

Sports in India

Introduction

The history of sports in India dates back to the Vedic era. Physical culture in ancient India was important and is mentioned in our great epics.

In the Ramayana and Mahabharata warriors were trained as archers and were also adept at physical contact sports like wrestling.

Today, sports are an important part of the Indian culture and contribute in many ways to the Indian economy. While India excels in many sports that originated outside the subcontinent, such as cricket and football, there are also sports that were invented in India that India frequently participates in. Even though the leading sport in the country remains cricket, the establishment of new leagues in football, hockey, kabaddi and other less popular sports has helped players to get global exposure.

International Sporting Events organised in India

In 1951 the very first Asian Games were organised in Delhi. Subsequently the Asian Games were held in New Delhi again in 1982. The Commonwealth Games were organised at Delhi in 2010. The Cricket World Cup was held in India in 1987 and 1996 (jointly with Pakistan and Sri Lanka) and in 2011 (jointly with Bangladesh and Sri Lanka). The FIFA Under-17 World Cup for men was held at Delhi in 2017.

Individual Sports

Athletics

The Athletics Federation of India is the apex body for running and managing athletics in India and affiliated to the IAAF, AAA and Indian Olympic Association. Indian athletics has a rich heritage and an enviable track record in more than 75 years of its existence. The sport has contributed the bulk of the medal haul for the Indian contingent at the Asian Games since 1951. Out of a total of 534 medals won by India, athletics leads the contribution with 219 medals, including 70 gold medals, 73 silver medals and 76 bronze medals respectively.

Born in Calcutta (now Kolkata), Norman Pritchard was an Anglo-Indian sportsman who won India her first medals: two silver medals in the 200m race and 200m hurdles events at the 1900 Paris Olympics. Since independence, India has produced a slew of international icons in track and field events, dominating the continent, and hitting the limelight in the Asian and Commonwealth Games.

Milkha Singh, titled the 'Flying Sikh' by the Pakistani dictator Ayub Khan, won an individual athletics gold medal at the 1958 Commonwealth Games at Cardiff. P.T. Usha almost won a bronze medal at the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics, where she lost by one hundredth of a second.

Some of the other Indian athletes who achieved fame include Sriram Singh, Shiny Abraham-Wilson, Jyotirmoyee Sikdar, Anju Bobby George and G.S. Randhawa.

Badminton

A game called Poona was invented in India in the late 19th century by British officers in the cantonment city of the same name (now called Pune). The name was subsequently changed to Badminton, after Badminton House in Gloucestershire in England.

The first Indian to make a mark globally in badminton was Prakash Padukone who was National Champion from 1971-1979. He also won the All England Singles Title in 1980; the year when he was also ranked World No. 1. Pullela Gopichand emulated him more than two decades later by winning the All England Championship in 2001.

Today some of the most well-known male Indian players are Srikanth Kadambi, Parupalli Kashyap, Prannoy Kumar, while women players such as Saina Nehwal and PV Sindhu have outclassed their male counterparts in terms of success as well as popularity. Saina is also the first Indian badminton player to have won an Olympic medal when she won the bronze medal at the 2012 Olympics. At the 2016 Summer Olympics, P.V. Sindhu became the first Indian woman to win a silver medal.

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| <i>Saina Nehwal</i> | <i>P.V. Sindhu</i> | <i>Prakash Padukone</i> |

Boxing

Boxing is a popular sport in India, with regular medal-holders at the Asian Games and Commonwealth Games. Mohammad Ali Qamar became the first Indian to win a gold medal at the 2002 Commonwealth Games in Manchester, UK.

At the 2008 Beijing Olympics, Vijender Singh won a bronze medal in the middleweight boxing category.

Mary Kom is a five-time World Amateur Boxing champion, and the only woman boxer to have won a medal in each one of the six world championships. She also became the first Indian woman boxer to get a Gold Medal at the Asian Games during the 2014 Asian Games at Incheon. More recently, she won gold at the Commonwealth Games held in Gold Coast, Australia.

Chess

Chess traces its origins back to India, with records showing that the game was played in India since ancient times when it was known as '*chaturanga*'. Even today chess is known as '*Shataranj*' in Hindustani. The governing body of Chess in India is All India Chess federation.

A modern-day legend of the game is Vishwanathan Anand, who has made significant contribution in making the game popular. He was the first Indian Grandmaster. He held the FIDE World Chess Championship from 2000 to 2002, thus becoming the first Asian to do so. He was the World Champion from 2007-2013. He won the World Rapid Chess Championship in 2003 and 2017.

In 2002, Koneru Humpy became the youngest woman ever to achieve the title of grandmaster, a record which was later broken. Parimarjan Negi (born 9 February 1993) is an Indian GM who achieved the grandmaster title at the age of 13 years, 4 months, and 20 days, which makes him the third youngest grandmaster in history.

Cricket

The one sport that every Indian knows, has an opinion about and has most likely even played at some point, cricket is a strong point, passion India's strength as well as passion. The Indian Premier League (IPL) and the Cricket World Cup are events which garner the highest TRPs in the country. It is a sport that unites people of all castes, creeds and colours.

Cricket was brought to the subcontinent by the British, including to Pakistan and Sri Lanka. In 1932, India joined Australia, England, South Africa, New Zealand and the West Indies as countries eligible to play international cricket. India have won 2 one-day international (ODI) World Cups so far, in 1983 and in 2011, under the captaincy of Kapil Dev and M.S.Dhoni respectively.



Wankhede stadium – the Mecca for every Indian cricket fan.

Cricket competitions in India are officially governed by the Board of Control for Cricket in India, or BCCI. National level competitions in cricket include the Ranji Trophy, the Duleep Trophy and the Vijay Hazare Trophy. IPL or the Indian Premier League, is a T20 (Twenty twenty, that is, twenty overs) event which, despite being more glamorous, does not hold the same position as the Ranji Trophy. The IPL, on the other hand, is the richest T20 league in the world. Players usually play in national level competitions to be selected for international matches to represent the country.



World Cup winners: 1983 and 2011

India holds various distinctions in cricket, as it is one of the most successful cricket playing nations, behind only Australia. The Indian cricket team has won every major ICC trophy at least once and have held the number 1 position in both tests and one day matches.

Col C.K.Nayudu was the first to captain India in a Test Match– doing so in the country’s inaugural match at Lord’s in 1932. The first to hit a test century (100 runs) was LalaAmarnath; the first to get a double century was Polly Umrigar; and the first to hit 300 was VirenderSehwag. Sunil Gavaskar was the first to score 10,000 test runs, breaking Australian Don Bradman’s record of 39 test centuries. Later Sachin Tendulkar made all batting records his own and retired with 100 international centuries. Kapil Dev was the first Indian to reach 300 test wickets, and retired with 434, then a world record. He was overtaken by Anil Kumble who finished with 619 test wickets; and also became only the second person to claim 10 wickets in a test innings. Rohit Sharma has scored 3 double hundreds in ODI matches and holds the record for the highest individual score (264 vs Sri Lanka) in such matches.

The Indian women’s team made its debut in the 1970s but are yet to win a World Cup although they have reached the finals of the ODI World Cup on two different occasions. Mitali Raj and JhulanGoswami are two of the most reputed members of the team.

India also has an Under-19 cricket team. Most players in the U-19 team get a chance to make it to the senior team if their performance is up to the mark. The Indian Under 19 men’s team is one of the most successful ones in recent years, having won the Under-19 ODI World Cup 4 different times, the most recent one being in 2018. Players like ViratKohli got their chance in the senior team on the basis of their performance in the U-19 team.

Cue Sports

Billiards

Billiards was brought to India by the British rulers and it soon gained popularity amongst Indians. With the increasing popularity, the need for a governing body was felt and soon the Billiards and Snookers Federation of India was established in 1926 in Calcutta (now Kolkata). The BFSI has remained the governing body till date.

India has always been considered as one of the powerhouses in the world of billiards. Wilson Jones, a professional billiards player from India, won the Amateur World championship twice, in 1958 and 1964, and was honoured with the Arjuna Award, Padma Shri and Dronacharya Award. Another notable player was Michael Ferreira, who was a three-time Amateur World Champion from India. He was honoured with the Arjuna Award, Padma Bhushan and Dronacharya Award.

In recent history, Geet Sethi dominated the sport through much of the 1990s and is a six-time winner of the professional-level and a three-time winner of the amateur World Championships, and holder of two world records, in English billiards.

Pankaj Advani is the current National Champion of India. He is one of the most successful billiards player in the history of India. He helped India win the first ever World Team Billiards Championship held in Glasgow in 2014. Advani remains the only person to have won all five national, regional, and world billiards tournaments in a single season. In April 2012, Advani won the Asian Billiards Championship in Goa, to become the first player to win 5 Asian Billiards Champion titles.

Snooker

Snooker was invented in India by British army officers stationed in Jabalpur. Sir Neville Chamberlain, devised the set of rules for the game while stationed in Ooty (short for Ootacamund or Udhagamandalam).

Currently, holders of various national and international championship titles, Pankaj Advani and Aditya Mehta dominate the sport in the country. In 2013, Mehta became the first Indian to reach the final of a ranking tournament, at the Indian Open. Pankaj Advani has been honoured with Padma Bhushan and Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna.

Football

Football was introduced to India during the colonial era. While India has never participated in any FIFA World Cup, it did qualify in 1950- but did not take part for a variety of reasons.

India was an Asian powerhouse in football in the 1950s and 1960s. During this golden era, India created history as the first Asian team to reach the semi-finals in an Olympic football tournament at the 1956 Melbourne Olympics where Neville D'Souza became the first Asian and Indian to score a hat-trick (record remains unbeaten) in an Olympic match.

India also finished as runners-up in the 1964 AFC Asian Cup, after which the standards of football began to drop in the country.

India is home to passionate fans and football is gradually growing in popularity in India. This is reflected in the rise of the Indian Football team in FIFA rankings.

Football in India officially started in 1937 with the formation of the All India Football Federation. Post-independence, India is said to have had its golden years in football, when they placed 4th in the Summer Olympics and 2nd place in the 1964 Asian Cup. The top domestic league in India, the I-League was started in 2007, while the Indian Super League commenced in 2013 to increase the popularity of football.

The Kolkata Derby, contested in the I-League, is one of the fiercest derbies in the world. It is contested between Mohun Bagan FC and East Bengal FC, and there have been clashes between players and protestors many times during the intense matches. MohunBaghan is said to represent the “natives”, while East Bengal represents people who had to immigrate to Kolkata after Partition. The other famous Kolkata based football team is Mohammedan Sporting.

India's oldest football tournament is the Durand Cup which was established in 1888.

The Indian Super League (ISL) has helped draw large crowds to football stadia and made football popular enough that India were selected as the hosts for the 2017 FIFA under-19 World Cup, where they also participated as a contesting team.

Sunil Chettri and BaichungBhutia are two of the most well-known football players in the country. Sunil Chettri is a part of an elite group of footballers to have scored more than 50 international goals.

Gymnastics

Gymnastics came of age in India, when at the 2010 Commonwealth Games, Ashish Kumar won the first-ever medal in gymnastics, by winning a bronze medal.

Alongside Ashish, the Commonwealth Games 2014 also saw the rise of female gymnasts from India. Gymnast DipaKarmakar also scored a bronze medal in gymnastics at the 2014 Commonwealth Games – Women's vault making her the first ever female Indian gymnast to do so. Her brilliant attempt of landing the Produnova in her second attempt at vault gave her average score of 14.366, making her one of the few gymnasts in the world to land Produnova on their feet successfully.

Hockey

India has achieved more success in hockey than any other sport at the Olympic Games. Field Hockey is a popular sport in India. Until the mid-1970s, India dominated field hockey internationally, winning eight Olympic gold medals and the Men's Hockey World Cup in 1975. Since then, barring a gold medal in the 1980 Olympics, India's performance in field hockey has slipped, with other hockey-playing nations improving their standards, catching up and surpassing India.

There is a variety of reasons for the decline of hockey standards, including changes in the rules of the game which favour faster movement and have reduced the importance of dribbling and ball-control, and the introduction of artificial turf. The popularity of field hockey has also considerably declined parallel to the decline of the Indian hockey team.

India has hosted two Hockey World Cups—one in 1982 at Mumbai, and another in Delhi in 2010.



Dhyan Chand was to Indian hockey what Don Bradman was to cricket.

Hockey legends include Major Dhyan Chand, Roop Singh, Lesley Claudius, Ajit Singh, Mohammad Shahid, Zafar Iqbal, Pargat Singh, Sardara Singh, Rani Rampal, Sandeep Singh, and Rupinder Pal Singh.

Kabaddi

Kabaddi traces its origin to Tamil Nadu. The game is known by different names across the country, including Chedugudu in Andhra Pradesh and Kauddi in Punjab. There are different styles of playing Kabaddi namely – *Gaminee, Punjabi, Sanjeevani* etc.

India is the most successful team in Kabaddi and has won the Kabaddi world cup title thrice (2004, 2007, 2016). Some of the famous Kabaddi players of India are MohitChillar, ManjeetChillar, Rahul Chaudhari, Anup Kumar and Rohit Kumar. Pro Kabaddi was introduced in 2014 to attract the crowd across the globe and increase popularity for the sport.



The advent of Pro Kabaddi League has rejuvenated interest in the game among the youth.

India has always dominated in kabaddi not only at the World Cup but the Asian Cup as well. India has won all the gold medals (from 1990 to 2014) in Asian games in both the categories (Men and Women). In the women's category, famous players include Mamta Pujari, Sakshi Kumar, AbhilashaMhatre, KishoriShinde.

Table Tennis

India has improved its position in world ranking in both men and women table tennis format. The Indian Men's table tennis team is at 13th position whereas the Women's team has also shown remarkable rise. In Men's singles CWG 2006, Sharath Kamal got the gold medal and Bronze in 2010 CWG. In Women's doubles, Mouma Das and PoulomiGhatak won the bronze medal in 2010 CWG. Indian Open, founded in 2007 is organised by the International table tennis federation.

For the Indian Open 2017, Sharath Kamal led the Indian Men's side along with Soumyajit Ghosh and the Indian women's side was hosted by ManikaBatra and Mouma Das. Table tennis has gained popularity in India and has made improvement in rankings.

Tennis

Tennis is another sport in which India has performed well in the international arena.

The history of tennis in India goes back a long way. In the 1880s, the Britishers introduced the game of tennis in India during the colonial rule and soon it started gaining momentum. B.K.Nehru in 1905 and SardarNihal Singh in 1908 were later joined by M.Saleem, Fayzee brothers and Jagat Mohan Lal who made it to last 16 stages at the Wimbledon. Ghaus Mohammad was the first Indian to reach the quarterfinals at Wimbledon in 1939 where he lost to American champion Bobby Riggs.

In the 1960s, the sport witnessed a golden era. In the Davis Cup, India repeatedly became the Zonal Champions. Ramanathan Krishnan, along with Premjit Lal, SP Misra, Jaidip and RK Khanna as the non-playing captain, steered India to the Cup finals in 1966 where they lost to Australia. In the 1970s, Vijay Amritraj emerged (part of a set of 3 tennis playing brothers) He

took India to the Davis Cup Finals for the second time in 1974- but India withdrew not wanting to play South Africa – who then practised apartheid. Ramesh Krishnan, the son of Ramanathan Krishnan, won the junior Wimbledon championship and junior French Open title in 1979 and was ranked number 1 junior in the world.

1990s onwards Leander Paes, Mahesh Bhupathi and Sania Mirza have brought laurels to the country, winning several Grand Slam Doubles tournaments. Leander Paes has represented the country in 7 consecutive Olympic Games: from 1992 to 2016. He won a bronze medal in the Men's Singles at the 1996 Atlanta Olympic Games.

Mahesh Bhupathi, with Rika Hiraki, was the first Indian to win a Grand Slam title (mixed doubles) in 1997. Sania Mirza with Alisa Kleybanova in 2003 won the Wimbledon title. Somdev Devvarman won the gold medal in singles category in 2010 Commonwealth games which were hosted in Delhi.

Weightlifting

Weightlifting holds a prominent place at the Olympic Games. It was among the first games to be included in the modern Olympics in 1896. In India, it is governed by the Indian Weightlifting Federation, headquartered in New Delhi.

The glorious history of India performance in the sport of weightlifting begins with Karnam Malleswari, who won a bronze medal in the 2000 Summer Olympics at Sydney. This win made her the first Indian woman to win an Olympic medal. She also won three bronze medals in the world championship.

In the 2014 Commonwealth Games in Glasgow, Sanjita Khumukcham Chanu won the gold medal while Mirabai Chanu took the silver in the women's event. In men's, Sukhen Dey and Sathish Sivalingam won gold in different categories, while Ganesh Mali won bronze.

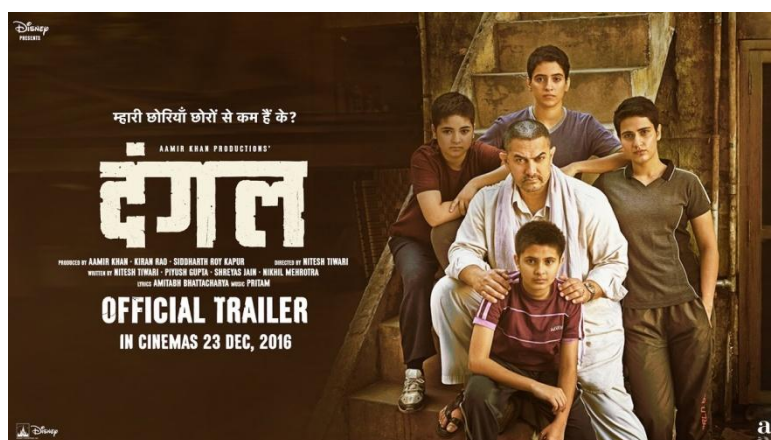
In the 2018 Commonwealth Games in Gold Coast, India bagged 5 gold, 2 silver and 2 bronze.

Wrestling

Wrestling, or Pehlwani, is a traditional sport of India. The people from Haryana and Punjab mostly constitute the wrestling mass. India is a very strong team in wrestling and has won many medals in wrestling at the international level. Wrestling has been played since the ages of Mahabharata and Ramayana.

Wrestlers such as GeetaPhogat, BabitaPhogat, Sushil Kumar, Dara Singh, Sakshi Malik and YogeshwarDutt have significantly contributed in wrestling. GeetaPhogat won the gold medal in 2010 Commonwealth games which were hosted in Delhi. Sakshi Malik is the first Indian female wrestler to win a medal in Olympics. Sushil Kumar in 2012 won a silver medal at London Olympics and bronze at 2008 Beijing Olympics. Dara Singh won the common wealth championship in 1959 and the World Wrestling Championship in 1968.

To promote wrestling in India, the Pro Wrestling League was established in 2015. Six teams participate in this league, NCR Punjab royals being the most recent champion. The other teams which participate in the tournament are: Delhi Sultans, Haryana Hammers, Mumbai Marathi, UP Dangal, Veer Marathas. Dangal, which starred Aamir Khan in the film, was an effort of Bollywood to make wrestling popular in every state and to allow girls to equally contribute in the sport.



A movie which broke stereotypes as well as numerous box office records.

Commonwealth Games 2018

When it comes to sports, there is perhaps nothing more engaging than cricket for Indians. However, with some of the recent achievements of Indian players, other sports are getting increasingly popular. Recently, at the 2018 Commonwealth Games, India finished

third in the medals tally behind powerhouses Australia and England. It was India's third most successful CWG of all time, with a 200-plus contingent delivering 66 medals and thus outdoing the 64 medals won at Glasgow four years ago but behind the 101 obtained from the Delhi CWG in 2010 and 69 from the 2002 Melbourne Games.

The following is a list of the number of medals won by India at CWG 2018:

| Sport | 1 Gold | 2 Silver | 3 Bronze |
|---------------|--------|----------|----------|
| Athletics | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Badminton | 2 | 3 | 1 |
| Basketball | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Boxing | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| Cycling | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Gymnastics | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Hockey | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Lawn bowls | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Parasports | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Shooting | 7 | 4 | 5 |
| Squash | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| Swimming | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Table tennis | 3 | 2 | 3 |
| Weightlifting | 5 | 2 | 2 |
| Wrestling | 5 | 3 | 4 |
| Total | 26 | 20 | 20 |