

What ails indian sports?

Sport & Tourism



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One of the greatest” degradations that has occurred in our country during the second half of the twentieth century, has been in the field of sports and games. The” only major performance of note has been the gold medal in hockey won at the Moscow Olympics in 1980 and the triumph at the 1983 & 2011 world cup in cricket, plus a few individual medals in Olympics and few success in Tennis. But these occasional triumphs do not augur well for the future of Indian sports. A nation of 1. 2 billion has not been able to produce a sportsperson or athlete of international standards even after 6 decades of independence.

In today’s new climate of peace, a nation’s achievements in sports are valued far above its arsenal or military might. We have, however, lagged behind in every field in spite of a large potential manpower. What does really ail Indian sports? With a few honourable exceptions like cricket, chess and tennis (where, even at the best of times, our performance has been erratic to say the least), our sportspersons and athletes like the ‘ Flying Sikh’ Milkha Singh and the ‘ Sprint Queen’ P. T.

Usha have failed to find a mention in the international medal tally, in spite of their best efforts and glowing eulogies at home. The chances of our doing well or making a mark in the international arena remain grim till date. At home also, the standard in regional, state-level and national-level games is fast deteriorating. The malady, indeed, is deep rooted. The first and the foremost cause is the poor state of our economy. We cannot spot, nourish and nurture talent even in the initial stages.

Whoever hits the spotlight is, by and large, a fluke. He or she has done it on one's own merit. For instance, our cricket hero Kapil Dev has come up' against all odds to make a mark in international cricket. Privatisation or sponsorship of the various games and sports is the only answer especially when we cannot spare enough funds for sporting activities in the country. Today, when about less than 25% of our population lives below thepovertyline, the nation cannot spare funds from other developmental activities to sponsor sports.

In such a scenario, privatisation of sports and games is the only remedy. It is done in the United States and the rest of the developed world. We can also do this if we wish sports and games to flourish in this country. The second cause of the fast-deteriorating standards in Indian sports is the politicisation of sports. Regionalism, linguism and favoritism are all visible, when any selection for a national or international event is made. This coupled with the lack of basic infrastructure, has hindered any progress in this direction.

While we have gone in for huge stadia like the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium in New Delhi, we have sadly neglected building small stadia and arenas in the rural and semi-urban centers, to encourage sporting talent in the initial stages. And such talent, whenever it comes to the fore, is grossly neglected at the time of selection for any event because they do not fit into any caste, region, language or group considerations of the selectors. This is a major shortcoming at the moment. Then, there is a lack ofprofessionalismin our sportspersons; they lack the competitive spirit and are prone to rest on their laurels.

Very few of our sportspersons keep up the strict regimen in respect of diet and training once they have achieved some name and fame. A medal here or a medal there is all they can achieve in lifetime before fading away into oblivion. The acme of their achievement is the Arjuna Award. How many chess grandmasters like Viswanathan Anand or cueists of international repute like Geet Sethi has the country produced? Our sportspersons, who have kept up the initial promise, can be counted on fingertips.

Parental emphasis on studies, at the expense of sports and game, is another cause for the desperate straits in which Indian sports and games find themselves today. A sportsperson is considered no good unless he or she is academically above par, if not brilliant. A good sportsperson, who does not fare well in studies, is always looked down upon as an idler or no-gooder. Added to it is the lack of sports consciousness in the Indian mind. Our duty is to create an awareness of sports and games in the minds of the people if things are to improve in times to come.

Otherwise we are likely to sink deeper into the morass with the passage of time. It is true our achievements in the sports have been negligible, but it is also true that there is no lack of talent in our country. If healthy atmosphere is created and selections properly made we can do a lot in this field. Simply to honour the outstanding sports persons at functions or staging international sports will not serve our purpose. We should extend every possible facility to our sportspersons and encourage them to take up sports and games more seriously.