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Ready, Set, Innovate: How Sports Can Become India’s Next Intellectual Property Powerhouse

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PUBLISHED 7 May 2026

A policy and business commentary on sports, innovation and IP-led growth based on PIB Release ID 2256352, posted on 28 April 2026

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Abstract

Sport is no longer only a field of play; it is a field of innovation, manufacturing, design, technology, branding and national identity. The Government's announcement of a three-year fee waiver for sports-related intellectual property registrations, together with the call to convert ideas into IP assets and the launch of the Viksit Bharat Digital Matrix 2026 Design Hackathon, signals a larger shift in India's innovation policy. It recognises that every bat, jersey, training device, sports format, wearable, brand name, broadcast asset and local craft can become part of an IP-led sports economy.

This article argues that India's sporting future will be shaped by athletes, and by designers, engineers, manufacturers, students, start-ups, artisans, coaches, data scientists and local communities. If sports infrastructure creates participation, intellectual property creates value. If sporting success inspires confidence, innovation converts that confidence into enterprise. The next phase of India's sports story must therefore connect talent with technology, craft with commerce, and grassroots participation with globally protected IP assets.

The Big Signal: Sports as Health, Industry and Innovation

Policy Signal	Why It Matters
Three-year fee waiver for sports-related IP	Makes IP registration more accessible for sports innovators, students, artisans, start-ups and stakeholders.
Promotion of Kashmir willow bat and GI strength	Shows how local craftsmanship can be protected, branded and positioned in global markets.
Sports manufacturing clusters	Links sporting culture with domestic production, regional livelihoods and local value chains.
Smart wearables hackathon	Places technology, design and IP at the centre of sports performance, wellness and everyday innovation.
CSR-led sports infrastructure	Encourages private participation in creating open gyms, facilities and access in remote areas.
Responsible endorsements	Recognises that sports commerce must be supported by ethical advertising and consumer trust.

I. Beyond the Stadium: Why Sports Must Be Seen as Nation-Building

Sports are often celebrated for medals, matches and moments of national pride. But their deeper importance lies in what they do to society. They build discipline, resilience, teamwork, physical fitness, mental strength and confidence. They give young people a language of aspiration that is not confined to classrooms. They can bring remote regions into national imagination, create livelihood pathways, and turn local talent into visible public achievement.

The felicitation of the Jammu and Kashmir Ranji Trophy team in the same programme is significant in this context. The victory was not treated merely as a cricketing result, but as a symbol of renewed confidence and opportunity. When a team from a region breaks through after decades and defeats an established champion, the message travels beyond sport: opportunity can emerge from places historically seen as peripheral, and talent can rise when infrastructure, belief and platforms converge.

This is why sports policy cannot be viewed only through the lens of elite performance. A serious sports ecosystem must include school-level participation, community spaces, coaching systems, nutrition, safe infrastructure, local manufacturing, women's participation, para-sports, digital training tools and market linkages. Sport becomes transformational when it moves from the margins of recreation to the centre of public policy.

II. IP and Sports: The Missing Link Between Talent and Value

The announcement of a three-year fee waiver for sports-related IP registrations is important because it lowers the entry barrier for converting sporting creativity into legally protected assets. The waiver covers sports-related trademarks, copyrights, patents, designs, traditional knowledge and geographical indications. This is not a narrow administrative relief; it is an invitation to treat sports ideas as protectable value.

In the sports economy, IP appears everywhere. A team name may be a trademark. A training manual may attract copyright. A smart wearable may involve patents and designs. A new sports format may require brand and media protection. A local sports product, such as the Kashmir willow bat, may draw strength from geographical indication and craft identity. Even the visual design of equipment, merchandise, mascots and performance technology can be part of an IP portfolio.

The future of Indian sport will not be built only by those who play the game, but also by those who design the equipment, code the analytics, build the wearables, brand the leagues, protect the craft and take Indian sporting innovation to global markets.

III. From Kashmir Willow to Global Craft: Local Products, Global Identity

The reference to the GI-tagged Kashmir willow cricket bat is especially powerful. It shows that sports innovation does not always begin in a laboratory. Sometimes it begins in a region, a craft tradition, a material ecosystem and the hands of skilled makers. A GI tag can help preserve authenticity, distinguish origin-linked quality and create a foundation for premium positioning in domestic and international markets.

The policy challenge is to ensure that such recognition does not remain symbolic. Craft-based sports products require quality standardisation, branding support, modern packaging, export readiness, e-commerce access, anti-counterfeiting protection and institutional marketing. The Kashmir willow example therefore reflects a wider possibility: India can build sports brands from its regions, not only from its metros.

IV. Manufacturing Clusters: Where Sports Meets Make in India

The call for sports manufacturing clusters in regions such as Jammu and Kashmir and Meerut is a crucial industrial signal. Sports equipment is not merely a consumer product category; it is an ecosystem of materials, design, testing, safety standards, branding, distribution and export. Bats, balls, hockey equipment, gym equipment, training aids and protective gear can generate employment while strengthening domestic production capacity.

For such clusters to succeed, they must not be treated as ordinary industrial estates. They require design labs, testing facilities, certification support, common branding platforms, export facilitation, IP clinics, skilling centres and linkages with athletes and coaches. The most successful sports goods ecosystems globally combine manufacturing know-how with design feedback from real users. India can do the same by linking local producers with schools, academies, federations, start-ups and professional leagues.

"Reiterating the Government's vision, the Minister highlighted the guiding principle of "innovate, patent, produce and prosper," encouraging stakeholders to develop ideas, secure IP rights, scale production, and access global markets."

V. Innovation on the Body: Smart Wearables and the New Sports Science

The launch of the Viksit Bharat Digital Matrix 2026 Design Hackathon on smart wearables reflects a forward-looking shift. Sports performance is increasingly shaped by data: heart rate, recovery, movement, fatigue, speed, sleep, balance, biomechanics and injury risk. Wearables can democratise access to such insights, making performance science available to elite athletes and to students, fitness users, senior citizens, rehabilitation patients and community sports programmes.

The deeper significance of the hackathon lies in the convergence of technology, design and intellectual property. A wearable must be functional, accurate and safe, but it must also be comfortable, affordable and aesthetically usable. Its value may lie in patents, industrial designs, software, data systems, branding and user interface. In this sense, smart wearables represent the new grammar of sports innovation: interdisciplinary, IP-driven and market-ready.

VI. Sports, Start-ups and Students: A New Classroom of Innovation

The announcement specifically recognises innovators, students, artisans and stakeholders. This is important because the sports economy should not be limited to large corporations or professional franchises. Students can design low-cost training aids. Engineering colleges can build affordable wearables. Design institutes can improve sports equipment ergonomics. Start-ups can create analytics platforms, fan engagement tools, injury-prevention devices and community sports applications. Artisans can modernise traditional sports goods without losing authenticity.

The most inspiring part of this policy direction is that it treats the young citizen as a player or spectator, and as a creator. It tells students that an idea from a dorm room, workshop, playground or local manufacturing unit can become an IP asset. It tells start-ups that sports is not a seasonal entertainment industry, but a serious innovation market.

VII. The Economics of Play: Why Sports Is Also Business

The PIB release notes the economic potential of sports and the growth in valuation of franchise-based cricket teams over the past 18 years. This reflects a global truth: sports economies are built through layered revenue streams, including broadcasting, sponsorship, merchandising, ticketing, technology, licensing, fantasy sports, training infrastructure, equipment, tourism and digital communities.

But economic growth in sports should not be captured only by elite leagues. A balanced sports economy must also support grassroots academies, local tournaments, community infrastructure, women's leagues, para-sports, coaching livelihoods and regional manufacturing. Intellectual property can help formalise this ecosystem by giving creators ownership, licensing opportunities and bargaining power.

VIII. Responsible Endorsements: Protecting Trust in the Sports Marketplace

The caution on responsible endorsements, especially in areas such as nutrition and supplements, is a timely reminder that sports commerce must be grounded in trust. Athletes and influencers carry persuasive power. When they endorse products, especially those related to health, nutrition, fitness or performance, the impact on consumers can be significant. Misleading advertising in this space can harm both consumers and the credibility of sport itself.

A mature sports economy therefore needs ethical endorsements, evidence-based claims, responsible influencer conduct and stronger consumer awareness. Innovation must be protected, but it must also be honest. The credibility of the sports marketplace depends on this balance.

IX. CSR and Sports Infrastructure: Taking Opportunity to the Last Mile

The call for greater use of CSR funds for sports development is also significant. Infrastructure remains one of the most important barriers to sports participation. Open gyms, community grounds, school facilities, basic training spaces, lighting, safe surfaces and inclusive access can make a major difference, especially in remote or underserved areas.

CSR-led sports infrastructure can be powerful when it is designed with local needs in mind. The aim should not be only to build facilities, but to create usable, maintained and inclusive spaces. When communities have access to safe sports infrastructure, children develop healthier habits, young athletes get early exposure, and sport becomes part of daily life rather than an occasional event.

X. Author's View: India Must Build an IP-Enabled Sports Nation

In the author's view, the announcement marks an important step in connecting three national priorities: sports participation, innovation and intellectual property. The fee waiver can reduce the hesitation that many students, start-ups, artisans and small manufacturers face in entering the IP system. However, the next challenge is implementation. The promise of the policy will depend on awareness campaigns, simple filing support, legal facilitation, regional IP helpdesks, industry-academia collaboration and credible pathways from registration to commercialisation.

India should use this moment to build an IP-enabled sports nation. That means protecting local craft, encouraging school and college innovation, supporting sports-tech start-ups, strengthening manufacturing clusters, expanding sports infrastructure and promoting ethical sports commerce. If India can connect playgrounds with laboratories, local workshops with global markets, and young ideas with formal IP protection, sports can become one of the most inclusive engines of national innovation.

Conclusion: The New Indian Sports Dream

The phrase "Ready, Set, Innovate" captures the spirit of the moment. India's sports future will not be defined only by medals won, but by ecosystems created. It will be defined by whether a child in a small town can access a playing field, whether a student can design a wearable, whether an artisan can protect a regional product, whether a start-up can patent a training device, whether a manufacturer can export world-class equipment, and whether athletes can inspire responsibly.

Sports teach movement. Innovation gives that movement direction. Intellectual property gives it ownership. Together, they can transform India from a nation of passionate sports consumers into a nation of sports creators, manufacturers, innovators and global competitors. The opportunity is not merely to play more; it is to build more, protect more, produce more and inspire more.

For more details, write to us at: contact@indialaw.in

Reference:

[PIB Release ID: 2256352] Union Minister of Commerce and Industry Shri Piyush Goyal Announces 3-Year Fee Waiver for Sports-Related IP Registrations on World IP Day, 28 APR 2026

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