of medals is the sole aim of the program, so funding is strictly directed towards sporting events where UK athletes have the best chance of winning. For example, team sports, which require more resources and funding, are prioritized significantly less than individual sports. Athletes competing in niche or less popular sports have had to resort to paying their own way or raising money from friends and family, while those competing in the government's preferred sports receive state of the art equipment, training, healthcare, and so on.

This has been seen as a somewhat ruthless approach, with winning being the sole purpose, rather than developing sports ecosystems and helping athletes towards success across the board. Whether or not costly individual success in well-funded sporting events has done anything to encourage younger generations to pursue those events is another question, given the "elite" status they can take on as a result (rowing being one example), but this is the hope of government officials.

## China

China provides an interesting comparison to India as the only other country with a comparable population. The 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing has given China a reason to plan big for the future in sports. Media reports that the Sports Industry of China is set to grow and the Government is convinced to make sports into a 5 trillion yuan (\$773 billion) industry by 2025. This may lead to a major shift in creating employment opportunities and ground for investment. In China, the vast majority of the funds directed to sport are derived from the government budget and they run 3000 sports schools. However, despite having so many traditional sports such as dragon boat racing, cuju (the ancient football) and martial arts that have been rooted in China for more than a thousand years, the government does little to promote these in school or at community level.

---

## Japan

Japan is consistently among the top medal-earning countries, especially in winter sports at the Olympics and World Championships. It started with a sports budget of 12.2 billion yen in FY2002 which increased to 16.8 billion yen in FY2004. Japan was slowly improving in building image in the sports world. After Tokyo was declared to host the 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games ("Tokyo 2020") an increase to 28.9 billion yen and then a further increase to 32.3 billion yen in FY2016 made Japan more into sports than ever before. The budget showed a slight increase until FY2019 and reached 35 billion yen. In Japan not only the Government but also the people value sports and this is the reason behind promoting different games and traditional sports like 'judo' and 'kendo' in different clubs.

## Jamaica

Jamaica is a small island nation of just under three million people that has managed to become world-renowned in athletics and an iconic, consistent competitor in track events in particular. While this is in no small part due to one athlete, sprinting star Usain Bolt, the government's initiatives have been important as well.

Sports is viewed by the Government of Jamaica as a cross cutting vehicle that will contribute to achieving national development and a healthy society besides, as sports have a direct impact on the Gross National Product (GNP), therefore, an important tool for economic development. Recognizing the value of sport in creating opportunities, generating employment and wealth, and sustaining the value of intellectual property, the Government of Jamaica encourages educational institutions to develop and implement courses of study which support the sport industry and creates awareness through public education campaigns on international rules, regulations and opportunities. Also, they encourage sport scholarships, sport tourism, sponsorships etc. (file:///C:/Users/ASUS/Downloads/rolandberger\_the\_sixth\_national\_sports\_development\_plan\_2017\_2021.pdf)

---

A 'Sports for All' campaign was run by Jamaica Olympic Association with 2.6 million sponsorship to encourage Jamaican sports persons with a goal to win positions in 2024 Olympic games in Paris, France in which The Sports Development Foundation (SDF) will be providing funding for several infrastructure development projects during the 2021/22 fiscal year. According to the document SDF will provide several infrastructural support for sports. The National Sport Policy is fully aligned with the key goals of Vision 2030 Jamaica. The Policy is aligned with the four core goals of Vision 2030 and focuses on Sport for All, Sport for Peace and Unity, Sport for Economic Development and Sport and the Environment. The Policy promotes the integration of sport in the national economy with the creation of globally competitive products and services, and the enhanced earnings of our athletes and associated industries.

## Conclusions

Despite the drawbacks of the UK government's approach, India could do well to look at a similar model. Using Lotto India proceeds to fund development of sports could negate arguments that government funding could be better spent elsewhere and that the \$399m spent on sports would benefit more people in many other ways. A hardline focus on the sports or events where Indian athletes have the best chance of international success to the detriment of other niche sports may not be an ideal long-term solution, but it could boost success in a few sports in particular. International success leading to national celebrity can be a huge boost to the popularity of a sport and the sporting culture that surrounds it, prompting more people to pursue athletics.

The KISCES could be a successful compromise between funding too few sports while focusing only on medals, and being intentional and focused on driving success while improving local sports cultures. Ultimately the key will be striking the right balance between a ruthless dedication to winning and promoting sports, athletics, and healthy exercise cultures at all levels.

© Swaniti Initiative 2022

Swaniti is a decade-old organization working in the space of policy-making and public service delivery. Our projects have been focused on supporting the government administration in strategizing schemes implementation, providing research support to Hon'ble Members of Parliament, and developing data-technology tools. With flagship initiatives like Supporting Parliamentarians in Analysis and Research in Constituencies (SPARC) and Leadership and Engagement Associate in District (LEAD), Swaniti has supported Constituency Development and District Development Planning in various parts of the country.



Swaniti Initiative  
13/14, Sarvapriya Vihar, New Delhi, India

[www.swaniti.com](http://www.swaniti.com)