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White Black Legal – The Law Journal is an open-access, peer-reviewed, and refereed legal journal established to provide a scholarly platform for the examination and discussion of contemporary legal issues. The journal is dedicated to encouraging rigorous legal research, critical analysis, and informed academic discourse across diverse fields of law.

The journal invites contributions from law students, researchers, academicians, legal practitioners, and policy scholars. By facilitating engagement between emerging scholars and experienced legal professionals, *White Black Legal* seeks to bridge theoretical legal research with practical, institutional, and societal perspectives.

In a rapidly evolving social, economic, and technological environment, the journal endeavours to examine the changing role of law and its impact on governance, justice systems, and society. *White Black Legal* remains committed to academic integrity, ethical research practices, and the dissemination of accessible legal scholarship to a global readership.

AIM & SCOPE

The aim of *White Black Legal – The Law Journal* is to promote excellence in legal research and to provide a credible academic forum for the analysis, discussion, and advancement of contemporary legal issues. The journal encourages original, analytical, and well-researched contributions that add substantive value to legal scholarship.

The journal publishes scholarly works examining doctrinal, theoretical, empirical, and interdisciplinary perspectives of law. Submissions are welcomed from academicians, legal professionals, researchers, scholars, and students who demonstrate intellectual rigour, analytical clarity, and relevance to current legal and policy developments.

The scope of the journal includes, but is not limited to:

- Constitutional and Administrative Law
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The journal accepts original research articles, case comments, legislative and policy analyses, book reviews, and interdisciplinary studies addressing legal issues at national and international levels. All submissions are subject to a rigorous double-blind peer-review process to ensure academic quality, originality, and relevance.

Through its publications, *White Black Legal – The Law Journal* seeks to foster critical legal thinking and contribute to the development of law as an instrument of justice, governance, and social progress, while expressly disclaiming responsibility for the application or misuse of published content.

REFORMING SPORTS GOVERNANCE IN INDIA: A CRITICAL LEGAL ANALYSIS

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INTRODUCTION

Sports governance in India has emerged as a significant area of legal and institutional concern due to persistent issues such as corruption, lack of transparency, and weak accountability mechanisms. Despite the growing importance of sports in national development and international representation, the governance structure remains fragmented and largely dependent on policy guidelines rather than a comprehensive statutory framework.

Sports bodies in India, including the Board of Control for Cricket in India and the Indian Olympic Association, operate as autonomous entities but perform functions of public importance. This dual nature raises complex legal questions regarding their accountability and regulatory control.

The study critically examines the legal framework, institutional challenges, and judicial interventions shaping sports governance in India, with the aim of identifying gaps and suggesting reforms.

LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

Unlike many developed jurisdictions, India does not have a single comprehensive law governing sports administration. The legal framework is derived from constitutional principles, policy guidelines such as the National Sports Development Code of India, and general statutes like the Societies Registration Act, 1860.

The Constitution indirectly influences sports governance through Articles 14 and 21, ensuring fairness and equality, while Article 12 determines whether sports bodies can be subjected to judicial review. However, ambiguity persists regarding their classification as “State,” leading to inconsistent application of legal standards.

The Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports plays a regulatory role by granting recognition and financial assistance to sports federations. Additionally, bodies such as the National Anti-Doping Agency ensure compliance with international standards set by the World Anti-Doping Agency.

Despite these mechanisms, enforcement remains weak due to the non-binding nature of policy guidelines and absence of a centralized statutory regulator.

KEY GOVERNANCE CHALLENGES

1. Lack of Transparency and Accountability

Sports federations often operate with limited financial disclosure and opaque decision-making processes. Selection procedures, fund allocation, and administrative decisions frequently lack clarity, leading to allegations of favoritism and bias. Weak accountability mechanisms allow irregularities to persist without effective consequences.

2. Political Interference and Conflict of Interest

The involvement of politically connected individuals in sports administration has resulted in undue influence over decision-making. Conflict of interest further complicates governance, particularly where individuals hold multiple roles, undermining fairness and institutional integrity.

3. Structural and Regulatory Deficiencies

The absence of a statutory framework results in inconsistent compliance with governance standards. The National Sports Development Code of India, though comprehensive, lacks enforceability, leading to partial or selective implementation by sports bodies.

4. Financial Mismanagement and Corruption

Irregularities in financial management, lack of audits, and misuse of funds have been recurring issues. These practices directly affect athlete welfare and infrastructure development, weakening the overall sports ecosystem.

ROLE OF JUDICIARY

The judiciary has played a transformative role in addressing governance failures and enforcing accountability in sports administration. In **BCCI v. Cricket Association of Bihar**, the Supreme Court recognized the public functions performed by the BCCI and initiated structural reforms through the Lodha Committee.

The **Lodha Committee reforms** introduced key governance principles, including:

- Tenure and age limits for office bearers
- Separation of administrative and commercial functions

- Inclusion of independent members
- Conflict of interest regulations

Similarly, in **Zee Telefilms Ltd. v. Union of India**, the Court held that BCCI is not “State” under Article 12 but acknowledged its public role, thereby allowing judicial scrutiny in appropriate cases.

These judgments demonstrate a shift from strict legal classification to a functional approach, ensuring that sports bodies remain accountable when performing public duties.

COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

A comparison with countries like the United Kingdom and Australia reveals that effective sports governance is supported by statutory frameworks and independent regulatory authorities. These systems ensure transparency through mandatory disclosures, enforce accountability through legal sanctions, and maintain integrity through independent oversight. In contrast, India’s reliance on policy-based regulation has resulted in weak enforcement and fragmented governance. This highlights the need to adopt international best practices and strengthen the legal framework.

FINDINGS

The analysis reveals several critical issues:

- Absence of a comprehensive sports law
- Excessive autonomy without accountability
- Weak enforcement mechanisms
- Persistent corruption and lack of transparency
- Over-reliance on judicial intervention for reforms

While judicial interventions have brought significant improvements, they cannot substitute a robust legislative framework.

SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Enactment of a Comprehensive Sports Law

A binding statutory framework should be introduced to regulate sports governance, ensuring uniform standards across all federations.

2. Establishment of an Independent Regulatory Authority

A centralized body with statutory powers should monitor compliance, enforce

regulations, and address governance failures.

3. Strengthening Transparency Mechanisms

Mandatory financial disclosures, audits, and transparent selection procedures must be enforced.

4. Addressing Conflict of Interest

Clear legal provisions should restrict multiple roles and ensure impartial decision-making.

5. Enhancing Athlete Representation

Athletes should be included in governance structures to ensure fair and inclusive decision-making.

6. Limiting Political Interference

Governance structures should prioritize professionalism over political influence.

7. Adoption of International Standards

Aligning with global best practices will improve credibility and efficiency in sports administration.

CONCLUSION

Sports governance in India is at a critical stage where the need for reform is both urgent and inevitable. The current system, characterized by policy-driven regulation and weak enforcement, has failed to ensure transparency, accountability, and efficiency.

While judicial intervention has played a crucial role in initiating reforms, sustainable improvement requires a strong legal framework supported by effective institutional mechanisms. Balancing autonomy with accountability is essential to protect the integrity of sports institutions and promote fair opportunities for athletes.

A comprehensive and enforceable governance structure, aligned with international standards, is the key to transforming sports administration in India and ensuring its long-term development.