

Experts Speak

ETHICAL PRACTICES IN LEAGUE GAMING IN INDIA

Concept Note

The Indian sports environment has been abuzz with activity in recent years. According to reports, sports sponsorship has grown 12.3% to a whopping INR 5,185.4 crore (~US\$800 million) in 2015 from a modest INR 4616.5 crore (~US\$700 million) in 2014. Especially, the brand value of the Indian Premier League (IPL) has been around US\$ 4 billion. According to the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI), the 2015 IPL season contributed to around INR 1,150 crore (~US\$170 million) to India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). There is a substantial increase in the private investment in the sport, combined with the resultant appreciation of the importance of public trust in authenticity of results. Of late it has been seen that Industrial houses and even Film Stars of the glamour world have come up to participate into sports sponsorship in a big way. Above all, the issue of participant-integrity in league gaming has come to the forefront.



By: Upasana

When Penguins try to play Table Tennis

Almost every quarter, a new private sports league is announced. The Hockey India League (HIL), founded in 2013 and organized by Hockey India, is a professional field hockey league and also the governing body for the sport in India. HIL, along with other leagues like the Indian Premier League, Indian Super League, and Pro-Kabaddi League, is considered one of the major sports leagues in the country. Since beginning, the league has proven to be a financial success for Hockey India, who were in financial disarray before the league began.

The Indian Super League (ISL), founded in 2013 as men's professional football league, serves as one of the top tournaments in India today. It is formed in an effort to make football a top sport in India and to increase the level of participation and recognition of Indian football worldwide.

The Premier Badminton League (PBL) is managed and commercially owned by the Badminton Association of India (BAI) founded in 2013.

Indigenous games like Kabaddi are also gaining global acceptance slowly. Apart from the rising powers like Iran and South Korea, teams like United States of America, Kenya, who are total beginners to the sport have expressed a keen desire to establish a league on the same lines as that of the immensely popular Indian Pro-Kabaddi League. This brings to the fore, the issue of 'India as a role model' in setting the trend in terms of the ethical standards and the overall impartial quality of league games.

However, given the increasing incidence of match-fixing, doping practices, age fraud, gender and sexual harassment, etc., Indian sport is no longer a stranger to challenges of integrity. Ever since IPL emerged, its credibility has not only been called into question by fixing allegations, but various other related events in the league have also had a domino effect, with the outcrop being the Supreme Court-appointed Lodha Committee that recommended for a complete overhaul of the Indian cricket management.

Cricket is the most admired game in India, having a following of more than a million obsessive fans, with an unquestioning belief in the commitment of cricketers. For them, to know that some of the losses which caused so much pain were manufactured as were some of the sweet victories made, gives an impression that the game had lost its meaning abysmally. With scripted and tailored performances "to fashion a specific result", some of the league games "have made a mockery" of its fans' most impassioned feelings. The short format of the league matches has however attracted everyone with its colourful entertainment and the glamour seems more prone to manufactured rules, arbitrary conventions, invented pursuits, arcane skills, etc. Cricket may only be a game, but the emotional highs and lows that it generates necessitate stringent authoritative oversight.

On the other hand, the excessive enthusiasm by the consumers of sport has created a sense of entitlement in those that perform at their behest. The players now seem to have become (well-paid) slaves or puppets whose strings are drawn by the popularity

of the sport. As aptly says Santosh Desai, “sport which is conceived of as a theatre or platform where human abilities would find their purest expression, has now been gradually dragged back into the real world, by making it the conduit to everything it was designed to be detached from. The external worldly pressure creates the motive for the cheating as well as the reason for treating the infraction as a crime.” But, is cheating at sports such a terrible crime in the legal sense of the word?

Numerous attempts have been made in the past, addressing the serious issues of unscrupulous sports practices in India. The latest of these efforts being the National Sports Ethics Commission Bill, 2016 that sets out to achieve “the purpose of fair play, a conducive environment for sports and justice to those wronged by others” by creating a set of new criminal offences and penalties relating to participant-integrity in sports – in short, establishing a formal mechanism for adjudication of sports disputes through creation of a national commission. The Bill requiring the central government to constitute a National Sports Ethics Commission to oversee and enforce the various Codes of Ethics that sport federations are mandated to frame, aims to formulate measures towards the elimination of such malpractices. Prior to this bill, the National Sports Development Bill 2013 attempted to bring certain governance structures to all national sports federations, including the issue of sports ethics. Further, the National Sports Development Code of India 2011 attempted to rationalise sports practice in the same manner but of not much help.

This Liberal Studies journal takes this opportunity to invite expert opinions on this intriguing issue from scholars to ponder over the future of league gaming in India as also the consequent governmental responses and actions to uplift the moral standard of sports in the country.



By: Rajshree