

# Corruption in Sports in India

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**Abstract-** Corruption already existed at the time of the “good old” Olympic Games of the Antique Era.

And it continues to exist in modern competitive sport. Corruption plagues all major Indian sports, including cricket, hockey, weightlifting, and athletics. The 2010 IPL franchise bidding process also led to the resignation of Shashi Tharoor, Minister of State for External Affairs, whose friend and current wife, Sunanda Pushkar, was alleged to have received \$15 million in ‘sweat equity’ from one of the franchises. Appalled in the June 2010 by the Commonwealth Games corruption scandal, former Indian Olympians launched the Group of Clean Sports India to raise public awareness and fight corruption in sports. Women’s Hockey World Cup (New Delhi) was hit by a financial corruption scandal involving the Federation of International Hockey (FIH), Indian Olympic Association (IOA) and H. Suresh Kalmadi, the IOA chief, was again said to be involved in financial corruption during arrangements for the World Cup. IHF, too, was suspended in 2008 by the IOA over an alleged bribery for selection scandal. The Indian government is currently at loggerheads with a civil society movement spearheaded by veteran Anna Hazare, over the passing of the Jan Lokpal Bill 2011 for the creation of a Lokpal (Ombudsman). The Bill was aimed at fighting corruption in government offices and the judicial machinery, and also covers various sports bodies. In 2011, the Indian Government has proposed a National Sports Bill to curb corruption and ensure that all sport federations comply with the Olympics Charter by subjecting their offices to annual audits. The Bill provides for a Sports Ombudsman to resolve disputes in sports, prevent age and sex fraud and doping, and to make all sports bodies comply with the Right to Information Act, 2005.

**Index Terms-** Corruption, sports

## I. INTRODUCTION

The first documented case of corruption in international sports is attributed to the athlete Eupolos of Thessalia who successfully bribed three of his competitors in the first combat tournament at the Olympic Games of 388 B.C. First of all, most accusations of corruption in sport should not be taken too seriously. When quickly arises. India has captured the world’s imagination with its dazzling economic growth. Athletes lose, they tend to look everywhere else for the blame rather than at themselves. Dishonest wheeling and dealings of their opponents, such as corruption and doping, may also be readily cited as an excuse. When fans see their team lose, the accusation of rigging always and rise in international affairs. Its global ascent is underpinned by a robust economy, growing at the rate of 9 percent and estimated to reach 10 percent during the next two years. However, this new found affluence has its flip side too, in

the form of horizontal and vertical corruption that has besieged the country. According to Transparency International’s Corruption Perceptions Index 2010, India ranks a dismal 87 out of 188 countries, falling three notches since 2009. It continues to plummet further, affecting all aspects of government functioning and public life, and sport is no exception.

Corruption is no stranger to India and its culmination in scale and magnitude during the 2010 Commonwealth Games subjected the government to global shame and scorn. The Indian government ended up spending 18-fold more than the \$400 million originally allocated in 2003 for the Games, an amount that supposedly could have funded three Olympic Games. It is deeply disturbing to find corruption of such magnitude in a country whose poverty line, according to World Bank figures (2005), is very low by international standards, and where 80 percent of the rural population lives below the median developing-country poverty line of \$2 a day. Several trillion dollars of unaccounted for money remains locked in Swiss banks which the Indian government is finding hard to retrieve. Post-Games, the first major action taken by the Government was to demand the resignation of two top officials, the Organizing Committee Chairman, Suresh Kalmadi, and Secretary General, Lalit Bhanot. Both Kalmadi and Bhanot have since been arrested, and are being interrogated by the investigation agencies. Today, corruption plagues all major Indian sports, including cricket, hockey, weightlifting, and athletics. The first major sporting scandal was reported during the 1990s, involving match-fixing by Indian cricketers through a Protean bookie, Mukesh Gupta. This scandal led to the fall from grace of cricketing demi-gods, namely, the then skipper Mohammad Azharuddin, Ajay Jadeja, Manoj Prabhakar, Nayan Mongia and Ajay Sharma. As the scandal unfolded, several international cricketers were also linked, including Hansie Conje (South Africa), Arjuna Ranatunga (Sri Lanka), Arvinda de Silva (Sri Lanka), Brian Lara (West Indies), Martin Crowe (New Zealand), Dean Jones (Australia), Mark Waugh (Australia), Shane Warne (Australia), Salem Malik (Pakistan) and Alec Stewart (England). The decision by the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) to ban Azharuddin for life and Ajay Jadeja for 5 years sent a strong message to Indian cricketers, and match-fixing scandals have reduced drastically. It should be noted, however, that BCCI’s own dubious record over the years has impeded its authority to be more forthright in checking corruption.

Now corruption has a new avatar, in the shape of a \$4 billion Indian Premier League (IPL), which has seen its former Commissioner, Lalit Modi, resign and flee to London over charges of gross financial irregularities. The 2010 IPL franchise bidding process also led to the resignation of Shashi Tharoor, Minister of State for External Affairs, whose friend and current wife, Sunanda Pushkar, was alleged to have received \$15 million in ‘sweat equity’ from one of the franchises.

In recent years, the BCCI has also been marred by financial irregularities and bitter turf wars between different lobby groups. Nonetheless, BCCI's mammoth financial clout has given it a dominating influence in the International Cricket Council (ICC) decision-making, much to the resentment of other international cricket boards. This influence is further augmented by the political weight that the BCCI holds nationally. It is currently headed by Sharad Pawar, a Minister and leading political heavy-weight in Indian politics, who is also President of the ICC.

In June 2010, appalled by the Commonwealth Games corruption scandal, former Indian Olympians launched the Group of Clean Sports India to raise public awareness and fight corruption in sports. In a short time-span, the group has enlarged its support base and campaigned hard to oppose politicians with no sports background from entering and contesting for executive positions in sports bodies. Recently the group succeeded in persuading Pallam Raju, Minister of State for Defense, to withdraw from the race for President of the Equestrian Federation of India. But in a setback for the group, the President of Clean Sports India, Pargat Singh, a former hockey skipper, lost to the 83 year old veteran Congress politician, Vidya Stokes, in the election for President of the Indian Hockey Federation; this example illustrates the extent of political hold on sporting bodies in India. However, the success of former cricketers with high credentials and reputation, Anil Kumble and Javagal Srinath, in getting elected to the Karnataka State Cricket Association augurs well for Indian cricket, and hopefully will lead to similar credible appointments in hockey.

In the meantime, the state of Indian hockey continues to be abysmal. Former world champions and Olympic gold medalist, India now struggles to even win Asian tournaments. Indian Hockey Federation (IHF) President, K.P.S. Gill, a former Indian police officer, has been officiating for many years. Gill's long-term appointment has divided the Federation, the hockey fraternity and players, and over time, has significantly affected the team's performance. The IHF is also involved in a fierce spat with the Women's Federation and Hockey India (HI) over the merger modalities. IHF's labeling of HI officials as 'highly corrupt' has caused a great deal of squabbling in the media. The 2010 Women's Hockey World Cup, held in New Delhi, was hit by a financial corruption scandal involving the Federation of International Hockey (FIH), Indian Olympic Association (IOA) and HI. Suresh Kalmadi, the IOA chief, was again said to be involved in financial corruption during arrangements for the World Cup. IHF, too, was suspended in 2008 by the IOA over an alleged bribery for selection scandal. In addition, sex scandals involving the coach of the women's hockey team, and favoritism and bribery for selection in the men's team, have tarnished the image of both the federations and brought Indian hockey to an all-time low.

In weightlifting, while India has produced world class lifters, the sport has also had its own share of scandals and controversies. In 2005, a bribe scandal surfaced over the selection of dope-tainted lifter, Shailja Pujari, in the Beijing Olympic squad. In July 2010, the Indian Weightlifting Federation had to suspend its coach, Ramesh Malhotra, over charges of sexually harassing junior lifters.

In July 2011, the Indian Sports Ministry sacked Yuri Ogorodnik, the Ukrainian coach of Indian Athletics, after six

female 400 meter runners, a female shot-putter and a male long-jumper all returned positive results in doping tests, marking the rapidly growing trend of banned substance abuse among Indian athletes.

During the Commonwealth Games, the lack of suitable legislation for the organization of mega sport events deeply affected India's objectives, in contrast to other international models, such as the Sydney Olympics 2000, Melbourne Commonwealth Games 2006, Glasgow Commonwealth Games 2014 and London Olympics 2012. These models enshrine appropriate Legislations to regulate the functioning of organizing committees and judicious dealing with key issues such as transport, ticketing, land acquisition, intellectual property, broadcasting and licensing rights.

Nevertheless, a look back to antique sport nevertheless demonstrates that the idea is far from new. In the classical Olympic Games, corrupt athletes were sentenced to stringent fines and were obliged to finance the construction of so-called "pillars of shame" ("zanes"), which were positioned at the entrance to the Olympic Stadium. These pillars were crafted from the finest materials by famous artists and cost a fortune, ensuring a high pecuniary penalty. If the athletes were unable to pay, their home town had to pay in their place. The pillars were built "for all eternity", and their remains can indeed still be seen in Olympia today. The Inscriptions contain the names of the corrupt athletes, their crimes and a moral lesson: in addition to the pecuniary loss, the delinquents bear a loss of reputation that tends towards the infinite. While the government fails in the first instance to weed out systemic corruption, the prospect of clean sports appears grim. The Indian government is currently at loggerheads with a civil society movement spearheaded by veteran social activist, Anna Hazare, over the passing of the Jan Lokpal Bill in 2011 for the creation of a Lokpal (Ombudsman). The Bill was aimed at fighting corruption in government offices and the judicial machinery, and also covers various sports bodies. On the policy front, in 2011, the Indian Government has proposed a National Sports Bill to curb corruption and ensure that all sport federations comply with the Olympics Charter by subjecting their offices to annual audits. The Bill provides for a Sports Ombudsman to resolve disputes in sports, prevent age and sex fraud and doping, and to make all sports bodies comply with the Right to Information Act, 2005.

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