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TALENT SCOUTING AND TRAINING – ROLE OF GOVERNMENT AND PRIVATE SECTOR IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

A big, developing country such as India requires a strong talent scouting and training system for tapping and honing potential sporting talent. The Government and private sector have taken several initiatives, but a country with a 1.28 billion-strong people is yet to produce a significant number of medal winners. This highlights the need for casting a wider net of talent scouting and providing quality training in order to identify and train more achievers. In this paper we discussed the role of Government and Private Sector in India in talent scouting and training.

Overview of initiatives in talent scouting and training

Role of governing bodies:

While the central and state Governments organise competitions at different levels where talent scouts from respective organisations search for sporting talent, SAI is responsible for talent spotting at the micro level. It has instituted several schemes for sports promotion and building the next generation of achievers.

Features of SAI Schemes:

For age group 8 to 25 years it instituted several schemes - National Sports Talent Contest (NSTC), Army Boys Sports Company (ABSC), SAI Training Centres (STC), Special Area Games (SAG), extension centres of STC/SAG and Centre of Excellence (COX). It adopts schools and universities that have quality sports infrastructure and are provided with funds for sports kits, a SAI trainer/coach and exposure to competition. In many of these schemes, SAI trainees are also provided with stipend, medical insurance, sports equipment and boarding/lodging as per the norms. SAI trainees are usually selected through competitions where an eminent selection committee consisting of SAI coaches and sports scientists spot talent for the respective scheme and National/state level winners are automatically admitted to these schemes while district-level achievers are admitted after passing some tests. A wide range of sports are covered by it such as athletics, badminton, basketball, hockey, gymnastics, swimming, wrestling and table tennis.

Following are some more schemes and responsibilities that the SAI undertakes:

- Come and play scheme - The scheme is for the 8–17 year category and aims at systematic talent spotting by the coaches, at all SAI training centres and stadia, by allowing young sports enthusiasts to get coached at a cost of Rs.45/- per month.
- Attempts to prepare sportspersons/national teams for various international sporting events at regional/sub-regional training centres in consultation with the respective national sports federations.
- The Government also provides funds for holding rural competitions under the Panchayat Yuva Krida Aur Khel Abhiyan (PYKKA) scheme.

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The Government of India currently invests more than Rs. 90,000 crores per annum on youth development programmes, i.e., approximately Rs.2,710 per young individual per year.

Role of the private sector:

Private academies:

Several sportspersons from various disciplines such as cricket, tennis, badminton and football have established academies to train upcoming players. Some of these academies are Britannia Amritraj Academy, Bhupathi Tennis Academy, Gopichand Badminton Academy (GBA), Prakash Padukone Badminton Academy (PPBA) and Baichung Bhutia Football Schools (BBFS).

These academies are mostly managed by players who have been successful at the international level. Such academies serve as important avenues for players to transmit their knowledge and share their experience with budding players. These experienced sportsmen also understand the lacunae in the system. As a result, these academies have been able to produce some impressive results, such as:

- Tintu Luka who won a bronze medal at the Asian Games 2010 is a product of the Usha School of Athletics
- Tennis players Leander Paes and Rohit Rajpal have trained at the Britannia Amritraj Academy
- Saina Nehwal trained at GBA.

Though these academies play an important role in nurturing sporting talent in the country, some of them have already delivered results and, many of them are yet to become sustainable, which is critical for their progress.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives:

Non-profit organisations such as the Olympic Gold Quest (OGQ) and the Mittal Champions Trust (MCT) (a CSR initiative by the Mittal group) have shown the way to other corporate players in supporting training requirements of athletes and extending financial support to upcoming athletes by raising funds from companies and individuals. Following are some results of such initiatives:

- MCT-backed shooter Abhinav Bindra became the first Indian to win an Olympic gold medal in an individual event.
- MCT assisted wrestler Yogeshwar Dutt in overcoming injuries. He won the bronze medal at the London Olympics 2012.
- OGQ identified coach Briton Charles Atkinson for Mary Kom's training when the Olympic 2012 organisers discontinued the usual weight category she contested in. With joint efforts from the Government and OGQ, she won an Olympic bronze medal.

Moreover, corporate houses such as TATA have invested extensively in sports as part of their CSR programme. The TATA group conducts a nationwide talent search and selects players for further training at its various academies like TATA Archery Academy, TATA Athletics Academy and TATA Football Academy. It also sponsors PPBA. Some encouraging results of TATA's CSR initiatives are:

- Ashwini Ponnappa, a student of PPBA, won gold and silver medals in doubles and mixed badminton events respectively, at the Commonwealth Games 2010.
- Sixty per cent of the national football team players are cadets from the TATA Football Academy.
- Deepika Kumari, a cadet of the TATA Archery Academy, won a gold medal in one individual and one team event at the Commonwealth Games 2010 and a bronze medal at the Asian Games 2010.

Similarly, the Jindal Steel Works (JSW) foundation (Jindal group) has established the second largest squash academy in India at Vasind, Maharashtra, which has produced many international and national-level players. Other examples of corporate efforts in improving training and talent spotting include industrialist KK Birla's patronage of the Guru Hanuman Akhara in Delhi, Punj Llyod's investment of INR30 million toward promoting

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squash and providing training to talented children, the IMG-Reliance partnership with All India Football Federation (AIFF) to overhaul football at the grassroots and professional level.

Key issues

- Limited reach of talent scout efforts:

Despite the Government's efforts in scouting for talent at the grassroots level, there were only around 15,000 SAI trainees in 2015. It is estimated that India's population in the 8–25 year group (the age group that SAI schemes cover) is approximately 43 crore, which indicates that only ~ 0.0035 per cent of India's youth in this age group is being trained under these schemes. This percentage appears low in comparison to that of countries such as Cuba (17 per cent). Therefore, there is a need for more initiatives and increased involvement of players to develop a system that casts a wider net of talent identification and grooming.

- Challenges faced by private players while establishing academies:

This varies with the sport. However, some issues common to all sports include lack of sporting culture and awareness on its importance, difficulty in sourcing funds since sport has not yet been awarded an industry status and is considered a risky business, lack of coaches and technical know-how of sports in India, scarcity of adequate spaces for providing training in sports such as football, athletics and tennis, problem of inaccessibility for private players to public stadia and training infrastructure gets compounded by a requirement for high capital expenditure, CSR initiatives in India have largely been restricted to supporting established athletes, resulting in a smaller talent pool.

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