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FROM THE FIELD TO THE FORUM: HOW SPORTS TRIBUNALS CAN RESHAPE DISPUTE RESOLUTION IN INDIA

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Abstract

Today, sports have become an integral pillar of national identity and global recognition. Sport in India has traditionally portrayed culture, identity, and national pride, developing from indigenous sports like kushti and mallakhamb to contemporary professional leagues in cricket, kabaddi, football, and hockey. With this development, players have persisted in encountering clashes over team selections, age-related fraud, exploitation in academies, doping offenses, gender bias, harassment, and unfair deals. Such problems usually set the path of a career of an athlete, but the mechanisms for redress remain feeble. Federation committees and civil courts are the primary means, but both suffer from delays, jurisdictional ambiguity, and inadequately trained adjudicators. While the Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996 and the National Sports Development Code, 2011 lay down a procedural foundation, they cannot keep pace with the time-bound and sports-person-specific nature of disputes in sports, particularly at state and district levels. Experiences in other countries point to superior solutions. The Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) has gained international leadership in sports arbitration, while Sport Resolutions (UK) and the National Sports Tribunal (Australia) illustrate how tribunals at the national level can provide rapid, specialist, and cost-effective decisions. Encouraged by these examples, India's National Sports Governance Act, 2025 brings in reforms for enhanced transparency and accountability, such as the establishment of a National Sports Tribunal. However, for real impact, tribunals must also function at state and district levels, where the

majority of disputes arise. This essay contends that sport tribunals have the potential to be the missing link between sport and justice in India. By synthesizing the comparative lessons of international jurisprudence and the goals of the 2025 Act, such tribunals have the potential to institutionalize timely, accessible, and equitable dispute resolution. Ultimately, relocating disputes from the field to the forum holds out the promise not only of protecting athlete rights but also of enhancing the credibility and integrity of Indian sport.

Key Words: National Sports Tribunals, Sports Jurisdiction, Sports Resolution.

1. Introduction

Sports law is a dedicated branch of legal practice and regulation dealing with the diverse legal matters concerning professional sports and amateur sports, covering aspects such as contract law, intellectual property law, employment law, and anti-doping rules. It acts to regulate athletes, teams, coaches, and organizations for fair play, safeguarding the rights of the stakeholders, and governing matters related to broadcasting, sponsorships, and the integrity of sports competition. Sports law relates to the sporting activities in a country. It is a newly emerging line of law which deals with the legal issue pertaining to the acts and issues of the players, teams' managers and associates. It includes traditional area of law like contract law, tort law, trademark law and various other.¹ The history of sports in India goes back to ancient times when popular games like chess, archery, wrestling, and polo were major recreational and developmental skills. Institutionalization and professionalization came later more prominently during the colonial era under British dominance. It was then that formal sporting disciplines first appeared in the form of cricket, which moved from being a colonial sport to a national phenomenon. With time, India became a force to be reckoned with in the global sporting scene, both a reflection of historical continuity and contemporary transformation in Indian sports culture.

India's legal involvement in sports began with the establishment of the *Indian Olympic Association (IOA)* in 1927, which marked the country's participation in the international sports arena. The formation of the *Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports (MYAS)* in 1982 was a significant step toward creating a national framework for governing sports. The *National Sports Policy of 1984* and its revised versions in 2001 and 2011 laid the foundation for sports

¹ S. Srana, 'Sports Law FAQ' (SSRana, Corporate Laws – Gaming and Sports Laws in India) <https://ssrana.in/corporate-laws/gaming-and-sports-laws-india/sports-law-faq/> accessed 17 September 2025.

regulation in the country.² The main authorities that govern sports in India are: *Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports*, *National Sports Federation*, *Sports Law and Welfare Association of India*, *Sports Authority of India*, and teams also have their own governing bodies like *BBCI* and *Indian Hockey Federation* etc. In spite of the existence of many regulatory organizations in India—both public and private—the lack of any single coherent legal framework makes their efforts at regulation scattered and ineffective. Several legislative tools and institutional frameworks have been introduced to regulate sports administration over the years, such as the *National Sports Policy (1984/2001)*, the *National Sports Development Code of India (2011)*, the *Prasar Bharati Act (2007)*, the *National Anti-Doping Act (2022)*, and programs such as the *Sports Authority of India (SAI)* and *Khelo India*. Although these steps are an advance, they are still beset by contradictions, jurisdictional uncertainties, and inability to respond to the changing issues confronting sportspersons. Prior to the passing of the *National Sports Governance Act, 2025*, India did not have a codified and specific legal act solely committed to sports. But the main challenge now is not so much the presence of this act, but its implementation and the unresolved issue of the judiciary's jurisdiction over sports disputes in the Indian judiciary structure. With these systemic loopholes in mind, this research paper suggests the creation of a special Sports Tribunal—a specialized judicial forum aimed at providing prompt, expert, and context-appropriate redressal of sport issues.

2. Non-Sports Specific Laws:

Outside the sphere of sports-specific laws, the sports industry in India is also conditioned by a wider system of substantive, mercantile, and commercial legislations. These legal tools—from contract and intellectual property rights through to taxation, labour laws, and company law—are central to governance of commercial transactions, labour relations, sponsorships, broadcasting rights, and the broader commercial environment of sport. Let's take a brief overview of these converging legal fields and their effects on the sporting world.

1. **Contract Law:** The legal basis for sports-related agreement i.e., player contracts, broadcasting deals, sponsorship agreements, and licensing alliances is provided under the Indian Contract Act, 1872. These contracts constitute essential tools for defining the rights, obligations, and expectations of all parties involved in a sporting venture. Conflicts emanating from contractual violations, either through a player's failure to

² Aishwarya Agrawal, 'Sports Law in India: An Overview' (LawBhoomi, 14 October 2024) <https://lawbhoomi.com/sports-law-in-india/> accessed 17 September 2025.

perform or the pre-termination pull-out of a sponsor are determined under the paradigm of contract law, guaranteeing responsibility and legal action in the business of sport.

- 2. Competition Law:** Competition law also serves to ensure fair play off the field by preventing abuse of dominance and anti-competitive behaviour in the sports industry. The Competition Act, 2002 provides for entities such as the BCCI to be investigated for behaviour that prevented competitor league establishment. The Competition Commission of India (CCI) is constantly on the lookout for such behaviour to ensure market fairness and healthy competition within the sports industry.

“Two teams playing against each other are like two corporate firms producing a single product. The product is the game, weighted by the revenues derived from its play. In one sense, the teams compete; in another, they combine in a single firm in which the success of each branch requires efficiency. Unequally distributed playing talent can produce “competitive imbalance”. Remuneration of the team members largely depends on the level of competition between the teams in the particular sports. sport is generally organized in a kind of a ‘pyramid’ structure, with a single governing body controlling most regulatory and commercial aspects of each sport, the governing body appears to be de facto ‘dominant’ and therefore claims relating to the abuse of monopoly.”³

- 3. Intellectual Property Law:** Intellectual property is an integral component of the business structure of contemporary sports, including sectors such as brand sponsorships, trademarks, and broadcasting rights. IP law is regulated by the Trade Marks Act, 1999 and the Copyright Act, 1957 and shelters properties such as team emblems, apparel, and broadcast signals. Legal shelter ensures the economic interests of teams, players, and tournament promoters in terms of rightful ownership and commercial utilization.

- 4. Labour Laws:** Labour legislation is key to protecting the rights of athletes, including terms of employment, pay, and conditions of work. Players are often contracted individually, but certain aspects of their engagement might still fall under laws such as the Minimum Wages Act, 1948 and the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947. The legal protection of player associations and their collective bargaining rights is also an important area of labour regulation in sport.

³ Gaurang, ‘Emergence of Sports Law in India’ (India Law Journal, vol. 3, iss. 2) https://www.indialawjournal.org/archives/volume3/issue_2/article_by_Gaurang.html accessed 17 September 2025.

5. Broadcasting Laws: Broadcasting rights have become a key revenue source for sports in India. The *Sports Broadcasting Signals (Mandatory Sharing with Prasar Bharati) Act, 2007* ensures that sports events of national importance are available on free-to-air television. Private broadcasters must share live signals with Prasar Bharati to promote accessibility to these events. This law plays a critical role in making sports accessible to a wider audience, but its application has raised concerns, particularly about what constitutes an event of national importance.

3. Why Sports Disputes demand dedicated Tribunals:

India's sports industry, an important fountainhead of national pride, needs a specialized legal mechanism to deal with its unique challenges. Sports disputes—like selection controversies, disciplinary proceedings, allegations of doping, and contractual issues—are generally time-sensitive and career-altering, requiring immediate and professional resolution. These cases involve sport-specific rules and schedules that regular courts are not equipped to deal with, unlike traditional legal cases. Having specialized sports tribunals would guarantee prompt, impartial, and well-informed adjudication and protect athletes' rights while preserving the integrity of the competitions. Tribunals would provide an accessible, athlete-focused platform promoting fairness, transparency, and accountability in sport governing, as well as relieving the burden on the common judicial system.

3.1 Daily-life Sports Events & Issues in India where Law Fell Short of Adjudication & Regulations:

1. Age Fraud in Sports: Age fraud remains one of the most persistent issues in Indian sports, particularly in disciplines like football, wrestling, and athletics. In 2012, the All-India Football Federation (AIFF) suspended over 50 players for falsifying their ages, highlighting the scale of the problem in grassroots competitions.⁴ Similar controversies regularly emerge in cadet-level wrestling tournaments, where overage competitors deprive genuine athletes of fair opportunities. While the National Code Against Age Fraud in Sports was drafted to address this concern, its enforcement has been weak and inconsistent.⁵ In the absence of a binding statutory framework, federations often handle

⁴ The Hindu, 'AIFF suspends 52 players for age fraud' (September 2012)

⁵ Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports, *Draft National Code Against Age Fraud in Sports (NCAAFS) 2025* (Government of India, 12 March 2025) <https://yas.gov.in/sites/default/files/Draft%20National%20Code%20against%20Age%20Fraud%20in%20Sports%20NCAAFS%202025.pdf> accessed 17 September 2025.

cases internally, leading to arbitrariness and bias. Courts, meanwhile, have been reluctant to intervene in selection and eligibility disputes, leaving athletes without effective remedies. This systemic gap persisted until the proposed National Sports Governance Act, 2025, which finally acknowledged the need for stricter oversight and independent adjudication of such disputes.

- 2. Indian Olympic Association (IOA) Suspension, 2012:** The suspension of the Indian Olympic Association (IOA) by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) in 2012 exposed the fragile state of sports governance in India.⁶ Triggered by election irregularities and political interference, the suspension forced Indian athletes to march under the Olympic flag at the 2014 Sochi Winter Games, stripping them of the chance to represent their own nation.⁷ For athletes who dedicate their lives to sport, this was not just a symbolic setback but a deeply personal blow—years of sacrifice and training overshadowed by administrative failures. The legal system compounded the problem: Indian courts issued conflicting rulings on IOA elections, yet lacked the speed and expertise to resolve the crisis effectively.⁸ The absence of a specialized sports tribunal meant that governance disputes lingered while athletes paid the price, highlighting how administrative battles can derail careers and tarnish national pride.
- 3. Wrestlers' Protest Against Wrestling Federation of India (WFI), 2023:** The 2023 wrestlers' protest against the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) revealed the vulnerability of athletes in the absence of specialized dispute resolution mechanisms. Leading wrestlers, including Vinesh Phogat, Bajrang Punia, and Sakshi Malik, accused then-WFI president Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh of sexual harassment, forcing them to protest at Delhi's Jantar Mantar after their complaints were ignored.⁹ Despite the seriousness of the allegations, there was a significant delay in filing FIRs and initiating a proper investigation, reflecting both political interference and institutional apathy.¹⁰ Ordinary courts and internal committees lacked the ability to provide urgent protective

⁶ CNN, 'IOC suspends Indian Olympic Association' (5 December 2012) <https://edition.cnn.com/2012/12/05/sport/olympics-india-ioc/index.html> accessed 17 September 2025.

⁷ BBC News, 'India outrage over IOA suspension from Olympics' (5 December 2012) <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-20604739> accessed 17 September 2025.

⁸ Reuters, 'IOC suspends India's Olympic body over government interference' (5 December 2012) <https://www.reuters.com/> accessed 17 September 2025.

⁹ Al Jazeera, 'Some of India's top wrestlers have accused the president of the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) and several coaches of sexually harassing female wrestlers and exploiting young athletes' (19 January 2023) <https://www.aljazeera.com/> accessed 17 September 2025.

¹⁰ Business Standard, 'The wrestlers had first come forward in January this year, demanding an inquiry against Singh, but an FIR was filed only after the Supreme Court issued a notice to the Delhi Police on a petition filed by the athletes' (June 2023) <https://www.business-standard.com/> accessed 17 September 2025.

remedies, leaving athletes exposed and unprotected during a critical phase of their careers. This incident underscores the urgent need for specialized sports tribunals capable of ensuring swift, impartial, and athlete-centric justice in cases involving harassment and abuse.

- 4. Doping Scandals:** The 2011 doping scandal involving eight Indian athletes, including Commonwealth and Asian Games medallists, highlighted the inadequacies of India's anti-doping framework. Athletes such as Ashwini Akkunji, Priyanka Panwar, and Tiana Mary Thomas tested positive for anabolic steroids and were provisionally suspended.¹¹ Many claimed they had unknowingly consumed contaminated supplements, yet their appeals had to move through ad hoc disciplinary panels or, in some cases, the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS)—a prohibitively expensive option for most Indian athletes.¹² The prolonged proceedings meant several athletes lost critical years of competition, with their careers effectively derailed. Until the enactment of the National Anti-Doping Act, 2022, which granted statutory backing to the National Anti-Doping Agency (NADA), enforcement remained inconsistent and fragmented, leaving athletes without timely or affordable avenues for redress. This episode underscores the urgent necessity of specialized sports tribunals within India's legal landscape to address doping-related disputes swiftly and fairly.
- 5. Indian Premier League (IPL) Spot-fixing & Betting Scandal, 2013:** The 2013 IPL spot-fixing and betting scandal exposed the absence of a coherent dispute resolution framework in Indian sport. Cricketers S. Sreesanth, Ankeet Chavan, and Ajit Chandila were arrested by Delhi Police on charges of spot-fixing during IPL matches.¹³ While the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) imposed life bans, the Supreme Court later set aside these sanctions in 2015, noting the lack of substantive evidence.¹⁴ However, by then, the prolonged criminal trials and disciplinary conflicts had already destroyed the players' careers. The case revealed a deep jurisdictional conflict between

¹¹ BBC News, 'India has been rocked by a major doping scandal with eight athletes, including three Commonwealth and Asian Games gold medallists, testing positive for anabolic steroids' (July 2011) <https://www.bbc.com/> accessed 17 September 2025.

¹² The Hindu, 'Ashwini Akkunji, Priyanka Panwar, Tiana Mary Thomas and Sini Jose returned positive for methandienone, a banned steroid, during tests conducted by the National Anti-Doping Agency (NADA)' (July 2011) <https://www.thehindu.com/> accessed 17 September 2025.

¹³ NDTV, 'India fast bowler S Sreesanth and two of his Rajasthan Royals teammates, Ankeet Chavan and Ajit Chandila, have been arrested by Delhi Police on charges of spot-fixing in the Indian Premier League' (May 2013) <https://www.ndtv.com/> accessed 17 September 2025.

¹⁴ The Hindu, 'The Supreme Court set aside the life ban imposed on former India fast bowler S. Sreesanth by the BCCI in the 2013 IPL spot-fixing scandal, saying no evidence was found to establish his guilt' (March 2015) <https://www.thehindu.com/> accessed 17 September 2025.

criminal law and sports governance, with no specialized tribunal available to ensure both urgent adjudication and fair process. This demonstrates the urgent need for sports tribunals capable of balancing athlete rights with the integrity of competition, thereby avoiding career-ending delays.

- 6. Sudha Singh – Steeplechase Athlete (Rio Olympics 2016):** After returning from the 2016 Rio Olympics, Indian steeplechase athlete Sudha Singh fell seriously ill and was diagnosed with H1N1 (swine flu), not the suspected Zika virus as initially feared. She had experienced high fever and body aches following her return and was admitted to a private hospital in Bengaluru for treatment. Despite her condition, Singh alleged that Indian officials dismissed her illness as an “excuse” and failed to provide adequate support during her recovery. “Sudha Singh, who has been undergoing treatment for a suspected Zika virus, is suffering from H1N1, known as swine flu virus,” Dr. Sarala of the Sports Authority of India (SAI) confirmed¹⁵. This incident underscores the lack of a formal legal or institutional mechanism to address athlete welfare grievances, leaving such issues to be handled by federations or sports ministry committees without enforceable rights.
- 7. Sarita Devi – Boxing Protest at Asian Games, 2014:** In the 2014 Asian Games, Indian boxer Sarita Devi sparked controversy by refusing to accept her bronze medal during the ceremony, protesting a disputed semifinal loss to South Korea’s Park Ji-Na. Despite an unconditional apology to the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA) and the International Boxing Association (AIBA), she was provisionally suspended by AIBA and banned from competitions until October 2015.¹⁶ Boxing India informed the Delhi High Court that it had no legal grounds to appeal AIBA’s decision, highlighting the absence of a domestic legal framework to support athletes in such disputes.¹⁷ This case underscores how athletes can be vulnerable to international disciplinary actions without robust domestic legal backing or specialized sports tribunals to ensure fair and timely justice.

¹⁵ ESPN, ‘Sudha Singh, who has been undergoing treatment for a suspected Zika virus, is suffering from H1N1, known as swine flu virus,’ Dr. Sarala of Sports Authority of India (SAI) confirmed’ (2016) https://www.espn.com/olympics/story/_/id/17373884/sudha-singh-tests-positive-swine-flu-not-zika-virus accessed 17 September 2025.

¹⁶ The National, ‘Indian boxer Sarita Devi was Wednesday banned for one year by the sport’s world governing body for refusing to accept her bronze medal at the Asian Games in protest against judging decisions’ (2014) <https://www.thenationalnews.com/sport/indian-sarita-devi-banned-for-asiad-medal-snub-1.465279> accessed 17 September 2025

¹⁷ Deccan Chronicle, ‘Boxing India on Monday told the Delhi High Court that it cannot appeal against the International Boxing Association’s (AIBA) decision to suspend boxer Laisram Sarita Devi for refusing to accept the bronze medal at the Asian Games in South Korea’ (2015) <https://www.deccanchronicle.com/150105/nation-current-affairs/article/no-appeal-lies-against-sarita-devi-ban-boxing-india-high> accessed 17 September 2025.

8. Cricket Administration (BCCI vs. Lodha Committee, 2015–17): The Board of Control for Cricket vs Cricket Association of Bihar & Ors on 2 January, 2017¹⁸, highlighted the absence of a specialized legal framework for sports governance in India. Following the 2013 IPL spot-fixing scandal, the Supreme Court appointed the Lodha Committee to recommend reforms for the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI). The committee proposed significant changes, including a cooling-off period between terms for office bearers, a one-state-one-vote policy, and limits on the tenure of officials. ¹⁹Despite the Supreme Court's approval of these reforms in July 2016, the BCCI resisted implementation, leading to the removal of its president and secretary in January 2017.²⁰ This prolonged legal battle underscores the need for a dedicated sports tribunal to address governance issues swiftly and effectively.

9. Contract & Payment Disputes: Domestic players in India's football and kabaddi leagues often grapple with contractual instability and delayed payments, reflecting a systemic issue in athlete welfare. For instance, in January 2025, Mohammedan Sporting's I-League players boycotted training due to unpaid dues for three months, highlighting the precarious financial conditions many face.²¹ Similarly, in the Pro Kabaddi League, players are subject to seasonal contracts, with some earning as little as ₹7.98 lakh per season, and retention policies that may not align with their financial needs.²² These challenges underscore the absence of a dedicated legal framework to address such disputes, leaving players vulnerable to exploitation and without timely recourse.

Lastly, the cyclical problems Indian sportspersons have encountered age fraud, governance breakdown, harassment, doping, contract issues, and international disciplinary exposures—underscore an overriding lacuna in the legal and institutional canvas of sports regulation in India. General courts and federation tribunals have failed to provide timely, expert, and impartial adjudication, tending to put career, rights, and

¹⁸ Board of Control for Cricket in India v Cricket Association of Bihar & Ors (Supreme Court of India, 2 January 2017).

¹⁹ LawInSport, 'The Impact of the Lodha Committee BCCI Report on Sports Governance in India' (15 December 2016) <https://www.lawinsport.com/topics/item/the-impact-of-the-lodha-committee-bcci-report-on-sports-governance-in-india> accessed 17 September 2025.

²⁰ India Today, 'BCCI vs Lodha Panel: Timeline of Supreme Court's Final Verdict' (1 January 2017) <https://www.indiatoday.in/sports/cricket/story/bcci-vs-lodha-panel-timeline-supreme-court-final-verdict-952632-2017-01-01> accessed 17 September 2025.

²¹ Sudipta Biswas, 'ISL: Mohammedan Sporting players not paid, boycott training' (The Bridge, 13 January 2025) <https://thebridge.in/football/isl-mohammedan-sporting-players-not-paid-boycott-training-51554> accessed 17 September 2025.

²² Sportskpi, 'PKL 11: Which Teams Found Success with NYPs?' (2025) <https://www.sportskpi.com/pkl-11-which-teams-found-success-with-nyps/> accessed 17 September 2025.

well-being of sportspersons in jeopardy. The enactment of the National Sports Governance Act, 2025, along with the requirement of specialized sports tribunals at national, state, and district levels, presents a chance for change. These tribunals would provide speedy, unbiased, and qualified adjudication of conflicts, promote athletes' rights, enhance accountability, and ensure the strengthening of Indian sport's integrity. In the end, putting in place specialized dispute mechanisms is not just a matter of law—it is also crucial for developing talent, safeguarding careers, and boosting India's profile in the international sports arena.

4. International Jurisprudence

This research seeks to explore how different nations have institutionally adopted sports tribunals and implemented specialized laws and regulations to respond to the changing demands of the sports ecosystem. It will discuss the administrative frameworks and mechanisms for resolving disputes that have been adopted internationally to deal with sector-specific problems like doping, rights of athletes, governance disputes, and commercial conflict. The emphasis will be on comprehending how these jurisdictions have attuned their legal frameworks with modern challenges in sport, hence promoting legal responsiveness and regulatory clarity. Conversely, the Indian sports legislation is still disintegrated and nascent, with no special tribunal or all-encompassing law. Through a comparison of the existing system in India with international best practices, this comparison will identify the most significant loopholes and suggest avenues for reform—pushing for specialist adjudicating tribunals, statutory support, and athlete-dominated governance.

- **Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS – Switzerland):** The CAS, established in 1984 by the IOC, is the best-known international sports dispute forum.²³ It resolves doping, transfers, eligibility, and governance disputes via arbitration panels and ad hoc Olympic divisions. Its worldwide legitimacy and enforcement of awards establish it as a foundation of sports law. But expense, restricted access for athletes from developing nations, and concerns regarding its independence are ongoing issues.
- **Sport Resolutions (UK):** Sport Resolutions is a stand-alone, not-for-profit organization that settles doping, safeguarding, selection, and governance disputes.²⁴ It offers low-cost and flexible arbitration and mediation, making it very much athlete-

²³ Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS), 'Frequently Asked Questions' (TAS-CAS) <https://www.tas-cas.org/en/general-information/frequently-asked-questions.html> accessed 17 September 2025.

²⁴ Sport Resolutions, 'Sport Resolutions' <https://www.sportresolutions.com/> accessed 17 September 2025.

centred. Its strength is its accessibility and specialist panels, although it is not a body with statutory power and is dependent on voluntary federation uptake.

- **National Sports Tribunal (NST – Australia):** Australia's NST, which was statutorily established following a pilot in 2019, is intended to deal with doping, integrity, selection, and governance issues.²⁵ It has arbitration, mediation, conciliation, and even appeal, with published decisions to guarantee consistency. Its statutory authority and athlete-centric procedures have improved speed in resolving disputes, although it is relatively new and underused by some athletes as a result of low awareness.
- **Sport Dispute Resolution Centre of Canada (SDRCC):** The SDRCC, created by the Canada's Physical Activity and Sport Act (2003), covers conflicts in selection, doping, harassment, and contracts. It uses arbitration and mediation with an Ombuds service for athlete complaints. Its openness in publishing decisions and linking into national sport administration systems provide accessibility.²⁶ Its jurisdiction, however, is confined to internal disputes and subject to government allocation of funds.
- **EU / National Courts (ECJ, Swiss Federal Tribunal):** The courts in Europe, especially the ECJ and the Swiss Federal Tribunal, also serve as control bodies for arbitral awards. They challenge CAS and national court rulings on the basis of competition law and observance of human rights. Judicial review incorporates accountability and guard's athletes' fundamental freedoms. It can, nonetheless, erode the finality of arbitral awards, leading to legal insecurity for federations and athletes.
- **India (Current):** In India, sports disputes have been traditionally dealt with by the Arbitration and Conciliation Act (1996), the National Sports Development Code (2011), and the National Anti-Doping Act (2022). The majority of disputes are referred to regular courts or ad hoc disciplinary committees, where they are often subject to delays and irregular judgments. This diversified strategy is bereft of sport-specialized expertise and deprives athletes of timely relief.

The 2025 Act aims to revolutionize India's system of resolving disputes in sports by creating statutory sports tribunals at the national, state, and district levels. The tribunals would resolve doping, harassment, contract, selection, and governance disputes with binding orders. The new

²⁵ Final Report of the Evaluation of the National Sports Tribunal Pilot (Australia, February 2023) <https://www.nationalsporttribunal.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-02/final-report-of-the-evaluation-of-the-national-sports-tribunal-pilot.pdf> accessed 17 September 2025.

²⁶ Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sport / Centre canadien pour l'éthique dans le sport, 'Home' (Sport Dispute Resolution Centre of Canada) <https://www.crdsc-sdrcc.ca/eng/home> accessed 17 September 2025.

system promises speed, specialist justice, and athlete-focussed justice. Whether this is fulfilled depends on implementation, autonomy from federations, and communication among athletes.

5. Conclusion

The Indian experience of sports law illustrates that though the country has shown improvement in appreciating the distinctive nature of sporting disputes, lack of specialized tribunals has exposed players to arbitrariness, delay, and injustice. The repeating incidents of age fraud, doping, harassment, governance issues, contract violations, and disciplinary disputes indicate that regular courts and internal federation panels are unable to provide the time-bound, specialist, and unbiased redressal athletes need. International jurisprudence—beginning with the Court of Arbitration for Sport and the national tribunals such as Sport Resolutions (UK), the National Sports Tribunal (Australia), and the SDRCC (Canada)—shows how expert tribunals ensure uniformity, openness, and athlete-focused justice while maintaining the integrity of sport.

For India, the National Sports Governance Act, 2025 is a milestone by conceptualizing statutory tribunals at national, state, and district levels. If established with autonomy, accessibility, and transparent rules of procedure, these tribunals may fill the age-old chasm between sports rights of players and legal redress. They not only lighten the law courts' burden but also inject fairness, accountability, and faith into sports administration. Finally, the sports tribunals are not merely a legal change but a moral necessity—a necessity essential to safeguarding players' careers, developing talent, and upholding India's reputation in the international sporting arena.

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