



STRIDE LEGAL SPORTS LAW NEWSLETTER



Welcome to the Stride Legal Sports Law Newsletter. In a field as dynamic and rapidly expanding as sports law, we are delighted to bring you a focused analysis of the most pertinent legal developments at its intersection with the sports industry.

- Team Stride Legal

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Introduction:

The first quarter of 2025–26 marked a pivotal shift in India's Sports Law and governance framework. From ambitious policy reforms such as the National Sports Policy 2025 and the Draft Sports Governance Bill to sector-specific regulatory changes in football, gaming, and cricket, the period reflected a growing push toward transparency, integrity, and most importantly, Olympic preparedness. Courts, regulators, and ministries played an active role in reshaping India's sporting ecosystem, whether through litigation that questioned franchise governance or rulings that reinforced athlete rights, data protection, and fair play.

REGULATORY AND POLICY UPDATES

2025 Sports Policy: India's Roadmap to Olympic Glory

The National Sports Policy 2025 was officially approved, superseding the 2001 framework, emphasising the Government's Olympic aspirations of 2036. Several new provisions have been introduced, such as creating local leagues, facilitating school-to-club transition, and driving widespread public awareness campaigns. The Policy places heavy emphasis on top-level performance by improving funding, training coaches, and supporting international exchange programs. Importantly, during its finalization, the policy saw the inclusion of several critical provisions such as (i) promotion of indigenous sports to preserve and popularize traditional Indian games, (ii) application of AI to increase efficiency in data analysis, (iii) encouraging private sector participation through Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs), Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), and innovative funding initiatives, (iv) integration with the National Education Policy to embed sports in academic curriculum, and (v) inclusion of sports psychology as a vital part of the overall sports development strategy.

Sports Governance Bill Proposes Regulator, Tribunal, and Election Reforms

The Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports released the National Sports Governance Bill for public consultation (the final enactment of the same is pending) to institutionalize Olympic-standard governance across the Indian Sports law framework. It proposes the establishment of a Sports Regulatory Board of India to license and monitor National Sports Federations and Athlete Commissions in each Federation to guarantee athlete-led input on policies, and a dedicated Appellate Sports Tribunal to fast-track grievance and dispute resolution outside of civil courts. The Bill also mandates tougher anti-doping, ethics codes, and creates a Sports Election Panel to ensure transparent, contest-free elections within sporting bodies.

Sports Ministry Ups NSF Funding; Focuses Grassroots and Coaching

The Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports has revamped its Scheme of Assistance to National Sports Federations ('NSF') for the new post-Paris 2024 Olympic cycle in sync with realizing India's aspiration to host the 2036 Olympic Games. The Ministry, while making these changes, has considered increased costs due to inflation and has therefore enhanced the quantum of assistance.

Key changes include allocating 20% of annual NSF budgets for grassroots junior and youth development and 10% for coach and technical staff capacity building. NSFs are also now mandated to hire a Coaching Education Expert and, for those with budgets over ₹10 crore, a High-Performance Director (HPD). The scheme also provides for probable athletes a ₹10,000 monthly dietary allowance, amongst others.

NCAAFS 2025: India's Most Comprehensive Move Against Age Manipulation

The Draft National Code Against Age Fraud in Sports ('NCAAFS') 2025 was released for public feedback. The NCAAFS 2025 represents

India's most comprehensive, tech-driven effort yet to stamp out age fraud in youth sport. It mandates a centralized age-verification system backed by Digi Locker, integrated QR-enabled athlete ID alongside multi-modal checks (TW3 bone-age assessments, MRI scans, dental and physical exams). A pilot AI-based bone-age evaluation is also proposed to enhance accuracy. Under the Draft Code, a first proven violation draws a two-year competition ban and forfeiture of titles; a second offense incurs a lifetime ban plus criminal proceedings. By embedding advanced medical protocols and AI in its framework, NCAAFS 2025 aims not merely to update regulations but to establish a new global benchmark for integrity in junior and developmental sports.

IPL Advisory: Tobacco and Alcohol Advertisements

Addressing a growing controversy, the Health Ministry advised the BCCI and the IPL Chairman to ban all alcohol and tobacco advertising, including surrogate ads, during IPL 2025 matches and their broadcasts. Atul Goel, the Director General of Health Services, conveyed these directions. These directions highlighted the important influence the cricketers exert as role models for the country's youth and the influence they have on the public. The recommendation specifically discouraged athletes, including commentators, from promoting alcohol or tobacco products, whether directly or indirectly. This direction highlighted the increased scrutiny that sports organizations face regarding their social responsibilities, particularly concerning public health.

Preity Zinta Moves Court Over Alleged Governance Lapses in Punjab Kings

Preity Zinta approached the Chandigarh district court to file a legal case against fellow co-owners Mohit Burman and Ness Wadia. The crux of the matter questioned the validity of an Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM) held on April 21, 2025, by KPH Dream Cricket Pvt. Ltd. (Parent Company of Punjab Kings). Zinta claimed that there were procedural violations under the Companies Act, 2013, and other secretarial regulations, especially objecting to

the appointment of Muneesh Khanna as a director during the disputed meeting. Zinta's petition underscored increasing concerns about the transparency and governance within India's premier sports franchises.

Gaming Sector Moves Towards Self-Regulation Amid Legal Uncertainty

Three major gaming industry organizations, including the All-India Gaming Federation ('AIGF'), the E-Gaming Federation ('EGF'), and the Federation of Indian Fantasy Sports ('FIFS'), have jointly adopted a self-regulatory Code of Ethics. This framework requires platforms to implement user safety measures and responsible-gaming protections, such as Know-Your-Customer and anti-addiction tools, across real-money gaming. The industries stated that the new framework is based on global practices of governance. This code addressed the lack of a central regulatory authority in India, which leads to chaos and fraud, posing significant problems for game developers and players.

High Court Directs Boxing Election's Oversight

Following a Himachal Pradesh High Court ruling, independent observers were appointed for the Boxing Federation of India's elections in May 2025. The Sports Authority of India Deputy Director General, Mayank Srivastava, and Japan Boxing Federation President Tatsuya Nakama will monitor the process, under the oversight of the Government and the World Boxing Federation, to ensure fairness amid longstanding administration disputes.

AIFF Constitution Litigation Halts Indian Super League

The dispute over the All-India Football Federation (AIFF)'s governance began with challenges to its 2016 elections and underlying constitution, on the grounds that both flouted the National Sports Code. Since then, the Supreme Court has stepped in, installing a Committee of Administrators (CoA) to re-draft the AIFF constitution and supervise fresh polls. After which, it approved a newly elected

Executive Committee in September 2022 (which prompted FIFA to lift its suspension), but the final determination on AIFF's permanent constitutional framework remained pending.

Justice L. Nageswara Rao, appointed to finalize the AIFF's draft constitution, proposed several landmark reforms to modernize its governance. Key changes include stricter office tenures capped at a maximum of 12 years, an age limit of 70 years for office bearers, and a no-confidence mechanism to impeach office bearers, including the President. The Executive Committee is also to be restructured into a 14-member body comprising a President, two Vice-Presidents (one male and one female), a Treasurer, and ten members, five of whom must be "eminent players," including at least two women, ensuring that former footballers have a direct voice in administration.

AIFF's Player Transfer Rules: Key Changes in RSTP-2025

The AIFF's revised Regulations on the Status and Transfer of Players, 2025 (RSTP-2025), mark a significant shift in how Indian football manages player rights, club responsibilities, and youth protection. Among the key changes are the introduction of clearer definitions, such as "club-trained player," and progressive welfare measures, including adoption leave, family leave, and menstrual health rights for female players and coaches. The new rules also impose a firm one-year cap on player loans (effective June 2025); introduce quantitative limits on the number of loans per club and require written agreements for all loan arrangements. In cases of unjust contract termination, players may now register outside regular windows following a preliminary AIFF review. Additionally, enhanced protections for minors have been introduced, mandating clubs and academies to report all underage players and comply with strict safeguarding norms.

Shooting Federation Announces Major Rule Changes Ahead of LA Olympics 2028

The International Shooting Sport Federation (ISSF) is making substantial changes to the

rules for rifle shooters. The ISSF believes that rapidly rising scores in shooting events are a growing concern and that changes are necessary; however, since the scoring system itself cannot change, the focus is to strip athletes of advanced shooting gear. The goal remains to make the sport more welcoming and exciting as we head toward the 2028 LA Olympics.

Under the new rules, rifle shooters will have to adapt to less rigid clothing, and ankle-length shoes will no longer be allowed wherein only flexible shoes that pass a new "bend test" will be permitted, ensuring natural movement. The jackets used will also need to be a bit looser, due to the increased button overlap tolerance. To make this transition smoother, the ISSF has asked its Athlete Commission to release a detailed YouTube guide so athletes can visualise what's changing and prepare in advance.

II. LITIGATION UPDATES AND IMPORTANT RULINGS

Bombay High Court Upholds ₹538 Crore Arbitral Award Against BCCI

In a major blow to the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI), the Bombay High Court dismissed its petitions challenging two arbitration awards totalling over ₹538 crore in favour of Ex-IPL franchise Kochi Tuskers Kerala. The main crux of the dispute arose from the BCCI's 2011 termination of the franchise over alleged breaches of contract. Justice Chagla opined that BCCI's attempt to re-argue factual issues and challenge the arbitrator's findings on merit was outside the limited scope of review under Section 34 of the Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996.

Azharuddin Name Removal Stayed by High Court

The Telangana High Court has stayed an order directing the removal of former Indian cricket captain Mohammad Azharuddin's name from the North Pavilion Stand at Hyderabad's Rajiv Gandhi International Cricket Stadium. The

stand was renamed in Azharuddin's honor in 2019 during his tenure as Hyderabad Cricket Association (HCA) President. The directive for removal was issued by the HCA's Ethics Officer on the grounds of conflict of interest and lack of proper ratification. Azharuddin challenged both the order and the appointment of the Ethics Officer, arguing it violated HCA rules and his constitutional rights.

Reservation for Scheduled Caste Sports (Women) upheld

The Supreme Court upheld the reservation of one Deputy Superintendent Police post (Punjab Police) for 'Scheduled Caste Sports (Women)'. The Court held that once an advertisement reserved the post specifically for Schedule Caste women (to fulfill a 33% women's quota), that criterion could not be altered mid-process. The lone eligible Scheduled Caste woman candidate thus must be appointed; no retrospective roster change was allowed.

Supreme Court indicates an inquiry into Sports Associations

The Supreme Court indicated it was "*inclined to appoint a commission of inquiry*" for a deeper probe into sports bodies' affairs. The remark came in a case filed by Kabaddi players; the Court noted all kinds of things are happening in federations beyond sports and suggested it might expand the inquiry to all associations. No formal commission has been set up yet, but this signals tough scrutiny ahead for the governance of sports NGOs.

FIR Filed Against Krafon India Over Alleged User Data Breach

Indian police filed an FIR accusing Krafon India (Battlegrounds Mobile India's developer) of illegally selling user data on Telegram for ₹2,000 per user. A civil suit was filed in the Bombay High Court by the complainant, Santosh Torane. Krafon denied any wrongdoing and insisted on data protection. The allegations include criminal conspiracy (IPC 120B) and IT Act 2002 violations for breach of user privacy. The case has put BGMI's future in India in uncertainty.

Competition Commission of India (CCI) Verdict on Table Tennis Associations

In a landmark decision, the Competition Commission of India (CCI) ruled that four table tennis associations, including the Table Tennis Federation of India (TTFI), violated the Sections 4 (Abuse of Dominant Position), 3(4)(c) and (d) (Vertical Agreements) of the Competition Act 2002 by restricting players from participating in unaffiliated events and enforcing affiliation-based gatekeeping. The case, *TT Friendly Super League Association v. Table Tennis Authorities*, originated from a district official's WhatsApp warning and evolved into a broader challenge to federation overreach. The CCI held that sports bodies are 'enterprises' when engaging in economic activity and cannot misuse regulatory powers to stifle competition.

Bombay High Court Rejects Maharashtra Casinos Act Revival Plea

Bombay High Court rejected a plea seeking to revive the Maharashtra Casinos (Control and Tax) Act, 1976. The High Court opined that the 1976 law, despite being passed by the legislature, was never formally notified and thus never came into force. The Bench comprising of Justices Girish Kulkarni and Advait Sethna, highlighted the Act as deeply buried and deemed its revival as an impossibility and a far-fetched expectation that the law could never recognize.

The High Court's decision was further appealed in the Apex Court, which adjourned the matter, and currently, gambling remains legally permitted only in Goa, Daman, Diu, and Sikkim.

IPL Trademark Dispute [Royal Challengers Bangalore (RCB) v. Uber]

The Delhi High Court refused an interim injunction for the RCB. RCB had sued Uber India, alleging Uber's "Baddies in Bengaluru" ad disparaged RCB's trademark. The court dismissed RCB's plea as lacking immediate harm, finding the ad's banter permissible in a

sports rivalry context.

Conclusion:

From policy blueprints to courtroom verdicts, the quarter's highlights show a change in Indian sports law, balancing ambition with accountability. Several reforms targeting governance gaps, anti-fraud safeguards, and commercial fairness have been introduced, laying the foundation for a world-class ecosystem. For legal advisors, administrators, and investors, this period presents both an opportunity and a responsibility to weave these principles into the fabric of Indian sport.