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# NATIONAL SPORTS GOVERNANCE ACT, 2025: AN ANALYSIS

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## **Abstract**

The National Sports Governance Act, 2025 represents one of the most consequential legal reforms in the Indian sports ecosystem's governance history. Enacted by the Parliament of India and receiving Presidential assent on August 18, 2025, the Act replaces the earlier policy-based National Sports Development Code of India (2011), offering a statutory framework that addresses transparency, accountability, athlete welfare, governance standards, and dispute-resolution mechanisms across national sports bodies. This paper critically analyses the Act's purpose, key institutional structures, governance innovations, democratization of sports administration, transparency obligations, and implementation challenges. Drawing upon official provisions and scholarly interpretation, the analysis highlights how the Act attempts to reconcile autonomy with public accountability, align domestic sports governance with international charter obligations, and enhance legal predictability in resolving governance conflicts. It concludes with reflections on the potential impact of the Act on India's broader sporting landscape, especially in the context of its aspirations for international excellence.

**KEYWORDS:** - National, Sports, Transparency and Accountability; Athlete Welfare; National Sports Board; Sports Administration; Dispute Resolution.

## **Introduction**

Sports governance in India historically operated under a mix of executive guidelines, policy directives, and voluntary codes administered by the Sports Authority of India (SAI) and the Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports. The National Sports Development Code of India (2011) sought to impose ethical and administrative standards, but recurrent governance failures in federations exposed limitations of a non-statutory regime. Responding to these governance lacunae, Parliament enacted the National Sports Governance Act, 2025 which, for the first time, provides a binding legal framework for organizing, regulating, and overseeing national sports

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bodies.

The following sections analyse the Act's background, core institutional mechanisms (such as the National Sports Board and Tribunal), governance reforms, transparency mandates, athlete protection, and the practical implications of its phased implementation.

## **Background and Legislative Context**

The Act emerged after growing concerns about opaque governance practices, factionalism in federations, and the absence of effective dispute-resolution mechanisms. Introduced in the Lok Sabha in July 2025 and passed by both Houses of Parliament, it received presidential assent in August 2025. The legislative intent was to transition sports governance from discretionary policy to enforceable law aligned with constitutional values of equality, accountability, transparency, and due process.

One key motivation was to align India's sports governance with international standards such as the Olympic and Paralympic Charters, facilitating predictable administration and strengthening India's global sports engagements.

## **Institutional Architecture: National Sports Board and Tribunal**

### **National Sports Board (NSB)**

A centrepiece of the Act is the National Sports Board, a statutory authority tasked with recognizing and supervising national federations — including bodies representing individual sports disciplines. The Board's powers include:

- 1) Granting and withdrawing recognition of national sports federations;
- 2) Maintaining a registry of sports bodies and their affiliated state/district units;
- 3) Enforcing governance standards, ethical compliance, and Safe Sports Policies;
- 4) Monitoring financial performance and adherence to reporting norms.
- 5) Only federations recognized by the NSB are eligible for government funding, promoting financial discipline and accountability. The Board is mandated to include representatives with expertise in public administration, sports law, ethics, and athlete welfare.

### **National Sports Tribunal (NST)**

To address persistent litigation delays and fragmented judicial oversight, the Act establishes a National Sports Tribunal — a specialized adjudicatory body with powers similar to a civil court. The Tribunal’s jurisdiction covers disputes relating to athlete selection, federation elections, internal governance issues, and other administrative conflicts. Its decisions are binding, with appeals lying only to the Supreme Court, thereby streamlining dispute resolution outside conventional High Court channels.

## **Governance Reforms and Democratic Representation**

The Act enforces structural reforms to democratize federations and professionalize administration:

### **Executive Composition and Elections**

Recognized sports bodies must constitute Executive Committees with a maximum of 15 members, including a mandatory inclusion of sportspersons of outstanding merit and gender representation quotas. These measures aim to diversify decision-making and elevate athlete voice within governance structures.

### **Age, Tenure, and Cooling-off Provisions**

The legislation caps the age and tenure of office bearers to prevent entrenchment of power: an upper age limit applies to officials, and term limits (with cooling off periods) ensure leadership renewal.

### **National Sports Election Panel**

The Act also creates an independent National Sports Election Panel composed of experienced election officials to oversee free and fair elections across federations and affiliated bodies — addressing perennial complaints about election delays and manipulation.

### **Transparency, Accountability, and Financial Oversight**

A significant innovation of the Act is mandating Right to Information Act (RTI) obligations for recognized sports organizations that receive government assistance — a departure from the past where entities like the BCCI resisted RTI applicability.

Furthermore, the Act requires mandatory audits by the Comptroller and Auditor General

(CAG) of recognized bodies receiving funds, reinforcing fiscal accountability and aligning with constitutional norms for public expenditure oversight.

### **Safe Sports and Athlete Protection**

The Act foregrounds athlete welfare by requiring all federations to adopt a Safe Sports Policy and maintain internal codes of ethics. These address harassment, abuse, and other violations of athletes' dignity — bringing governance in sports within a broader human-rights and safety framework.

Ethics and grievance redressal committees within each body are mandated to ensure compliance with these protections, reflecting a systemic shift toward athlete-centered governance.

### **Implementation and Challenges**

Although the Act was notified in 2025, its provisions are being *phased into force* — with select sections effective from January 1, 2026 to allow a structured transition.

Challenges remain. Resistance from powerful federations, the logistics of setting up national institutions like the Tribunal and Election Panel, and balancing autonomy with government oversight may define the Act's practical impact. Critics also warn that excessive regulation could stifle organic growth or invite administrative overreach.

### **Conclusion**

The National Sports Governance Act, 2025 heralds a transformative legal regime for Indian sports governance. By replacing discretionary codes with a statutory structure, it elevates transparency, strengthens dispute resolution, democratizes leadership, and foregrounds athlete welfare. While its implementation will require careful calibration to respect autonomy and prevent bureaucratic excess, the Act positions India's sports governance closer to constitutional principles and international norms — a step that could profoundly influence competitive success, institutional integrity, and global participation in the years leading to ambitions such as the 2036 Olympic Games.

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