

INTRODUCTION

Why is India bad at sports?

It's the most populous country on Earth, with a BILLION and a half people. At the Paris Olympics, the United States won 126 medals. China won 91. India? ... six. And none of them gold ... less than countries like Croatia, Cuba, and Kazakhstan.

Here's a fun fact: American swimmer Michael Phelps has personally won more TWICE AS MANY gold medals at the Olympics – 23 – than India has ever won over 124 years of competition.

It seems as though India is missing from the world's elite athletes. ...but why?

So I went in search of an answer. Was it all about economics? Or concentration on other sports, like cricket? As always, there are multiple reasons that give us insight into not just India and sports, but into human motivation and how societies function.

I'm Ken LaCorte and I'll give you what I found as straightforward as I can.

I'll start with making sure the question itself is fair ... IS IT ACTUALLY TRUE? The first look at THE POVERTY EXCUSE. We'll also talk about A CORRUPTION PROBLEM, and whether this is A GOVERNMENT PROBLEM. We'll finish by looking at FAMILY CHOICES as a factor.

By the end, you'll know more about this than lots of people ... including many in India.
IS IT ACTUALLY TRUE?

The first thing I wanted to check ... IS IT ACTUALLY TRUE? Maybe India does better than I thought, and this is just a stereotype.

It's not.

Again, in the Olympics, I could find stat after stat, and all of them would paint a picture that would make sense for a tiny country, not one the size and importance of India.

But it's not just the Olympics. Soccer – I know some of you call it football – is the most popular game on Earth, and India has NEVER EVEN PLAYED in a World Cup. FIFA rankings put it at 138th ... below Comoros, a tiny island nation I had never heard of until I saw that ranking.

Zoom out to the world's premier professional leagues, and India is barely there. No Indian citizen has ever played in the NBA. Or England's Premier League or Italy's La Liga.

They just don't show up in any meaningful way on the world athletic stage – whether it's professional or amateur.

It wasn't always this way. For thirty years, India ruled one Olympic sport ... field hockey. Starting in 1928, they won six straight gold medals, and eight overall. Then the sport modernized in ways

India didn't keep up with, the wins dried up, and India went 41 years without another hockey medal.

So one explanation that I wanted to explore was that Indians just don't care about sports. But that's not true either.

Cricket edges closer to a national religion in India, with over a billion followers and a hold on their culture that no other sport comes close to.

Kids play it in alleyways with a tennis ball and a plank of wood. Villages without electricity still find a way to gather around a radio or a borrowed TV when India plays.

The Indian Premier League is now one of the richest sporting leagues on earth, pulling in broadcast deals and sponsorships that rival the NFL and English Premier League. Cricketers are the country's biggest celebrities, bigger than most Bollywood stars

But here's the part that surprised me. It's not only cricket. There's a sport called kabaddi ... a full-contact team game that's kind of a cross between tag and wrestling that has been played in Indian villages for centuries. When it launched a professional league in 2014, its first season drew 435 million viewers.

And India isn't hiding from the world stage. It's actively bidding to host the Olympics in 2036.

So this is a MASSIVE country with people who watch sports in numbers no other nation can touch. It has an economy that generates billions of dollars around games and is confident enough to invite the whole world over ... and it can't crack the top 70 of the medal table at the Olympics.

THE POVERTY EXCUSE

So it's a puzzle, and the first suspect everyone points to is the obvious one: THE POVERTY EXCUSE.

Poverty's a tricky one to talk about, if for no other reason than it's a massive, diverse country. Anyone who kind of quickly tries to explain the economy is undoubtedly wrong.

They have the sixth largest economy in the world by GDP standards. But so many people that it ranks about 147 in the world in GDP per capita. And then substantially higher if you factor in purchasing power.

But one area where it's been bad is childhood nutrition.

A malnourished, five-year-old doesn't become an Olympian at 19, no matter how much talent he may have been born with.

India's own government measures this, and the last full picture found that roughly a third of Indian children under five were stunted.

That doesn't mean they're a little short. Stunted is a medical threshold ... a child so far below normal height for their age that it signals long-term malnutrition, the kind that holds back the brain and the body. Another group is what doctors call wasted, meaning dangerously underweight for their height, the mark of a more immediate hunger problem.

The good news is that it's improving. The most recent survey showed the stunting numbers dropping and the worst cases of wasting falling by roughly a third. Chronic underweight has barely moved, but the overall direction is better.

That shrinks the pool of potential elite athletes. Olympic athletes are built in childhood, from good nutrition and good health. For a huge share of Indian kids, that foundation is cracked before they ever start training.

So despite some improvements, the athletes who competed in Paris were children under the older, worse numbers. Whatever gains India is making now won't show up on a medal stand for another decade or more.

And there are also countries poorer than India that do far better at the Olympics.

Kenya – poorer than India – won 11 medals in Paris, four of them gold. Ethiopia won four. Uganda, one of the poorest countries on Earth, won two, including a gold.

And every single one of those 17 medals came in the same place: running. The cheapest sport in existence. You just need a road and a pair of shoes.

India certainly has that, but in the last hundred years, it's won only two track and field medals ... both by the same man.

So poverty shrinks the pool, but something else is going on.

The next part of the answer isn't about what India lacks. It's about what the people running Indian sports do with the athletes they have. And we'll first take a look at corruption.

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Here's a story I came across recently. Tim Walz pardoned an illegal immigrant convicted of sexually assaulting a 10-year-old girl. And when I looked it up, 80% of the coverage came from right-leaning outlets. Left-leaning outlets? Virtually silent.

On the other side, 14 Minnesota defendants who obstructed ICE arrests pleaded not guilty in federal court. That story ran 57% left-leaning and just 7% right. Same state, same issue, but a completely different media appetite depending on which side of the story makes your team look good.

That's a troubling pattern, and it's why I read Ground News, which takes you out of your news bubble.

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A CORRUPTION PROBLEM

From the outside, Indian sports looks like it has a talent problem. But look closer at the talent it does have ... and you start to see something else: A CORRUPTION PROBLEM.

Corruption isn't a footnote in India, and it permeates and pulls down the entire country. It's in government, healthcare, business, education ... and athletics.

There's a win-at-any-cost pressure that reaches all the way down to children, and athletes can't trust the sports federations to protect them.

For three consecutive years, India has topped the World Anti-Doping Agency's list of major testing nations, and by a lot. Of the urine or blood sample India tested most recently, 3.6% came back positive. Most serious sporting nations sit under one percent. India is several times that.

And the sports producing the most positives were track and field and wrestling ... the exact places India wins its medals.

The same agency ran a global investigation into doping among children, called Operation Refuge. It ranked India second in the world for doping by minors, behind Russia. The youngest athlete sanctioned was 12 years old.

You could read that as a country desperate to win, and if they didn't get caught, it'd actually help them. But that's ALWAYS the ALLURE ... and the PROBLEM problem ... with unethical behavior. It usually pays off in the short term, but in the long run ... not so much.

For India, the positive test results affected the Commonwealth Games where India has repeatedly had athletes pulled or sanctioned and medals stripped after the fact. Or at the Asian Games medals or national titles.

India's doping hurt it games a level down from the Olympics exactly the competitions meant to build toward them.

The Olympic Committee has noticed, and when Indian officials went to Lausanne [low-ZAHN] to push their bid for the 2036 Games, the IOC told them directly to clean up the doping or they wouldn't be taken seriously as a potential host.

Which brings us to how these sports are actually governed. Here, wrestling is the clearest window. It's one of India's few real Olympic success stories ... eight medals, at least one at every Games since 2008.

So who ran it? For more than a decade, not a former wrestler, but a sitting member of Parliament. That's not unique to wrestling. Across Indian sports, the federations have long been run by politicians and bureaucrats rather than athletes, and the wrestling case showed what that can cost.

When the person picking the team owes his job to a party, some say the best wrestler doesn't always make the mat ... only the most connected.

In 2023, six of the country's top female wrestlers accused the federation president of sexual harassment. He denies it, and a court will rule on the specifics. But the wrestlers protested in the streets for weeks.

When the federation held new elections, the winner was one of the president's close associates ... at which point Sakshi Malik [SAHK-shee MAH-lik], an Olympic medalist, walked away from the sport entirely. That's a medal-caliber athlete this country now has zero chance of winning with.

Every country has abusers. What this exposed was who holds the power when athletes need protecting.

By the way, I'm working with a lot of statistics in this video, and if I've gotten any of them wrong, tell me in the comments. I'll correct anything substantive in a pinned comment below, and my sources are linked in the description.

A GOVERNMENT PROBLEM

Alright ... India's got A GOVERNMENT PROBLEM, too, and it cuts two ways — it barely spends on sports, and when it does spend, it doesn't do a great job.

Start with the money, because India's government isn't poor. It runs a \$4 trillion economy. It has a space program that landed a rover on the south pole of the moon, and it builds its own aircraft carriers. A country that can do that can afford sports facilities.

This is about where sports rank on its list of priorities, and the answer for most of a century has been: near the bottom.

In 2018, India's own sports minister stood up in Parliament and said the central government was spending about 17 US cents per person per year on sports. On paper, Jamaica spent six times more per person, and the United Kingdom 16 times more.

Now, one caveat here. Comparing dollars across countries is tricky, because a dollar stretches much further in India ... it buys more coaching, more staff, more court time than the same dollar does in London.

And they're spending more. The most recent sports budget included the biggest jump ever ... up 18 percent to roughly half a billion dollars. But in the same budget, the government cut funding for its own anti-doping agency and its only accredited testing lab.

You don't have to guess whether money would work. China already ran the experiment.

Not that long China was a MUCH poorer country than it is today. And it made a choice. Sports schools that recruited kids as young as four. And a program that specifically targeted sports where the rest of the world wasn't as deep ... because that's where the medals were cheapest to buy.

It worked. China went from also-ran to near the top of the medal table. Say what you want about how it treats those kids — and there's a lot to say on that — but as a pure funding experiment, it proves the money argument isn't theoretical.

For decades, India did support athletes in one way: with government jobs. The Army, the Railways, and the police are among the country's biggest employers of pro athletes. But that's support for athletes who already exist, not a system that produces new ones.

Here's what ties all of this together. In America, the pipeline is scholastic and collegiate. A kid plays for their high school, then their university, and college sports doubles as a talent factory feeding the Olympic and pro ranks. In China, it's the state. In Europe, it's the club.

India doesn't have any of the three, at least not at scale. Most schools don't have a functioning athletics program to skip class for. There's no college league feeding anything. Their federations aren't built to develop talent, they're built to be run.

FAMILY CHOICES

Now our last answer, and the one that to me may impact things more than anything ... is at home. It's FAMILY CHOICES being made for kids from the beginning.

There's an old Hindi saying that generations of Indian kids grew up hearing. It translates to: “study, and you'll become a nobleman. Play, and you'll be ruined.”

And that's the divide. Watching sports is a national pastime. Playing them for a living isn't seen as the path to success that it is in many other countries.

The schools enforce it. Whatever the official curriculum says, in most Indian schools sports functions as a break between classes, not a subject. When exams get near, the games period is the first thing sacrificed. It's routine enough that one Indian state had to formally order its schools to stop stealing the sports period for extra classes.

The competition that consumes Indian teenagers isn't for a spot on a team ... it's for a seat at engineering and medical colleges. Entire towns exist just to cram students for those entrance exams. That's where India's sports-parent energy goes ... the private coaches, the training schedules, the sacrificed weekends.

A machinery exists, but it's not aimed at sports. Even India's own sports department admitted this to a parliamentary committee, saying most athletes drop out because a sports career means "high risk, uncertainty and low rewards."

For the typical Indian family, the trade-off isn't worth it. So families steer their kids toward school, credentials, and stable careers, and by most measurements of parenting ... they're not wrong. Here's a data point, though. Indian-Americans are among the wealthiest, best-educated groups in the United States. Their median household income is more than double the national average. Part of that's selection ... the visa system that lured most of their parents to the U.S. leans hard on engineers, doctors, and academics. So it's not a clean test of Indian culture on its own, but it tests a professional class that happens to be Indian.

Even accounting for that, the absence of top Indian-American is noticeable. Five million people, some of the best resources on earth, and you get a small handful of names ... like five people over multiple decades.

And here's how you know it's the odds, not the sports: cricket. A contract there can pay a teenager millions, and below that there's a visible ladder up ... real money even if you never become a star.

Cricket built the one thing no other Indian sport has: a path a career that parents can believe in. So the same families that steer kids away from the track pour them into cricket academies by the hundreds of thousands.

Indian families don't like bad bets. And for 70 years, every sport except cricket has been one.

Because when a sports career actually pays, people care, and ONE REGION in India stands out. The state of Haryana [har-YAH-nah] pays athletes real money ... roughly \$720,000 for an Olympic gold, with cash prizes reaching down to fourth place and beyond, plus a government job with the medal.

Haryana has only 2 percent of India's population and now supplies about a quarter of its Olympic team.

It's another sign that India's sports trajectory might be ticking upward.

CONCLUSION

So malnutrition shrinks the pool of kids who could compete, a broken system fails the ones who remain, and that makes sports a bad bet. Families do what smart families do ... they put their kids on paths that actually go somewhere, whether that's an engineering degree or a cricket academy.

Which means in SOME ways, I'm not sure it's fair to say India's failing at sports. A country that would rather watch cricket than fund a javelin program hasn't made a mistake. It's made a choice. And who's to say whether that's the wrong choice.

And that family instinct we talked about, pointed at books instead of sports? It's produced one of the most unusual dynasties in America.

Indian-American kids are about one percent of the country's children, and they've won the National Spelling Bee almost every year since 1999. I dug into how a community that small pulls that off in this video.

I certainly learned things in putting together THAT and THIS video ... I hope you did as well. Until next time.



ELEPHANTS IN ROOMS — FACT CHECK

TITLE: Sources & Fact Check — Why is India bad at sports?

Introduction:

Claim: India is the most populous country on Earth.

Source: [United Nations, “India overtakes China as the world’s most populous country”](#)

Claim: India has “a billion and a half people.”

Source: [United Nations, World Population Prospects 2024 release note](#)

Claim: At the Paris Olympics, the United States won 126 medals.

Source: [International Olympic Committee, Paris 2024 medal table](#)

Claim: At the Paris Olympics, China won 91 medals.

Source: [International Olympic Committee, Paris 2024 medal table](#)

Claim: At the Paris Olympics, India won six medals.

Source: [International Olympic Committee, Paris 2024 medal table](#)

Claim: India won no gold medals at the Paris Olympics.

Source: [International Olympic Committee, Paris 2024 medal table](#)

Claim: India won fewer Paris 2024 medals than Croatia, Cuba and Kazakhstan.

Source: [International Olympic Committee, Paris 2024 medal table](#)

Claim: Michael Phelps won 23 Olympic gold medals.

Source: [International Olympic Committee, Michael Phelps athlete profile](#)

Claim: India has won 10 Olympic gold medals in its history.

Source: [International Olympic Committee, India’s Olympic medal history](#)

Claim: Michael Phelps has won more than twice as many Olympic gold medals as India.

Source: International Olympic Committee, [Michael Phelps profile](#); International Olympic Committee, [India’s Olympic medal history](#)

Claim: India accumulated its Olympic gold medals over “124 years of competition.”

Source: [International Olympic Committee, Indian Olympic history](#)

Section 1:

Claim: Soccer is the most popular game on Earth.

Source: [YouGov, global football popularity research](#)

Claim: India has never played in the men's FIFA World Cup.

Source: [Olympics.com, India's World Cup qualification history](#)

Claim: FIFA ranks India 138th.

Source: [FIFA men's world ranking, India](#)

Claim: India is ranked below Comoros.

Source: [FIFA men's world ranking, Comoros](#)

Claim: Comoros is "a tiny island nation."

Source: [World Bank, Comoros country information](#)

Claim: No Indian citizen has ever played in the NBA.

Source: [NBA, Sim Bhullar's NBA history](#); Olympics.com, [Indian basketball players](#)

Claim: No Indian citizen has played in England's Premier League.

Source: [Premier League, nations represented in the competition](#)

Claim: No Indian citizen has ever played in La Liga or Serie A.

Source: [LaLiga official website](#); [Lega Serie A official website](#)

Claim: India dominated Olympic field hockey for approximately 30 years.

Source: [Scroll.in, history of Indian hockey's Olympic era](#)

Claim: Beginning in 1928, India won six consecutive Olympic field-hockey gold medals.

Source: [Scroll.in, history of Indian hockey's Olympic era](#)

Claim: India has won eight Olympic field-hockey gold medals overall.

Source: [Olympics.com, India's Olympic hockey record](#)

Claim: Field hockey modernized in ways India failed to keep up with, causing its decline.

Source: [Government of India, account of Indian hockey's decline](#)

Claim: India went 41 years without another Olympic hockey medal.

Source: [Olympics.com, India's Tokyo hockey bronze](#)

Claim: Cricket has more than one billion followers

Source: [International Cricket Council, global cricket-fan research](#)

Claim: Cricket dominates Indian sports culture more than any other sport.

Source: [WPP Media, Sporting Nation 2025](#)

Claim: Children play cricket in alleyways with tennis balls.

Source: [Forbes India, Indian Street Premier League](#)

Claim: Children commonly use a plank of wood as a cricket bat.

Source: [Forbes India, Indian Street Premier League](#)

Claim: Indian villages without electricity still gather around radios or borrowed televisions when India plays.

Source: [Government of India, village electrification review](#)

Claim: The Indian Premier League is one of the richest sporting leagues in the world.

Source: [Reuters, IPL media-rights auction](#)

Claim: IPL broadcast deals rival those of the NFL and English Premier League.

Source: [ESPNcricinfo, sports media-rights comparison](#)

Claim: Indian cricketers are bigger celebrities than most Bollywood stars.

Source: [Kroll, Celebrity Brand Valuation Study 2024](#)

Claim: Kabaddi is a full-contact team sport resembling tag and wrestling.

Source: [Olympics.com, kabaddi rules](#); [Encyclopaedia Britannica, kabaddi](#)

Claim: The Pro Kabaddi League launched in 2014.

Source: [Olympics.com, kabaddi rules and professional history](#)

Claim: The Pro Kabaddi League's first season drew 435 million viewers.

Source: [Pro Kabaddi, official audience figures](#)

Status: Confirmed

Claim: India is actively bidding to host the 2036 Olympics.

Source: [Government of India, 2036 Olympic bid status](#); [Press Trust of India, July 2026 bid update](#)

Claim: India's sports economy generates billions of dollars.

Source: [WPP Media, Sporting Nation 2025](#)

Claim: Indians watch sports in numbers no other country can match.

Source: [FIFA, Qatar 2022 global audience report](#)

Claim: India cannot crack the top 70 of the Olympic medal table.

Source: [BBC Sport, Paris 2024 medal table](#); [Business Standard, India's Tokyo and Paris rankings](#)

Section 2

Claim: India has the world's sixth-largest economy.

Source: [World Bank, GDP in current U.S. dollars](#)

Claim: India ranks approximately 147th in GDP per capita.

Source: [IMF, nominal GDP per capita](#); [World Bank, GDP per capita](#)

Claim: India's GDP-per-capita ranking is substantially higher after adjusting for purchasing power.

Source: [World Bank, PPP-adjusted GDP per capita](#); [IMF, PPP-adjusted GDP per capita](#)

Claim: India has performed poorly in childhood nutrition.

Source: [Government of India, NFHS-6 results](#)

Claim: A malnourished five-year-old cannot become an Olympian at 19.

Source: [Advances in Nutrition, review of recovery from childhood undernutrition](#); [WHO, stunting overview](#)

Claim: India's government measures childhood malnutrition.

Source: [Government of India, NFHS-6 results](#); [Rajya Sabha, national nutrition monitoring](#)

Claim: The latest complete national survey found that approximately one-third of Indian children under five were stunted.

Source: [NFHS-6 national fact sheet](#); [NFHS-5 national fact sheet](#)

Claim: Stunting is a medical threshold for children who are substantially shorter than expected for their age.

Source: [WHO, child-malnutrition definitions](#)

Claim: Stunting signals long-term malnutrition.

Source: [WHO, malnutrition fact sheet](#)

Claim: Stunting can hold back brain and bodily development.

Source: [WHO, stunting overview](#); [UNICEF, child-malnutrition data](#)

Claim: Wasting means being dangerously underweight for height.

Source: [WHO, child-malnutrition definitions](#)

Claim: India's childhood-stunting rate is improving.

Source: [NFHS-6 national fact sheet](#); [NFHS-5 national fact sheet](#)

Claim: The worst cases of wasting declined by approximately one-third.

Source: [Government of India, NFHS-6 results](#)

Claim: Chronic underweight has barely moved.

Source: [Government of India, NFHS-6 results](#)

Claim: Childhood malnutrition shrinks India's potential pool of elite athletes.

Source: [Verbecque et al., childhood underweight and physical fitness](#); [Youth Athlete Development and Nutrition](#)

Claim: India's Paris 2024 athletes grew up when childhood-malnutrition rates were worse.

Source: [Olympics.com, India's Paris 2024 contingent](#); [Rajya Sabha, historical NFHS figures](#)

Claim: Kenya, Ethiopia and Uganda are poorer per person than India.

Source: [World Bank, GDP per capita](#)

Claim: Kenya won 11 medals in Paris, including four gold medals.

Source: [International Olympic Committee, Paris 2024 medal table](#)

Claim: Ethiopia won four medals in Paris.

Source: [International Olympic Committee, Paris 2024 medal table](#)

Claim: Uganda won two Paris medals, including one gold.

Source: [International Olympic Committee, Paris 2024 medal table](#)

Claim: Uganda is one of the poorest countries on Earth.

Source: [World Bank, GNI per capita](#)

Claim: All 17 medals won by Kenya, Ethiopia and Uganda came in running events.

Source: [International Olympic Committee, Paris 2024 athletics results](#)

Claim: Running is the cheapest sport in existence and requires only a road and shoes.

Source: [Aspen Institute, State of Play 2019](#)

Claim: India has won only two Olympic track-and-field medals during the last 100 years, both by the same man.

Source: [Olympics.com, Neeraj Chopra profile](#); [Olympics.com, Paris 2024 athletics results](#)

Section 3

Claim: Corruption “permeates” India’s government, healthcare, business, education, and athletics.

Source: [Transparency International: India](#); [Scroll.in sports-governance audit](#)

Claim: Win-at-any-cost pressure reaches children, and athletes cannot trust sports federations to protect them.

Source: [WADA: Operation Refuge report](#)

Claim: For three consecutive years, India topped WADA’s list of major testing nations.

Source: [WADA 2024 Anti-Doping Testing Figures Report](#); [The Hindu](#)

Claim: Of the urine or blood samples India tested most recently, 3.6% came back positive.

Source: [WADA 2024 Anti-Doping Testing Figures Report](#)

Claim: Most serious sporting nations have positive-test rates below 1%.

Source: [WADA 2024 Anti-Doping Testing Figures Report](#)

Claim: Track and field and wrestling produced India’s most positive findings.

Source: [WADA 2024 Anti-Doping Testing Figures Report](#)

Claim: Track and field and wrestling are “the exact places India wins its medals.”

Source: [Olympics.com: India’s Paris 2024 medal tally](#); [Olympedia: India](#)

Claim: WADA conducted a global investigation into doping among children called Operation Refuge.

Source: [WADA: Operation Refuge](#); [Operation Refuge report](#)

Claim: Operation Refuge ranked India second in the world for doping by minors, behind Russia.

Source: [WADA: Operation Refuge report](#)

Claim: The youngest athlete sanctioned in Operation Refuge was 12 years old.

Source: [WADA: Operation Refuge report](#)

Claim: Indian athletes have repeatedly been removed, sanctioned, or stripped of Commonwealth Games medals because of doping.

Source: [Commonwealth Sport: Anti-doping violations](#); [The Tribune: 2002 Commonwealth Games sanctions](#)

Claim: Indian doping cases have affected Asian Games medals and national titles.

Source: [Scroll.in: Parveen Hooda's Asian Games medal](#); [Olympics.com: Sanjita Chanu's suspension](#)

Claim: Doping has harmed India specifically in competitions intended to build toward the Olympics.

Source: [Commonwealth Sport](#); [Scroll.in](#)

Claim: When Indian officials promoted their 2036 Olympic bid in Lausanne, the IOC directly warned them to address doping or they would not be taken seriously.

Source: [The Indian Express](#); [Reuters](#)

Claim: India has won eight Olympic wrestling medals and at least one at every Games since 2008.

Source: [Olympics.com: India's Olympic wrestling medals](#)

Claim: For more than a decade, India's wrestling federation was headed by a sitting member of Parliament.

Source: [BBC News](#); [Newslaundry](#)

Claim: Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh was not a former wrestler.

Source: [BBC News](#); [The Indian Express](#)

Claim: Indian sports federations have long been run primarily by politicians and bureaucrats rather than athletes.

Source: [Scroll.in sports-governance audit](#); [Newslaundry](#)

Claim: Political control means the most connected wrestler may be selected instead of the best wrestler.

Source: [The Indian Express](#); [SCC Online](#)

Claim: In 2023, six leading female wrestlers accused the federation president of sexual harassment.

Source: [ESPN](#); [BBC News](#)

Status: Disputed

Claim: Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh denies the allegations, and a court will decide the case.

Source: [BBC News](#); [LiveLaw](#)

Claim: The wrestlers protested in the streets for weeks.

Source: [ESPN](#)

Status: Confirmed

Claim: The winner of the federation's subsequent election was a close associate of the former president.

Source: [ThePrint/PTI](#); [NDTV](#)

Claim: Olympic medalist Sakshi Malik retired after Sanjay Singh won the election.

Source: [Sportstar](#); [BBC News](#)

Section 4

Claim: India "barely spends on sports."

Source:

[Lok Sabha written answer, January 4, 2018](#); [Union Budget 2026–27, Demand No. 102](#)

Claim: India runs a \$4 trillion economy.

Source: [World Bank](#)

Claim: India landed a rover "on the south pole of the moon."

Source: [ISRO: Chandrayaan-3 details](#); [European Space Agency](#)

Claim: India builds its own aircraft carriers.

Source: [Government of India: INS Vikrant](#); [Government of India: INS Vikramaditya](#)

Claim: Sports ranked near the bottom of India's government priorities "for most of a century."

Source: [Lok Sabha historical sports-allocation figures](#)

Claim: In 2018, India's sports minister "stood up in Parliament" and said the central government spent about 17 cents per person annually on sports.

Source: [Lok Sabha written answer, January 4, 2018](#)

Claim: Jamaica spent six times more per person on sports than India, and the United Kingdom spent 16 times more.

Source: [Deccan Herald](#); [Business Today](#)

Claim: A dollar buys more coaching, staff, and facility time in India than in London.

Source: [World Bank International Comparison Program](#)

Claim: India is spending more on sports.

Source: [Union Budget 2026–27, Demand No. 102](#)

Claim: The 2026–27 sports budget rose 18% to roughly half a billion dollars.

Source: [Union Budget 2026–27](#); [Federal Reserve exchange-rate data](#)

Claim: The same budget cut funding for India's anti-doping agency.

Source: [Union Budget 2026–27](#)

Claim: The same budget cut funding for India's only accredited testing laboratory.

Source: [Union Budget 2026–27](#); [New Indian Express](#)

Claim: Chinese sports schools recruited children as young as four.

Source: [NPR](#); [ITV News](#)

Claim: China deliberately targeted sports in which international competition was less developed because those medals were easier to obtain.

Source: [New York Times](#); [NPR](#); [Xinhua](#)

Claim: China went from an Olympic also-ran to near the top of the medal table.

Source: [Olympics.com: Paris 2024 medal table](#); [Xinhua](#)

Claim: The Indian Army, Railways, and police are among the country's largest employers of professional athletes.

Source: [Government of India: Railway athletes](#); [CRPF sports recruitment](#); [Government of India: Army sports recruitment](#)

Claim: The American athletic pipeline is primarily scholastic and collegiate.

Source: [US Olympic and Paralympic Committee](#); [NCAA](#)

Claim: China's elite-athlete pipeline is primarily state-run.

Source: [BBC News](#); [Frontiers in Sports and Active Living](#)

Claim: Europe's principal athlete-development pipeline is the sports club.

Source: [German Olympic Sports Confederation](#); [European Commission Youth Wiki](#)

Claim: India has no American-style, Chinese-style, or European-style development pipeline "at scale."

Source: [Government of India: Khelo India University Games](#); [School Games Federation of India](#); [Army Sports Institute](#)

Claim: Most Indian schools do not have a functioning athletics program.

Source: [ASER 2024 physical-education report](#); [UDISE+ figures](#)

Status: Disputed

Claim: Indian sports federations are not built to develop talent.

Source: [National Sports Governance Rules, 2026](#);

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Claim: An old Hindi saying translates to, "Study, and you'll become a nobleman. Play, and you'll be ruined."

Source: [Dawn](#); [Atul's Song A Day](#)

Claim: Watching sports is a national pastime in India, but playing professionally is not widely regarded as a path to success.

Source: [Rajya Sabha Standing Committee Report No. 281](#)

Claim: In most Indian schools, sports functions as a break rather than a subject.

Source: [Lok Sabha answer on physical education](#); [CBSE Circular 71/2010](#)

Claim: Schools commonly sacrifice sports periods for academic classes, especially near examinations.

Source: [The Hindu: Kerala's 2023 order](#); [New Indian Express: Karnataka's 2025 order](#)

Claim: One Indian state formally ordered schools to stop using sports periods for extra classes.

Source: [The Hindu](#); [Bar & Bench](#)

Claim: Competition for engineering and medical-college admission consumes large numbers of Indian teenagers.

Source: [National Testing Agency: JEE Main 2025](#); [National Testing Agency: NEET 2026](#)

Claim: Entire towns exist to prepare students for engineering and medical entrance examinations.

Source: [Kota coaching-industry report](#)

Status: Confirmed

Claim: India's Sports Department told a parliamentary committee that most athletes drop out because sports careers involve "high risk, uncertainty and low rewards."

Source: [Rajya Sabha Standing Committee Report No. 281](#)

Claim: Indian-Americans are among the wealthiest and best-educated groups in the United States.

Source: [Pew Research Center](#)

Claim: Indian-American median household income is more than double the national average.

Source: [Pew Research Center](#); [U.S. Census Bureau](#)

Claim: Approximately five million Indian-Americans live in the United States.

Source: [U.S. Census Bureau](#); [Pew Research Center](#)

Claim: Immigration selection helps explain Indian-Americans' income and education because the visa system favors engineers, doctors, and academics.

Source: [Pew Research Center](#)

Claim: Only about five Indian-Americans became top athletes over multiple decades.

Source: [Team USA: Rajeev Ram](#); [Smithsonian: Raj Bhavsar](#); [PGA Tour: Sahith Theegala](#)

Claim: A cricket contract can pay an Indian teenager millions.

Source: [ESPNcricinfo](#); [Official IPL 2025 auction](#)

Claim: Cricket offers a visible financial ladder below superstar level.

Source: [The Hindu: domestic match fees](#); [Olympics.com: BCCI central contracts](#)

Claim: Cricket has a credible career path that no other Indian sport possesses.

Source: [BCCI Annual Report 2016–17](#); [Rajya Sabha Standing Committee Report No. 281](#)

Claim: Haryana pays roughly \$720,000 for an Olympic gold medal.

Source: [Haryana cash-award policy](#)

Claim: Haryana's cash awards extend to fourth place and beyond.

Source: [Indian Express](#); [Haryana cash-award policy](#)

Claim: Haryana automatically gives Olympic medalists a government job.

Source: [Haryana cash-award policy](#); [The Week/PTI](#)

Claim: Haryana has approximately 2% of India's population.

Source: [Official Indian population-projections report](#); [Government of Haryana](#)

Claim: Haryana supplies approximately one-quarter of India's Olympic team.

Source: [Indian Express](#); [The Hindu](#)

Claim: India's overall sports trajectory is moving upward.

Source: [The Hindu](#)