



ARE YOU A SPORTS GOVERNING BODY? ARE YOU LEGALLY MATCH-READY

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In India[1], sports is far more than a game; it is a massive, multi-billion-dollar industry and a powerful cultural force that unites the entire country. From the bustling streets of our cities to the quietest corners of our villages, a single victory on the international stage can bring a nation of 1.4 billion people together in a shared moment of pride. However, for decades, the management of this dynamic sector relied largely on the National Sports Development Code of India, 2011. This changed dramatically with the introduction of the National Sports Governance Act (NSGA), 2025 (Act)[2], which, along with the National Sports Governance Rules, 2026 (notified on January 12, 2026) (Rules)[3]. This landmark legislation transitions Indian sports administration into a formal, statutory framework designed to provide clarity and stability. Its core objective is simple yet profound: to create a transparent, world-class governance structure that puts the focus back where it belongs- on the integrity of the sport and the welfare of the athletes.

Checklist for Sports Bodies as per NSGA 2025

If you are a sports governing body in India, this is the checklist you need to stay ahead of the game and ensure your organization is match-ready for the new regulatory season!

1.Can you still claim to be the National Sports Federation (NSF) for your sport just because you were recognized in 2024?

✘ No. Under Section 3(2) of the Act, only one body per sport can be established as the NSF. All previous recognitions are subject to a mandatory review by the newly established National Sports Board (NSB). Failure to obtain fresh recognition under the NSGA 2025 will result in a loss of official status and access to government support.

[1] The article reflects the general work of the authors and the views expressed are personal. No reader should act on any statement contained herein without seeking detailed professional advice.

[2] <https://www.indiacode.nic.in/bitstream/123456789/22045/1/2025-25.pdf>

[3] <https://yas.gov.in/sites/default/files/National%20Sports%20Governance%20%28National%20Sports%20Bodies%29%20Rules%2C%202026.pdf>

2.Can your current President continue to serve if they are 72 years old and have been in office for 16 years?

✘ No. Section 4 of the Act strictly mandates age and tenure caps. No office bearer can exceed the age of 70 (or 75 if specifically permitted by the International Federation) nor serve more than three terms (max 12 years). These limits are now statutory and non-negotiable.

3.Can you refuse a government audit of your internal funds and sponsorship revenue?

✘ No. While you retain administrative control, Section 29(2) empowers the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India to audit the accounts related to the implementation of the Act. National Sports Board funding isn't just a grant; it's a commitment to transparency. Accepting these funds means your finances are now under the direct oversight of the CAG.

4.Are you now considered a public entity, and do you have to respond to Right to Information (RTI) queries?

✔ Yes. Under Section 14(2), every recognized sports body in India is explicitly deemed a "Public Authority" for the purposes of the Right to Information (RTI) Act, 2005. This applies to your public functions, selection processes, and the utilization of funds.

5. If there is a dispute over your elections, can the dissatisfied party file a petition directly in the civil courts?

✘ No. Section 23 of the Act creates a bar on the jurisdiction of civil courts. Most sports-related disputes, including election and selection grievances, must now be referred to the National Sports Tribunal (NST) constituted under Section 17.

6. Can you meaningfully integrate the expertise of retired champions into your core decision-making?

✔ Yes. This is a core victory of the new Act. Under Section 4(1)(b)(i), your Executive Committee must include Sportspersons of Outstanding Merit (SOMs). The specific eligibility for these athletes including age, retirement, and achievement levels is governed by Rule 5 and the detailed Tiered Eligibility Criteria in Schedule I of the National Sports Governance Rules, 2026. This ensures those who have played at the highest level have a statutory seat at the table.

7. Do you have a long, open-ended timeline to gradually adopt these changes?

✘ No. Under Chapter 8 Rule 18(1) of the 2026 Rules, every National Sports Body is required to amend its byelaws in conformity with the Act within six months from the notification date (January 12, 2026). The clock is ticking!

8. Do you still only answer to the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports for your day-to-day compliance?

✘ No. While the Ministry sets high-level policy, the National Sports Board (NSB), established under Section 5, is now your primary regulator. The NSB has the power to grant, suspend, or cancel your recognition based on your adherence to the governance standards set out in the Act.

Bombay Judo Association vs. Judo Federation of India (Delhi High Court, Feb 2026)[4]

In this case, the Delhi High Court highlighted a turning point for sports administration. Rather than a protracted dispute, the proceedings revealed a clear consensus: all parties were *ad idem* that future elections and governance must strictly align with the National Sports Governance Act, 2025, and the 2026 Rules. Acknowledging this shared legal understanding, the Court ensured that the Judo Federation of India (JFI) would first bring its constitution into full harmony with the new statutory framework before proceeding with elections. This case serves as a definitive confirmation that the NSGA 2025 is no longer up for debate, it is the unified "playbook" that both the judiciary and the sporting fraternity have accepted as the mandatory path forward.

[4] https://delhihighcourt.nic.in/app/showFileJudgment/59612022026CW31652022_120340.pdf

THE “ATHLETE FIRST” MANDATE

The true "Game Changer" of the **NSGA 2025** is the decisive shift in power toward those who actually step onto the field. For too long, athletes were often spectators in their own boardrooms. This Act changes the roster entirely by placing the athlete at the very center of the governing strategy. This isn't just a consolation trophy; it's a statutory "captaincy" of the boardroom enforced through three powerful mechanisms:

- **Guaranteed Seat at the High Table:** Under Section 4(1)(b), the Act mandates that at least 25% of the Executive Committee must consist of athletes, specifically comprising representatives from the Athletes Committee and Sportspersons of Outstanding Merit (SOMs). The Act also specifies that voting rights of these Athletes Committee representatives are to be determined by the Sports Body's own byelaws. By ensuring that one-fourth of the decision-makers have "skin in the game," the Act ensures that high-performance policies are drafted by those who have actually felt the pressure of the final whistle.
- **Mandatory Committees:** Section 4 also requires the creation of an Athletes Committee, an Ethics Committee, and a Dispute Resolution Committee. These are no longer optional.

Sportspersons of Outstanding Merit: To ensure that "athlete representation" isn't just a box-ticking exercise, the 2026 Rules introduce the Sportsperson of Outstanding Merit (SOM) criteria. This serves as a quality-control filter, ensuring that the representatives in the boardroom are true veterans of competitive excellence individuals who have represented the tricolour at the highest levels and understand the grit required to win.

- With these reforms, the Man of the Match will now also be the Man of the Boardroom!

- **Who qualifies as Sportsperson of Outstanding Merit (SOM)?**

While the Rules provide a detailed eligibility matrix, understanding who fits the "Sportsperson of Outstanding Merit" (SOM) profile is simpler than it looks. Let us understand with these examples:

- Mr. A, a javelin thrower, clinched a Silver Medal at the Summer Olympic Games. Under Tier 1 of Schedule I, winning any Olympic medal (Gold, Silver, or Bronze) is the golden ticket that automatically qualifies him as SOM.
- Mr. B, a cricketer who dedicated years to the domestic circuit before finally earning his "Blue Cap" in a single sanctioned international match for India. Under Tier 9 of Schedule I, that single sanctioned appearance is all he needs to qualify as SOM.
- Miss C, a sprinter, dominated the national stage for a decade. While she never donned the national colours abroad, she clinched a hard-fought Bronze Medal at the National Games. This enables her to be SOM under Tier 10 of Schedule I.

The full eligibility criteria for all Tiers can be better understood through Schedule I of the National Sports Governance Rules, 2026.

A Level Playing Field for the Future

The enactment of the National Sports Governance Act, 2025, marks a historic victory lap for the Indian sports ecosystem. For an industry that has reached such immense magnitude shaping our economy and our national pride this shift to a statutory framework is a necessary evolution.

Ultimately, the true winners of this legislation are the athletes. By mandating that funds are strictly utilized for their benefit and giving them a decisive voice in administration, the Act ensures that every rupee invested and every policy drafted serves the spirit of the game. With a transparent playbook and the real MVPs at the helm, we can say the future of Indian sports isn't just bright, it is championship-ready!

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