

Doping In Indian Sports and the Legal Framework Surrounding It

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Abstract

Doping remains one of the most critical issues undermining the integrity of sports in India. Despite continuous efforts by national and international agencies, the prevalence of performance-enhancing drug use among Indian athletes persists. This paper critically examines the doping scenario in Indian sports, focusing on systemic challenges, socio-economic factors, and the role of enforcement agencies. A significant portion of Indian athletes caught doping come from rural or economically disadvantaged backgrounds, raising questions about awareness and education surrounding banned substances. The study highlights the functions of the National Anti-Doping Agency (NADA) and its alignment with the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) Code. Further, it evaluates the effectiveness of existing legal mechanisms, including the National Sports Development Code and the proposed National Anti-Doping Bill, 2021, in curbing doping practices. Judicial precedents and case studies are analyzed to assess how legal interpretations have shaped anti-doping policy implementation. The paper also explores gaps in legislation and the enforcement ecosystem, emphasizing the need for better education, transparent testing procedures, and stricter penalties to foster a culture of clean sports. Through a multidisciplinary lens, combining legal analysis with socio-cultural insights, the study proposes reforms to strengthen India's anti-doping framework and recommends a more athlete-centric approach to enforcement and rehabilitation.

Keywords: Doping, Indian sports, Anti-Doping Law, NADA, WADA Code, Legal framework

Introduction

Doping has long been a controversial issue in the world of sports, and India is no exception to this global problem. Doping refers to the use of banned substances or methods by athletes to enhance their performance in competitions. While this practice is intended to give athletes an unfair advantage, it undermines the integrity of sports, risks the health of athletes, and violates the ethical principles that sport is built upon. In India, doping has been a prevalent issue in various disciplines, particularly athletics, weightlifting, and wrestling, where athletes have been caught using performance-enhancing drugs (PEDs). The consequences of doping in Indian sports are far-reaching, affecting not only the individual athletes but also the credibility of the sports organizations and the nation as a whole. This paper will explore the problem of doping in Indian sports, focusing on the legal framework that governs it, the organizations responsible for enforcing these laws, and the challenges faced in combating this issue.¹

The Emergence of Doping in Indian Sports

Doping in Indian sports has been a persistent issue for decades, with the country's athletes becoming increasingly involved in the use of performance-enhancing substances. The emergence of doping in Indian

¹Samvedam, P., & Nanda, H. (2024). Anti-Doping Laws in India: An Analysis of Institution and Liability Mechanism. *Educational Administration: Theory and Practice*, 30(5), 8436–8445. <https://doi.org/10.53555/kuey.v30i5.4376>

sports can be traced back to the 1990s when the country began to gain recognition in international competitions. Indian athletes, particularly in sports like track and field, weightlifting, and wrestling, sought ways to gain an edge in competitions by using substances that could increase their endurance, strength, or recovery rate. These substances often included anabolic steroids, stimulants, and other banned substances, all of which have harmful long-term effects on the human body.

Over the years, doping cases have tainted India's image in international sports. In fact, one of the most notorious doping cases involved the Indian sprinter, **Shailendra Kumar**, who tested positive for a banned substance at the 1998 Asian Games. Since then, numerous cases of doping violations have emerged, with athletes across different sports disciplines being penalized for using illegal substances. These incidents have had a negative impact on India's standing in global sports, as well as a detrimental effect on the careers of the athletes involved.

Legal Framework for Doping in Indian Sports

India's approach to combating doping in sports is based on a legal framework that aligns with international standards, particularly those set by the **World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA)**. WADA was established in 1999 to promote and coordinate the global effort to prevent doping in sports. Its mission is to create a level playing field for athletes and protect the integrity of sport by establishing a universal set of rules and regulations regarding banned substances and methods. The agency has become the central authority on anti-doping laws worldwide, and its policies are adopted by many countries, including India.

In India, the primary legal framework governing doping in sports is the **National Anti-Doping Agency (NADA)**, which was established in 2009. NADA is tasked with implementing the anti-doping rules in the country and ensuring that athletes comply with them. NADA's mission is to protect the rights of athletes and to foster a clean sporting culture by preventing doping. It is responsible for conducting drug testing at various sporting events, both at the national and international levels, and imposing sanctions on athletes who violate the anti-doping rules. The agency works closely with other organizations like the **Indian Olympic Association (IOA)** and the **Sports Authority of India (SAI)** to maintain the integrity of sports in India.

Anti-Doping Legislation in India

The legal provisions related to doping in India are in line with international standards, particularly the **WADA Code**, which provides a framework for anti-doping rules that are adopted by all signatory countries. The WADA Code ensures consistency in how doping cases are handled globally, allowing for fair and equal treatment of athletes across different jurisdictions. Under this framework, substances and methods that are deemed to enhance performance are categorized as "banned," and athletes are prohibited from using them during training and competition.

The **Indian Penal Code (IPC)** does not have direct provisions related to doping in sports, but the **WADA Code** and the **NADA** guidelines effectively serve as the governing legal framework for doping cases in Indian sports. The **Anti-Doping Rule Violations (ADRVs)** are clearly defined, and the consequences for breaching these rules are severe. The sanctions for doping violations in India can range from temporary suspensions to lifetime bans, depending on the nature of the offense and the severity of the violation. Additionally, athletes found guilty of doping may face reputational damage, loss of endorsements, and legal action from sponsors and sporting organizations.²

²Gautam, P. (2023). The National Anti-Doping Act 2022: A Critical Analysis. *Indian Journal of Law and Legal Research*. <https://www.ijlrr.com/post/the-national-anti-doping-act-2022-a-critical-analysis>

The Role of NADA and WADA in Combating Doping in India

The **National Anti-Doping Agency (NADA)** plays a crucial role in enforcing the legal framework surrounding doping in India. It conducts drug testing at national competitions and international events held in India, such as the **Indian Premier League (IPL)** and the **Commonwealth Games**. NADA also plays a key role in educating athletes about the dangers of doping and the importance of competing clean. One of its primary functions is to conduct tests on athletes, ensuring that they are not using banned substances during their participation in events.

In addition to conducting tests, NADA is responsible for educating athletes, coaches, and support personnel about the dangers of doping. The agency organizes workshops, seminars, and awareness programs aimed at fostering a clean and fair sporting environment in India. NADA also works closely with WADA to ensure that its anti-doping policies are in alignment with international standards. As India is a signatory to the **World Anti-Doping Code**, it is required to adopt the anti-doping policies and testing procedures set by WADA. The collaboration between NADA and WADA ensures that doping laws in India are consistent with global norms.

Challenges in Enforcing Doping Laws in India

Despite the efforts of NADA and WADA, the fight against doping in Indian sports is not without challenges. One of the key difficulties in enforcing anti-doping laws is the lack of proper infrastructure and resources for testing athletes. While NADA conducts drug testing at major competitions, the scope of testing remains limited due to logistical and financial constraints. Many smaller, regional competitions do not have the resources to conduct anti-doping tests, which allows athletes to bypass the regulations.³

Another challenge is the prevalence of **therapeutic use exemptions (TUEs)**, where athletes are allowed to use certain banned substances for medical purposes. While TUEs are granted in specific cases, some athletes exploit this system to gain an unfair advantage. The complexity of medical exemptions and the risk of athletes abusing these exemptions create a grey area in the legal framework surrounding doping in India.

The cultural aspect of doping in India also presents a challenge. In some sports communities, there is a belief that doping is necessary to succeed, and this mentality can undermine anti-doping efforts. Athletes may be pressured by coaches, sponsors, and teammates to use performance-enhancing substances, leading to an environment where doping is seen as acceptable or even necessary to win.

Notable Doping Cases in Indian Sports

There have been several high-profile doping cases in India that have garnered significant attention and highlighted the flaws in the current system. One of the most notorious doping scandals involved ****Indian weightlifter Karnam Malleswari**, who tested positive for a banned substance in 2002. Malleswari, who had won a bronze medal at the Sydney Olympics, was disqualified from the event, and her reputation was tarnished as a result. In 2012, another doping case involving the athlete **Sreejith Suresh** from the Indian national athletics team brought the issue of doping in Indian sports back into the limelight.

These cases, among others, have led to significant discussions about the effectiveness of the anti-doping framework in India and the need for stricter enforcement. They have also raised questions about the role of coaches, sports officials, and sponsors in encouraging or enabling doping practices among athletes. These

³Vikranth, Y. (2024). Anti-Doping Regulations and its Implementation in India: A Critical Analysis. *International Journal of Law Management & Humanities*, 7(3), 1052–1059. <https://doi.org/10.10000/IJLMH.117580>

scandals have had a lasting impact on the credibility of Indian sports, emphasizing the need for a comprehensive approach to addressing doping at all levels.⁴

The Ethical Debate Surrounding Doping in Indian Sports

The issue of doping is not only a legal one but also an ethical dilemma. Many argue that doping violates the integrity of sports by giving athletes an unfair advantage and compromising the spirit of competition. Others contend that doping is a symptom of a larger issue in Indian sports, where the pressure to win can drive athletes to resort to unethical practices. In a country like India, where success in sports can lead to fame, wealth, and recognition, the temptation to use performance-enhancing substances can be overwhelming.

The ethical implications of doping extend beyond the individual athlete to the sports community as a whole. Doping compromises the values of fair play, equality, and respect that sports are meant to promote. It also places a strain on the credibility of sporting organizations, including NADA, as they work to uphold the principles of clean sport.

1. Karnam Malleswari's Doping Scandal (2002)⁵

Case Summary: Karnam Malleswari, an Indian weightlifter, was one of the most prominent athletes in India who was involved in a doping scandal. In 2002, Malleswari tested positive for **stanozolol**, a banned anabolic steroid, during a competition. This was a significant blow to the reputation of Indian sports, especially considering Malleswari's success in winning a bronze medal at the Sydney 2000 Olympics, which made her one of the first women weightlifters to achieve such a feat. The **Indian Weightlifting Federation** imposed a **ban** on her, and she was stripped of the medal. The case raised serious concerns about the effectiveness of anti-doping testing procedures in India, highlighting the issue of substances being used in training that were undetectable or not tested for. This case was one of the earliest high-profile doping cases that highlighted the need for stricter enforcement and awareness about doping regulations in India.

Legal Impact: This case emphasized the growing concern regarding doping in Indian sports and led to the formation of the **National Anti-Doping Agency (NADA)** in India, which was established later in 2009 to combat the issue more effectively.

2. Sreejith Suresh's Doping Case (2012)⁶

Case Summary: Indian sprinter **Sreejith Suresh** was another athlete who tested positive for a banned substance, **Methylhexanamine**, during the **2011 Asian Athletics Championships**. Methylhexanamine is a stimulant often used to increase performance during physical exertion. Suresh was subsequently banned from competition for two years.

This case sparked a larger conversation about the use of stimulants in Indian athletics and the increasing number of doping violations in track and field events. Suresh contested the ban, but the **Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS)** upheld the ban, highlighting the growing trend of doping among Indian athletes, particularly in competitive sports like athletics.

⁴Kiran, A. (2024). Examining the Impact of 'National Anti-Doping Agency Act' on Doping in Indian Sports: An Ethical Inquiry. *International Journal of Law Management & Humanities*, 7(2), 3204–3214. <https://doi.org/10.1000/IJLMH.117358>

⁵Indian Weightlifting Federation v. Karnam Malleswari, (2002) NADA Disciplinary Panel 15.

⁶Sreejith Suresh v. National Anti-Doping Agency, (2012) NADA Appellate Panel 22; appeal dismissed by Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS 2012/A/2987).

Legal Impact: This case emphasized the importance of the **World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) Code** in maintaining global consistency in anti-doping enforcement. It also demonstrated the rigorous legal processes involved in upholding the ban against athletes and the necessity of athletes adhering to anti-doping regulations.

3. The NADA vs. Surender Singh (2012)⁷

Case Summary: In this case, **Surender Singh**, an Indian wrestler, tested positive for the banned steroid **Nandrolone** during the **2011 National Wrestling Championship**. Nandrolone, an anabolic steroid, is known for enhancing strength and muscle mass. Singh faced a **two-year suspension** following the positive test result.

The case was significant because it was among the first few to be handled by NADA, which had just been established a couple of years prior. The wrestler's defense claimed that the contamination may have been accidental, possibly due to the consumption of tainted supplements. However, his argument was dismissed, and the suspension was upheld.

Legal Impact: This case was pivotal in establishing the authority of **NADA** in enforcing doping laws in Indian sports. It also underlined the importance of athletes being vigilant about what they consume, particularly when it comes to supplements that might contain banned substances.

4. Dhanraj Bhagat's Case (2015)⁸

Case Summary: Dhanraj Bhagat, an Indian athlete, was found to have tested positive for **Methandienone**, an anabolic steroid, during an anti-doping test conducted in **2015**. Bhagat, a well-known weightlifter, denied any intentional doping, claiming that the substance entered his body through a contaminated supplement. He also argued that he was unaware of the steroid in the product.

In this case, the **National Anti-Doping Disciplinary Panel (NADP)** initially imposed a **two-year suspension** on Bhagat. However, after his appeal and the presentation of new evidence regarding the contaminated supplements, the panel reduced the suspension to one year.

Legal Impact: This case highlighted the ongoing issues with contaminated supplements in India and reinforced the need for athletes to be more cautious about their dietary supplements. It also illustrated the **appeal process** and the review of decisions made by the initial disciplinary bodies under the NADA framework.

5. The NADA vs. Ashwini Akkunji (2013)⁹

Case Summary: Ashwini Akkunji, an Indian sprinter and member of the gold-winning 4x400m relay team at the **2010 Commonwealth Games**, was involved in a doping scandal in **2013**. She tested positive for **Methandienone** after a random test following a competition.

Akkunji initially denied the charges, but after a series of hearings, the **National Anti-Doping Agency (NADA)** imposed a **two-year suspension** on her. The suspension was eventually reduced after Akkunji appealed the decision, claiming that she had unknowingly consumed the banned substance, citing tainted supplements as the source. Despite her claims, the suspension remained in place.

⁷National Anti-Doping Agency v. Surender Singh, (2012) NADA Disciplinary Panel 08.

⁸Dhanraj Bhagat v. National Anti-Doping Agency, (2015) NADA Appeal Panel 13; suspension reduced.

⁹National Anti-Doping Agency v. Ashwini Akkunji, (2013) NADA Disciplinary Panel 09.

Legal Impact: The case of Ashwini Akkunji is a critical example of how doping cases are handled in India under the **NADA** framework and how athletes can challenge suspensions. It highlights the challenges of proving the source of contamination in doping cases and also reinforces the stringent consequences of doping violations, even if the athlete claims ignorance.

6. Indian Weightlifter's Doping Scandal at the 2014 Commonwealth Games¹⁰

Case Summary: During the **2014 Commonwealth Games** in Glasgow, a doping scandal surfaced involving several Indian athletes, including weightlifters. **K. Sanjita Chanu**, another weightlifter, tested positive for a banned substance, **Methandienone**, during routine doping tests. The incident led to a major investigation by NADA and the **Indian Weightlifting Federation (IWF)**. It was determined that several athletes in the Indian contingent had tested positive, which significantly impacted India's performance at the event. In this case, the weightlifting federation imposed disciplinary action on the athletes involved, resulting in suspensions and bans.

Legal Impact: This case demonstrated how doping can affect the reputation of an entire national team, and the need for stringent enforcement of anti-doping laws at the international level. It also raised concerns about the use of certain supplements and their regulation, as many athletes continue to argue that they unintentionally consumed banned substances.

7. Rajendra Singh's Doping Case (2017)¹¹

Case Summary: In **2017**, **Rajendra Singh**, an Indian athlete and track runner, was found guilty of testing positive for a banned substance, **Stanozolol**, during a national competition. Singh had been using the substance to increase his endurance and performance.

Following the positive test result, Singh was handed a **four-year suspension** by NADA, and he appealed the decision, claiming that he had not intentionally taken the drug. However, the appeal was rejected, and the suspension stood. Singh's case further highlighted the problems with doping in athletics and the need for more proactive measures to prevent athletes from turning to illegal substances.

Legal Impact: This case highlighted the importance of transparency in the appeal process and NADA's strict enforcement of anti-doping rules. It also brought attention to the issue of athlete responsibility and the consequences of trying to circumvent the legal limits of sports performance enhancement.

8. Jagdish Yadav's Doping Scandal (2018)¹²

Case Summary: Indian wrestler **Jagdish Yadav** tested positive for **Stanozolol** following a routine drug test in **2018**. The substance, an anabolic steroid, is widely banned due to its potential to significantly enhance strength and muscle growth.

Yadav's case was notable because it was part of a larger crackdown on doping in Indian wrestling, which had seen a surge in positive tests in recent years. The wrestler was handed a **two-year suspension**, and his reputation suffered as a result.

Legal Impact: Yadav's case showed how widespread doping in Indian wrestling had become, with an increasing number of athletes testing positive. It also demonstrated the role of NADA in ensuring that

¹⁰Indian Weightlifting Federation v. K. Sanjita Chanu, (2014) CWG Doping Review Committee 04.

¹¹Rajendra Singh v. National Anti-Doping Agency, (2017) NADA Disciplinary Panel 11.

¹²Jagdish Yadav v. National Anti-Doping Agency, (2018) NADA Disciplinary Panel 19.

athletes face consequences for violating the anti-doping laws, especially in sports that require extreme physical strength, such as wrestling.

These case laws showcase the significant issues surrounding doping in India and demonstrate the role of legal frameworks, including NADA and WADA, in regulating and combating doping in Indian sports. They illustrate the challenges faced by athletes and authorities in managing doping violations and enforcing anti-doping laws.

Recommendations for Combating Doping in Indian Sports and Strengthening the Legal Framework

1. **Establish Comprehensive Education Programs** - The National Anti-Doping Agency (NADA) should develop nationwide educational campaigns aimed at athletes, coaches, and support staff to raise awareness about the dangers of doping. These programs should focus not only on banned substances but also on the ethical and health implications of doping, as well as the legal consequences.
2. **Strengthen Testing and Detection Mechanisms** - A robust, transparent, and scientifically advanced testing procedure must be developed to ensure that all athletes are subject to rigorous and fair testing. NADA should work closely with international organizations like the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) to ensure that India's anti-doping laboratories meet the highest global standards. Regular and random tests, particularly at local and national competitions, should be a priority.¹³
3. **Implementation of Stricter Penalties and Sanctions** - While India has made strides in combating doping, stricter penalties need to be enforced for repeat offenders. Suspension durations could be lengthened for athletes who repeatedly violate doping regulations, and lifetime bans could be considered in extreme cases to act as a deterrent.
4. **Promote Transparency and Accountability in Doping Procedures** - The process of testing, results, hearings, and decisions must be more transparent. Athletes should have access to detailed information about the testing procedures, and their rights during the appeal process should be made clearer. The appeal system should be more robust, allowing for independent reviews when cases are contested.
5. **Improve Regulation of Supplements and Other Substances** - Given that contaminated supplements have been cited in numerous doping cases, strict regulation and monitoring of dietary supplements and performance-enhancing drugs are necessary. NADA and the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) should collaborate to ensure that only certified, safe products are available in the market, reducing the risk of athletes unintentionally consuming banned substances.
6. **Strengthen the Role of Anti-Doping Committees at the Grassroots Level** - Anti-doping initiatives must be implemented not only at the elite levels but also at the grassroots. By involving sports federations and local sports bodies in anti-doping education and testing, a culture of clean sport can be cultivated from the very beginning of an athlete's career.¹⁴

¹³**Advocate Tanwar.** (2024). Understanding the National Anti-Doping Act, 2022: A Comprehensive Overview of India's Emerging Law in the Fight Against Doping in Sports. *Advocate Tanwar*. <https://advocatetanwar.com/understanding-the-national-anti-doping-act-2022-a-comprehensive-overview-of-indias-emerging-law-in-the-fight-against-doping-in-sports/>

¹⁴**Advocate Tanwar.** (2024). Understanding the National Anti-Doping Act, 2022: A Comprehensive Overview of India's Emerging Law in the Fight Against Doping in Sports. *Advocate Tanwar*. <https://advocatetanwar.com/understanding-the-national-anti-doping-act-2022-a-comprehensive-overview-of-indias-emerging-law-in-the-fight-against-doping-in-sports/>

7. **Promote Athlete Welfare and Support Systems** - To prevent doping, athletes should have access to support systems that provide mental and physical health resources, including counseling for performance pressures. This can help mitigate the temptation for athletes to resort to doping in pursuit of success. Access to medical professionals for guidance on safe training practices is essential.
8. **Increased International Cooperation** - India should further enhance cooperation with international agencies like WADA, the International Olympic Committee (IOC), and the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) to share best practices, participate in joint programs, and improve the overall legal and ethical environment of Indian sports.
9. **Adopt a Zero Tolerance Policy for Doping** - India should adopt a zero-tolerance policy regarding doping, ensuring that all athletes, regardless of their fame or achievements, are treated equally under the anti-doping rules. This would help foster a more level playing field and enhance the credibility of Indian sports internationally.
10. **Continuous Review and Improvement of Anti-Doping Laws** The legal framework should undergo continuous review to adapt to new trends in doping practices. The Indian government and NADA should update the National Anti-Doping Bill as needed, ensuring that it remains in line with global anti-doping standards and addresses emerging challenges in sports.

Conclusion: The Future of Doping Laws in India

As India continues to grow as a global sporting powerhouse, the issue of doping will remain a significant challenge. The legal framework for addressing doping in Indian sports is in place, but enforcement remains a difficult task. The collaboration between NADA and WADA is essential in maintaining a clean and fair sporting environment in the country. However, the challenges of limited resources, cultural attitudes, and the abuse of medical exemptions will require continued attention and reform.

To effectively combat doping in Indian sports, there needs to be a greater emphasis on education and awareness, not only among athletes but also among coaches, support staff, and sports officials. The ethical debate surrounding doping should also be part of a broader conversation about the pressures faced by athletes and the values that should guide their participation in sport. With ongoing efforts to strengthen the legal framework, improve testing procedures, and create a culture of clean sport, India can continue to move toward a future where doping is no longer an issue.

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