

Role of Public Sector Undertakings and Corporate Firms in Identifying and Grooming Sports Talent in India

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DOI: 10.26524/1532

ABSTRACT: Sports are a worldwide phenomenon today. In no period of the world history sports was so popular, organized and important as it is today. Considering the importance of sports competitions, one can say that it has become a social need of the present civilization, which must be met by the societies and the government. Although talent identification and development programmes have gained popularity in the recent decades, there remains a lack of consensus in relation to talent identification and there is no uniformly accepted theoretical framework to guide current practice. The success rates of talent identification and development programmes have rarely been assessed and the validity of the models applied remains highly debated. A conceptual framework that acknowledges both genetic and environmental influences and considers the dynamic and multidimensional nature of sport talent needs to be developed and set in action.

Keywords: Sports Talent; Talent Identification; Talent Grooming; Public Sector Undertakings; Corporate firms.

INTRODUCTION

The history of sports in India dates back to the Vedic era. There is a fascinating link between Greece and India, which stretches back to 975 B.C. It is more than likely that many of today's Olympic disciplines are sophisticated versions of the games of strength and speed that flourished in ancient India and Greece [1]. Chess, wrestling, polo, archery and hockey (possibly a fall-out from polo) are some of the games that have originated in India [2].

Festivals and local fairs are the natural venues of indigenous games and martial arts. In the post-independence era, the government has made special efforts to preserve and nurture the awesome cultural heritage, by setting up a number of new incentives, and by heightening media exposure at the national level, to propagate and popularize indigenous games [3].

Over the years after independence, the Government of India has launched several programmes to encourage sports in the country. However, we are yet to achieve a place of pride in international sports. We are lagging much behind even among the Asian countries [4]. This indicates that implementation of sports programmes in the country leaves for much space for progress.

International sporting success helps generate pride and a sense of national identity, and a “feel good factor”. It also boosts the profile of a sport and increases interest in participation. However, experience shows that such interest is rarely sustained as facilities are poor and clubs do not have the capacity to meet new demand [5-6-7]. If we are to build on our already strong performance in international sport, we must be more systematic in spotting and developing talented competitors. Apart from government agencies, Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs) and Corporate Firms should lead this work, in successful talent scouting and recognizing talent development plans which should have appropriate reach deep down towards the grassroots of sport [8]. In India though, there are not many PSUs and corporate firms directly or indirectly involved in the identification and grooming of sports talent but in the last two decades, this list has definitely multiplied certain folds [9]. A brief account of these agencies has been sequently presented below:

1. TATA SPORTS CLUB

The Tata group has been committed to development of sports and promoting sportspersons for over three-quarters of a century. Tata Sports Club (TSC) came into existence on July 1, 1937 with its endeavours directed at spotting and then developing potential by providing an early platform for those who deserve no less.

To formally train budding talent, the group runs three dedicated sports academies for football, archery and mountaineering, each supported by a network of feeder centres that help in identifying emerging talent across the country.

- The **Tata Football Academy**, set up in Jamshedpur in 1987, selects boys of U-14 age group and trains them for a four-year period in world-class facilities. A total of 147 cadets up until 2013 have passed out from the academy and have turned out to be professional football players.
- The **Tata Archery Academy**, established in Jamshedpur in 1996, has produced illustrious archers who have gone on to win national and international honours.
- The **Tata Adventure Foundation** set up in 1984, headed by Bachendri Pal, the first Indian woman to climb Mount Everest, has rock-climbing, river rafting and parasailing on its alternate sports agenda. The Adventure Foundation has so far provided training, mentoring and financial support for five expeditions to Mount Everest along with numerous other expeditions across the continent.

These academies are further supported through dedicated sports infrastructure such as a JRD Tata Sports Complex in Jamshedpur, a 40,000-capacity arena with facilities for athletics, archery, boxing, basketball, volleyball, boxing, tennis and more followed by the Keenan Stadium, a 22,000 capacity stadium, which is a regular venue for international cricket in Jamshedpur.

Over the years, these initiatives have helped produce 5 Olympic Games winners, 6 World Championship winners, 36 Asian Games winners, 33 Asian Championship winners, 4 Commonwealth Games winners, 6 Commonwealth Championship winners, 11 Padmashrees, 41 Arjuna awardees, 4 Dronacharya awardees and 1 Padma Bhushan, speaking volumes of the commitment of Tatas to Indian sport.

2 ONGC SPORTS

Oil and Natural Gas Corporation Limited (ONGC) is an Indian multinational oil and gas company headquartered in Dehradun, India. It is a Public Sector Undertaking (PSU) of the Government of India, under the administrative control of the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas. ONGC was founded on 14 August, 1956 by Government of India.

ONGC has always been in the forefront when it comes to the development and promotion of sports in the country. Under its sports policy, ONGC has identified promising and hidden sports talent in the country and nurtured them to take up challenges at the national and international levels. Building of infrastructure, training in the country and abroad, providing necessary kits, instruments, endowing scholarship support and sponsorship to the young and upcoming talented sportspersons are an integral part of ONGC's sports credo.

ONGC received the prestigious Rashtriya Khel Protsahan Puruskar from the President of India in 2014, for its immense contribution in sports talent identification, development and promotion of sports in the country has the highest recognition. This glory does not stop there as among the international level achievers both in past and in present includes 27 National Awardees (01Khel Ratna, 02 Padma Shri and 24 Arjun Awardees).

ONGC presently has 179 active sportspersons and 159 players on scholarships, spread over 23 game disciplines. Out of them, 93 sportspersons are international players who have been regularly representing the country in Cricket, Chess, Table Tennis, Athletics, Badminton, Volleyball, Hockey, Lawn Tennis, Football and Shooting.

3 MRF PACE FOUNDATION

At a time when sports training was hardly a viable business proposition in India, the late Ravi Mammen defied all sports and business critics to set up MRF Pace Foundation at Madras Christian

College Higher Secondary School, Chetpet, Chennai. The foundation was born in the year 1987 to make up for the fact that the Indian cricket team lacked quality pace bowlers. He combined forces with the Australian pace legend Dennis Lillee for the identification and grooming of promising fast bowlers from different age-groups, all over the country and providing them with world-class training facilities, together with the understanding that it would be a long term process requiring patience and commitment.

In 1992 MRF pace foundation opened its doors to other countries such as Sri Lanka, Australia, New Zealand, Bangladesh, England and West Indies. The basis of this relationship is an exchange program for coaches, bowlers and other staff helping them share both talent and expertise.

Today, the Pace Foundation has earned itself the reputation of being the most sought-after institution for honing fast bowling skills across all test-playing countries. Apart from a world-class gymnasium, Olympic-sized swimming pool, its own cricket stadium and residential facilities, the academy also exposes trainees to four different turf pitches. Fast bowlers who trained with the MRF Pace Foundation that went on to represent India include Javagal Srinath, Irfan Pathan, Munaf Patel, Venkatesh Prasad, Rudra Pratap Singh, Zaheer Khan and S. Sreesanth. Besides Indian players, foreign players like Chaminda Vaas, Henry Olonga, Heath Streak and Australian fast bowlers Glenn McGrath, Mitchell Johnson and Brett Lee have also trained at the Foundation. Glenn McGrath was appointed director of the Foundation on September 2, 2012, replacing Dennis Lillee, who has held the post since its inception in 1987.

4. PRAKASH PADUKONE BADMINTON ACADEMY (PPBA)

The Prakash Padukone Badminton Academy (PPBA) was launched on October 1st, 1994. Located in the heart of vibrant Bangalore city, the Academy was started by Mr. Prakash Padukone, Mr. Vimal Kumar and Mr. Vivek Kumar - all stalwarts of Indian Badminton.

The Prakash Padukone Badminton Academy is housed in a state-of-the art facility with superior amenities. Apart from the Badminton courts, players have access to a swimming pool, fully-equipped gymnasium, squash court and restaurant. The Prakash Padukone Badminton Academy imparts top-notch training and coaching to young players who are selected to the Academy on merit, and to whom training and facilities are provided on a scholarship basis.

The Academy has hosted teams and players from Denmark, England, Scotland, Canada, Malaysia, Indonesia, Belgium, Mauritius, Sri Lanka, Czech Republic etc. and has an informal tie-up with Aarhus Badminton Center in Denmark run by former World No. 1, Morton Frost; A similar

association also exists with Badminton England in Milton Keynes. Thus, imparting latest training updates and international exposure to upcoming shuttlers.

Encouraged by the success of the Bangalore Centre, PPBA has amalgamated with the Tata Group to form two more TATA PADUKONE TRAINING CENTRES based at Pune and Mumbai. Tata Padukone Training Centre at Pune was established in July, 1999 whereas its Mumbai Centre was opened in May 2009. The sponsorship has helped in covering essential expenses of the academy, day-to-day expenses, and participation of academy players in international tournaments and camps.

The PPBA is also the training base for many of India's top Badminton players, who would make ideal sparring partners for athletes during their training stint. In short, the PPBA has produced multiple National and International level champions and is renowned around the country for producing world-class badminton players.

5. NATIONAL CRICKET ACADEMY

The National Cricket Academy is located at Chinnaswamy Stadium Bangalore, Karnataka in India. The NCA was the brainchild of cricket administrator and former BCCI President Raj Singh Dungarpur. Academy was established in year 2000 as a cricket facility of the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) for training young cricketers who are identified as having the potential to represent the Indian cricket team.

In 2014, BCCI is proposing a tie-up with the both Cricket Australia and the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) to get experts in for helping draw the new structure. BCCI has decided to put in place a new structure on the lines of the state-of-the-art high performance centres based in Australia and England as part of the revamp of the National Cricket Academy. In the new plan, the NCA will also have a tie-up with the MRF Pace Foundation to train the fast bowlers from across the country. Further, from 2000 onwards NCA also instituted a yearly scholarship to three promising players in the form of a visit to Australia's Centre of Excellence in Brisbane.

NCA has contributed substantially to the Indian cricket in the form of outstanding cricketers leading country from the front on the international platform. A brief listing of these can be summed up as: Mohammad Kaif, Shiv Sunder Das, Parthiv Patel, Gautam Gambhir, Lakshmi pathy Balaji, Shikhar Dhawan, Suresh Raina, VRV Singh, RP Singh, Cheteshwar Pujara, Virat Kohli and Bhuvneshwar Kumar.

6. GOPICHAND BADMINTON ACADEMY

Gopichand Badminton Academy is a badminton training facility spread over 5 acres (2.0 ha) of land in Hyderabad, India. Founded by the 2001 All England Open Badminton Champion, Pullela Gopichand, the facility trains several badminton players and has many world class shuttlers such as Saina Nehwal, Parupalli Kashyap, P. V. Sindhu, Arundhati Pantawane, Gurusai Datt and Arun Vishnu. The Academy has also served as a venue for major sporting events. The 2009 Indian Open was held here while the 2009 BWF World Championships used it as a training venue.

7. OLYMPIC GOLD QUEST

Olympic Gold Quest is a program of the Foundation of Sports and Games founded in 2001 by Indian sporting icons Geet Sethi and Prakash Padukone to identify and support Indian athletes with a proven track record and who have the potential to win Olympic gold medals. In 2010, Leander Paes and Viswanathan Anand also joined the Board of Directors. Viren Rasquinha, former India hockey captain, is the current CEO of Olympic Gold Quest.

OGQ brings together eminent sportspersons, business leaders, sportswriters and talent scouts to identify emerging athletes, understand their training needs and requirements and raise funds to be used for supporting athletes with Olympic medal winning potential. OGQ strives to compliment the efforts of the Indian Government and various Sports Federations in identifying and funding the best and most deserving medal prospects for the Olympic Games.

OGQ experts systematically oversee and benchmark the progress of athletes and provide funds to them so that they have access to the best coaching and training facilities and exploit scientific aids including planned nutrition and diet.

OGQ is identifying talented junior athletes in the age group of 11-18 and grooming them for 2020-2024 Olympics. Each of the athletes is given a monthly scholarship and mentoring by a team of experts. Moreover, OGQ has also shortlisted six individual disciplines viz. Shooting, Athletics, Boxing, Wrestling, Archery and Badminton as the ones in which Indian athletes have the strongest potential to win Olympic medals. In nutshell, OGQ supports 44 athletes in the six selected disciplines till date.

8. OTHER AGENCIES

Apart from the Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs) and Corporate Firms cited above there are several other NGOs, private entities as well as individuals who want India to excel not only in team sports but in individual events too at the world arena and for that they are willing to help talented individuals pursue their dreams. These agencies comprehend that if the right talent is identified at the

right age and are provided proper funds and mentorship they can go on to become world-beaters. A concise list of these agencies engaged in the identification and nurturing sports talent in India is given underneath:

- ❑ Bhiwani Boxing Club (BBC), Bhiwani, Haryana.
- ❑ Bhaichung Bhutia Football Schools (BBFS), in the 6 cities across the Country.
- ❑ Mahesh Bhupati Tennis Academy (MBTA), comprising 35 centres across the Country.
- ❑ Mary Kom Boxing academy, Imphal, Manipur.
- ❑ GunForGlory, Balewadi, Pune.
- ❑ Anglian Medal Hunt Company (AHMC), Dehli.

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