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REINVENTING SPORTS GOVERNANCE: IMPLICATIONS OF THE NATIONAL SPORTS GOVERNANCE ACT, 2025

ABSTRACT

The area of Sports Administration and governance was neglected for a long time in our country. In this article, we shall delve into the newly enacted National Sports Governance Act, 2025. This article will discuss whether the act marks a transformative step in sports governance. The study will critically examine the present framework of the National Sports Governance Act, 2025, along with an emphasis on the evolution of sports governance in our country. The unified legal regime of study shall be put forward, along with a comprehensive discussion on the concept of the National Sports Board. A detailed discussion shall be put forward about the historical evolution, its recent composition, along with the powers and functions that have been assigned under the newly enacted statute. The National Sports Governing bodies, which stand as the administrative units of the different sports organizations, and committees shall also be put forward. The paper further proceeds to explore the National Sports Tribunal, which is another landmark development, along with the Constitutional Significance of the Act. However, analysis can truly be complete after the inclusion of the views of the critics. Thus, the analysis will conclude with the views of critics, reforms, measures for athletes' welfare, global sporting standards, along with some possible ways to overcome the same.

KEYWORDS

Olympic Charter, Paralympic Charter, National Sports Governance Act, Administration,

Committee, National Sports Board, National Sports Tribunal, Athlete, Safe Sports Policy

INTRODUCTION

It was on 19th August, 2025, while I was stuck in the midst of my semester examinations, that a news pop-up on my phone screen at around 4:21 pm announced that President Droupadi Murmu had given her approval to the National Sports Governance Bill. To satisfy my curiosity, I visited the news portal to read more about it. The National Sports Governance Act of 2025 received the formal approval of the President on August 18, 2025. The Lok Sabha gave its assent to the National Sports Governance Bill on August 11, 2025, which Sports Minister Mansukh Mandviya introduced. The National Sports Governance Bill 2025 received the assent of the Rajya Sabha on 12th August, 2025, following a two-hour-long deliberation.¹

Sports, in general terms, refer to physical activities that contribute to physical fitness, enhance mental well-being, and, most importantly, develop positive competitive skills. It is deemed more

¹ The Hindu, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/national-sports-governance-bill-gets-president-droupadi-murmu-assent/article69950568.ece>, (last visited 5th September, 2025).

than just a recreational activity, as it creates a cohesive social force that binds the citizens of a nation to a robust sense of national pride. However, the administration of sports in our country has been unregulated for a long time, due to the absence of a proper governance structure.

The absence of a proper governance structure led to corruption, inefficiency, a lack of transparency, and reduced participation among sports persons. From a legal standpoint, the National Sports Governance Act will bring a sense of accountability, transparency, regulation, and adherence to constitutional values in the public domain.

FRAMEWORK OF THE NATIONAL SPORTS GOVERNANCE ACT, 2025

The National Sports Governance Act, 2025, is part of Act No. 25 of 2025² and comprises 38 Sections. The Act mentions at the very outset that it is devised for the development and promotion of sports persons. It is primarily formulated to balance ethical conduct and practices within the sports community. The framework of the act is based on contemporary international standards, such as the Olympic Charter and the Paralympic Charter, as well as the international sports movement, to promote best practices on a global level. This Act is framed not only to meet international standards but also to resolve sports-related disputes in a uniform and effective manner. All matters related to sports governance, administration, and any disputes connected thereto shall fall under the ambit of this act.

The Preliminary portion, that is Chapter I of the Act, mainly expands between Section 1³ and Section 2(a) to (zb)⁴, defining different concepts such as the Athletes Committee, Board, International Olympic Committee, International Paralympic Committee, International Sports

Body, National Sports Federation, Regional Sports Federation, and many more. The Act further proceeds to include National Sports Bodies, the National Sports Board, the governance of National Sports Organizations, the code of ethics, safe sports policy, grievance redressal mechanisms, privileges, and duties of recognized sports organizations under Chapters II to VII of the Act. Furthermore, we can observe that Chapter VIII of the Act addresses the National Sports Election Panel, while Chapter IX pertains to the National Sports Tribunal. Thus, the basic framework of the Act has been elaborately discussed.

EVOLUTION OF SPORTS GOVERNANCE IN INDIA

The matter of Sports Governance in India after Independence was under the purview of private bodies, including the Indian Olympic Association (IOA), the National Sports Federations (NSFs), and other such associations. These associations worked under the statutory framework of the Societies Registration Act, 1860². These associations utilized public funds for their operations, but were still hindered by an inefficient, corrupt, and opaque administrative structure. The policy of

² The National Sports Governance Act, 2025, No. 25, Acts of Parliament, 2025 (India). ³ The National Sports Governance Act, 2025, § 1, No. 25, Acts of Parliament, 2025 (India). ⁴ The National Sports Governance Act, 2025, § 2(a)-(zb), No. 25, Acts of Parliament, 2025 (India). ⁵ The Societies Registration Act, 1860, No. 21, Acts of Parliament, 1860 (India).

1984 was the first national framework to aim for mass participation and excellence, but it lacked effective enforcement mechanisms.⁶ The 2001 policy introduced ideas of obligation, voluntary implementation, and gender inclusion.

The National Sports Development Code (2011) was considered an important code that ensured the growth and evolution of Sports Governance in India. It led to significant developments, including the establishment of age limits, transparency standards, and election rules, among other regulations, which were implemented. However, it was implemented in the form of executive orders, which lacked enforcement; there were no Statutory bodies to enforce them, resulting in numerous inconsistencies in their operation.

THE NATIONAL SPORTS BOARD

Emergence of the National Sports Board

The National Sports Board (NSB), as mentioned in the National Sports Governance Act, 2025, is a transformative step towards the development of sports governance in our country. The Act replaced the National Sports Development Code of India, 2011, which had guided the development of the National Sports Development Framework. The National Sports Development Code, 2011,

was primarily in the form of ad-hoc guidelines. These guidelines were not duly followed due to the absence of statutory enforcement authority, minimal accountability, unclear administration,

and embedded inefficient leadership. Moreover, they were a set of expeditiously drafted rules created by the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports.⁷

Composition of the National Sports Board

The National Sports Board (NSB) can be formed by the Union Government through a notification, as enshrined in Section 5 of the Act.⁸ The National Sports Board shall consist of a Chairperson, who is the presiding officer, and other additional members as may be required. The Union Government appoints the Chairperson and other members from among persons of distinguished capacity, integrity, and standing in the arena of sports. Individuals with practical experience in the fields of sports governance, sports law, or related areas will be given preference. A selection committee will be formed, consisting of persons with extensive experience in public and sports administration, as well as national sports awardees, as may be prescribed.

⁶ LUKMAAN IAS, <https://share.google/w2RkkgZY0GEMYXp3u>, (last visited 5th September, 2025).

⁷ Janay Jain, *National Sports Governance Act will ensure sports bodies do not function as fiefdoms*, THE INDIAN EXPRESS, (September 04, 2025, 7:14 AM), <https://share.google/cP1iuw0vasl2kMuqZ>.

⁸ The National Sports Governance Act, 2025, § 5, No. 25, Acts of Parliament, 2025 (India). The salaries and other general terms and conditions of the office of the Chairperson and the other members, including the matter of removal, shall be decided as prescribed by the National Sports Governance Act, 2025. The main office of the National Sports Board shall be established in the domestic territorial limits of Delhi as provided in this Act. Further, the Board can extend its branch offices to such other areas as it may deem fit. It is a form of corporate body, having a common seal and working by means of perpetual succession.

Powers and Functions of the National Sports Board

The powers and functions of the National Sports Board have been enshrined under Section 6⁹ and Section 7¹⁰ Of the National Sports Governance Act, 2025. It also has the power to hold and dispose of property, both movable and immovable property, which comes under its purview. The powers and functions of the National Sports Board have been enshrined as follows-

- **Formal identification of Sports Organization-** It can grant recognition of the different sports organizations and also facilitate the registration of the affiliate units. The National Sports Board is also conferred with the power to put off or eradicate the registration or acknowledgment of the institutions and the affiliate units.
- **Maintenance of records-** It will have to maintain an official record of all the National

Sports Bodies that have been recognized and registered, along with their affiliate units. The register of records shall be prepared in accordance with all the rules and regulations specified in this Act.

- **Direct Inquiries**- It can carry out inquiries for matters specified in Section 9¹¹ Of the Act.
- **Ad-hoc Administration** – The National Sports Body has the unique power to create an ad hoc administrative body, or can direct the different Sports Organizations or their affiliate units to do so as per the stipulation of Section 11¹² Of the Act.
- **Code of Ethics**- It can direct the Sports Bodies to a particular course of action, which would ease the task of formulation of an ethical code of conduct.
- **Safe Sports Policy**- This policy is considered one of the most important powers and functions of the National Sports Board. Policies will be framed to ensure the safety and protection of women, minor athletes, and other vulnerable groups of people in the sports arena.
- **Maintaining an Election Panel List**- A list shall be maintained containing a roster of members of the National Sports Election Panel, as per the provisions of Section 16¹³.
- **Collaboration with International Bodies**- The National Sports Board will work along with the other International Sports Organizations and bodies to develop sports in India. It

⁹ The National Sports Governance Act, 2025, § 6, No. 25, Acts of Parliament, 2025 (India).

¹⁰ The National Sports Governance Act, 2025, § 7, No. 25, Acts of Parliament, 2025 (India).

¹¹ The National Sports Governance Act, 2025, § 9, No. 25, Acts of Parliament, 2025 (India).

¹² The National Sports Governance Act, 2025, § 11, No. 25, Acts of Parliament, 2025 (India).

¹³ The National Sports Governance Act, 2025, § 16, No. 25, Acts of Parliament, 2025 (India). aims to strike at the grassroots level by ensuring the welfare of the athletes. The primary aim is to issue guidelines that are oriented towards connecting Indian Sports Bodies via an invisible chain of international standards, and to ensure best practices in the Olympics.

- **Protection of the Rights of Athletes**- The Board will work towards the preservation of the rights and ensuring the welfare of the athletes and their support staff.

In addition to the aforementioned powers and functions, the National Sports Board may also perform other functions and duties as provided under the law. The Central Government needs to consult with the members of the Board to appoint officers and employees as required. The appointment is designed to oversee the day-to-day functioning of the board. The officers who will be appointed need to work under the supervision and direction of the Chairperson or any other person delegated by the Chairperson. Thus, a well-structured model for Sports Bodies has been formulated by our Parliament. If it is practically applied in our society, then the sphere of Sports will have rampant development in the coming years.

NATIONAL SPORTS GOVERNING BODIES

The National Sports Governance Act refers in Chapter II to the genesis and role of National Sports Bodies. There will be a National Olympic Committee, National Paralympic Committee, and the National & Sports Federation for each recognized sport. Each of the mentioned national bodies shall have a due affiliation with international bodies, along with affiliate units in various districts and states within our country.

The Act further stipulates that the National Sports Governing Bodies must establish a General Body, an Executive Committee, an Ethics Committee, a Dispute Resolution Committee, and an Athletes' Committee. The General Body is mainly composed of an equal number of representatives from each of its affiliate units, keeping in consonance with International Charters and statutes, as may be applicable. While the Executive Committee shall consist of not more than 15 members, out of which two persons shall be from the sports fraternity having remarkable merits, a minimum of four members shall be women, two members shall be elected from the Sports Committee itself, and there shall be ex officio members. The other members shall be either nominated or elected, keeping it in line with international statutes and standards.

ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE OF THE SPORTS GOVERNING BODIES

The National Sports Body shall be supervised by the President, who shall also attend the formal discussions of the diverse Committees, as well as the General Body. Apart from that, there shall be a Secretary-General, who is responsible for carrying out the administrative responsibilities and implementing the decisions of the various Executive Committees and the General Body. Lastly, the Treasurer is responsible for maintaining accurate accounts of the National Sports Body, thereby acting as the custodian of its funds. Therefore, the various international charters can influence the governing bodies. If any conflict arises, the Central Government intervenes to resolve the issue.

There are certain eligibility criteria which has been provided for being a member of the Executive Committee, which include that a person must be a citizen of India, should not be a person of unsound mind, should be at least 25 years of age, and not more than 70 years of age. The most important criteria are that the person should comply with the International Statutes, Charters, and bye-laws. A person who is more than 70 years of age or is aged between 70 to 75 years of age may become a member of the committee, if permitted by International Rules, and will serve for a full-term basis.¹⁴

NATIONAL SPORTS TRIBUNAL

The National Sports Governance Act, 2025, also provides for the appointment of the National Sports Tribunal under the ambit of Chapter IX of the Act. The Central Government, after giving notification, can appoint a National Sports Tribunal, which consists of a chairperson and two other members. The framers of the act have the objective of quickly resolving disputes about

sports in a cost-efficient and effective manner. The presiding officer of the tribunal shall be an individual who has been or is a Judge of the Apex Court, or the Chief Justice of the High Court. The other members shall also be persons of eminence in public life, they are having wide experience in the sphere of Sports Administration, governance, and law.

The presiding officer and the other members will be officially chosen by the Union Government on acquiring endorsements from the Search-cum Selection Committee composed of the following members namely, the Chief Justice of India (CJI), or a Supreme Court judge nominated by the Chief Justice of India (CJI) will recommend the name of the Chairperson, while the Law Secretary and the Sports Secretary shall recommend the names of the other members of the tribunal. The Search-cum Selection Committee shall also determine the procedure for recommending the members as per its discretion.

The National Sports Tribunal has powers similar to a civil court; appeals against the decisions of the tribunal shall lie before the Supreme Court. The tribunal shall execute the following powers and functions they are summoning the attendance of any individual and inspecting them on oath, requiring the discovery and production of documents, obtaining evidence on affidavits, issuing commissions, reviewing the decisions of the commissions, dismissing a default application, and other matters as may be prescribed. However, in cases of International Disputes relating to Sports appeal shall lie before the Court for arbitration in Switzerland.¹⁵

CONSTITUTIONAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ACT

¹⁴ PRS LEGISLATIVE RESEARCH, <https://share.google/aK8NjUz9v4OOLV3cR>, (last visited 4th September, 2025).

¹⁵ PRS LEGISLATIVE RESEARCH, <https://share.google/aK8NjUz9v4OOLV3cR>, (last visited 4th September, 2025).

The National Sports Governance Act is not just a regulatory statute, but deep down it touches upon the salient fundamental rights along with the directive principles of state policy. The principle of the Right to Equality under Article 14¹⁶ is firmly established by introducing tenure limits, an age cap, accountability, statutory enforcement, and transparent and fair elections in sports bodies. Thus, it will help to ensure equality among the sports persons; there shall be no favoritism, and all shall be treated equally.

The act introduces various policies like the Safe Sports Policy, athlete welfare protection measures, and different grievance redressal mechanisms, which directly coincide with the Right to Life and Dignity enshrined under Article 21¹⁷ Of the Constitution. The women and the minor athletes are especially provided with constitutional safeguards by ensuring their safety and equality in the realm of sports. The Directive Principle of State Policy is also

activated by the inclusion of safe sporting spaces for children and youth, which comes under the purview of Article 39(f)¹⁸ of the Constitution. Similarly, the duty to improve public health, which is enshrined under Article 47¹⁹ is also directly related to Sports governance, which ultimately improves the health and the general well-being of individuals.

CRITICISM

Every coin has two faces, similar to the newly enacted National Sports Governance Act, 2025, which, despite having all the positive impacts, also faces several criticisms. The risk of government obstruction and decline of sports self-sufficiency is the main area of argument of the critics. Even the International Olympic Committee (IOC) expressed concern and urged the preservation of the autonomy of sports.²⁰ The matter of age limit relaxation, which relaxes the 70-year age cap, allows people between 70 and 75 years to participate if permitted by the International Rules. Thus, it underscores the importance of efficient leadership and leadership renewal.²¹

LANDMARK CASES

Zee Telefilms Ltd. v. Union of India (2005)²²

The apex court in this case held that the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI), despite performing national functions such as electing the national team, is not a state under Article

¹⁶ INDIA CONST. art. 14.

¹⁷ INDIA CONST. art. 21.

¹⁸ INDIA CONST. art. 39 (f).

¹⁹ INDIA CONST. art. 47.

²⁰ Ashutosh Sahoo, *Statutes of Olympic charter must be applied: IOC, raises concerns around "Autonomy" of Sports*, THE BRIDGE CHRONICLE, (August 31, 2025, 3:52 PM), <https://share.google/3D3LFe0eaB7vTSPli>.

²¹ Ujwal Jalali, *Bills on sports governance, doping cleared in Lok Sabha amid Opposition din*, THE TRIBUNE, (August 12, 2025, 7:49 AM), <https://share.google/2RCJd0ID4SwxkL3ib>. ²² Zee Telefilms Ltd. v. Union of India, (2005) 4 SCC 649.

¹²²³ of the Constitution. The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) works independently without state control, so it does not come under the purview of the definition of the State. However, it is not an autonomous body and is subject to judicial review under Article 226²⁴ when executing public duties. The decision of the apex court balances between sports autonomy and constitutional accountability.

Rahul Mehra v. Union of India (2014-2022)²⁵

The Delhi High Court directed sports organizations to strictly comply with the Sports Code, 2011, including transparency, term limits, and accountability. Non-compliant states were denied official recognition. Thus, all these rulings pushed the government towards stringent

regulations, which are more effective in laying the building blocks for the National Sports Governance Act, 2025.

THE WAY FORWARD

The National Sports Governance Act, 2025, is definitely a prominent development in the area of Sports. There is a need to maintain a sense of accountability so that autonomy does not prevail. The chances of excessive Centralization, as pointed out by critics, are definitely a matter of concern, which should be duly addressed. The government should engage in consultations with the Sports persons and organizations so as to ensure compliance. These engaging consultations, if brought into reality, will not only safeguard the national interest but will also preserve the global norms. The matter of representation of athletes should be strengthened, preparation of proper audit reports, and a clearly demarcated timeline is the need of the hour. Thus, if the act is harmonized with international statutes, consultation with the athletes is conducted, transparency, welfare of the athletes, and flexibility are ensured, it will emerge as the most credible statute in the entire global community of nations.

CONCLUSION

The National Sports Governance Act, 2025, provides a statutory framework for sports in India, but it should be well-balanced. The principles of transparency, accountability, and matters of athlete welfare, if infused with the Constitutional framework, will help to promote national and global exemplary practices. If all the aforesaid challenges are well tackled, then we can definitely conclude that the Act has the potential to make Sports Governance in India truly coordinated in nature. It would truly serve the collective interest of the nation if it promotes the welfare of the Sports Persons in the true sense of the term. Democratic governance, principles of equity, and an athlete-centric approach would definitely transform Sports Administration in India and increase the sense of national pride for all citizens.

²³ INDIA CONST. art. 12.

²⁴ INDIA CONST. art. 226.

²⁵ Rahul Mehra v. Union of India, W.P.(C) 8691/2020.

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