

"Towards Sustainable Growth: Overcoming Challenges in Indian Athletics Coaching"

AMIT KUMAR GAUTAM

*Research Scholar
Athletics Coach, M. P. Ed.*

DR. SANTOSH KUMAR DWIVEDI

*Principal, Jyotsana College of Education,
Sidhi (M.P.)*

Abstract

This paper examines the persistent challenges confronting athletic coaching in India despite enabling initiatives like the Khelo India program, the advanced coaching programme of the Athletics Federation of India, and the sports authority of the India Target Olympic Podium Scheme. Key infrastructure, equipment, coaches, and financing impediments are analyzed by reviewing literature and audits of the implementation of these programmes and schemes. The study found infrastructural gaps in tracks, gymnasiums, and sports science facilities and acute equipment shortages as significant barriers limiting coaching effectiveness under the programme. Deficits were also identified in qualified coaches, especially at the grassroots, and delays in athlete funding disbursement affected continuity. While these programmes and schemes have created a policy foundation, strategic interventions are needed for sustainable coaching development. Decentralized infrastructure upgrading, state-level equipment banks, transparent coach recruitment, e-learning for grassroots coaches, and streamlining of athlete scholarships are proposed. Constructive public-private partnerships are advocated to transform plans into action. By providing a blueprint to strengthen athletic coaching despite limitations seen under existing schemes, this study aims to nurture a robust ecosystem to propel Indian athletes to international success.

Keywords: *Indian athletics, coaching challenges, Khelo India, Advanced coaching programme, Target Olympic Podium Scheme, infrastructure, equipment, coaches, financing, public-private partnership, decentralization*

I. Introduction

Indian athletics has witnessed growing participation and interest in recent years; however, significant challenges around training resources, infrastructure, and coaching expertise continue to hamper sustainable growth. While initiatives like Khelo India and coach education programs demonstrate a policy focus on athletics promotion, substantial barriers to effective coaching remain. This paper aims to examine the key challenges facing Indian athletics coaching today and propose strategic solutions to enable sustainable growth in this domain.

Despite producing world-class athletes like Neeraj Chopra and Anju Bobby George, the coaching ecosystem in India grapples with infrastructural limitations, lack of equipment, inadequate compensation to retain coaches, and absence of structured development pathways. Studies highlight the shortage of certified coaches available at the grassroots, particularly in rural areas, as a significant roadblock. For instance, the ratio of coaches to athletes is 1:114 in some states, against the ideal ratio of 1:10. The lack of athletics Track and field facilities, indoor training facilities and equipment has also been cited as an impediment.

The Khelo India scheme, initiated in 2018, provides funding support to build and upgrade sports infrastructure across India. The programme also focuses on establishing academies with High-Performance managerial support. However, the effectiveness and outreach of the programme vary. Structural issues like the shortage of qualified coaches and the appointment of personnel on an ad hoc basis affect consistency in training quality. While initiatives of the Athletics Federation of India's advanced coaching programme, the Diploma in Coaching of the Sports Authority of India (SAI), and Sports Sciences aim to address the shortage of certified coaches, quality gaps remain in pedagogical methods and continuous professional development.

This paper comprehensively examines the critical challenges in Indian athletics coaching today. Analyzing existing data and initiatives, it proposes strategic interventions through policies, public-private partnerships and community-led solutions to address infrastructure limitations, optimize resource allocation, incentivize coaches and foster sustainable quality improvement in athletics coaching across India. The recommendations aim to provide valuable insights to policymakers and stakeholders working to propel India as a world leader in sports.

II. Literature Review:

Previous scholarly research has highlighted the multifaceted challenges facing Indian athletics coaching today. Several studies have examined the issues around infrastructure limitations and lack of resources and funds as key barriers to building a robust coaching ecosystem.

Coaching is systematically designed according to the individual needs of each athlete. This entails developing individualized training programmes that address their physiological and psychological profiles. Horn's (2008) study on the efficacy of coaching in the athletic field lends support to this strategy (Horn, T.S. 2008). The role of a coach extends to mentorship and guidance, often encapsulating life coaching, a concept that resonates with Banwell and Kerr's (2016) exploration of coaches' roles in facilitating the personal development of student-athletes (Banwell & Kerr, 2016).

Infrastructure and resources have been emphasized as foundational requirements for athletic development. Thakur (2019) found that the lack of dedicated venues and equipment adversely affects the quantity and quality of training, particularly in rural areas. Difficulty in accessing proper athletic tracks, gymnasiums, physiotherapy and other facilities hampers coaching effectiveness across India (Bhalerao, 2017). Analyzing data from the Khelo India scheme, Rathore (2021) notes that while the program has funded infrastructure construction, maintenance costs make sustenance difficult. The shortage of equipment like vaulting poles, landing pits, and hurdles has also been cited frequently (Mukherjee, 2020; Bose, 2021).

According to Duffy et al. (2011), administrative and policy issues also affect the efficacy and uniformity of coaching practices in different coaching environments. Cassidy, Potrac, & Rynne (2023) reinforce the necessity of an athlete-centric approach that stresses focusing on individual needs and talents for effective coaching (Cassidy, Potrac, & Rynne, 2023).

The exchange of international coaching practices is essential, as demonstrated by Ahlberg, Mallett, and Tinning's (2007) work on developing autonomy-supportive coaching behaviours (Ahlberg, Mallett, & Tinning, 2007).

Limited funding and resultant financial constraints for athletes have been investigated as another major barrier. Thakur (2020) found that most aspiring athletes come from economically weaker backgrounds and cannot bear coaching, diet and equipment costs over long durations. There is a high dropout rate among talented individuals due to financial pressures (Kapoor, 2019). While some central and state funding is available, researchers note loopholes in allocation and delays in disbursement that affect coaching continuity (Bose, 2020; Chavan, 2022).

Some studies have prescribed interventions like public-private partnerships, corporate funding and community coaching networks as possible solutions to expand resources (Sharma, 2021; Rathore, 2022). However, significant gaps remain in examining successful implementation models to scale such measures (Kapoor, 2021). As Mukherjee (2022) notes, while shortcomings are well documented, workable solutions tailored to ground realities remain unclear. This paper aims to build on existing scholarship to identify challenges and propose strategic, context-specific solutions that various stakeholders can adopt to bring about sustainable change. The recommendations formulated by analyzing tried-and-tested approaches will help provide practical interventions for the long-term development of Indian athletics coaching.

III. Methodology:

This study utilizes a robust analytical approach to examine existing literature and data on the challenges facing Indian athletics coaching. Various scholarly sources, including sports sciences journals, sports management journals, coaching reviews, and government and organizational reports, have been analyzed to develop a holistic understanding. This study endeavours to conduct a thorough analysis of the intricacies, challenges, and opportunities inherent in the different coaching strategies at these levels, the research aims to refine athlete development programs. The intention is to harmonize coaching practices across the board, pinpointing and bridging gaps while accommodating the diverse needs of Indian athletes. This proactive approach is envisioned to nurture a conducive environment that would propel Indian athletes to succeed domestically and globally.

Based on a detailed investigation of scholarly literature, governmental data and sports organizations' statistics, a robust understanding of the key challenge areas was developed, creating an informed foundation. The proposed strategies have been formulated by studying examples of successful localized implementations, public-private partnerships in other countries and community-led initiatives. A feasibility analysis of solutions suited for the Indian context was conducted before the recommendation. The aim has been to develop practical, cost-effective interventions through rigorous data analysis.

Key Challenges:

The literature and data analysis reveals significant challenges in Indian athletics coaching across infrastructure, resources, personnel and finance domains.

Infrastructure limitations remain a persistent obstacle. Per the Sports Authority of India (2021), only 21 out of 36 states and union territories have an athletic track conforming to international standards. Even in states

with facilities, maintenance is an issue causing degradation (Rathore, 2022). The SAI audit also found a skewed distribution as 65% of tracks are concentrated in just six states, leaving many underserved (SAI, 2021). Gymnasiums, physiotherapy clinics and sports science support are primarily available in metropolitan cities only (Thakur, 2020). This affects coaching quality, especially in emerging athletic hubs in rural areas.

The scarcity of equipment has also been quantified. Data from 2020 shows that, on average, two vaulting poles are available per state training centre against a requirement of 20 poles (AFI, 2021). For hurdles, the availability is 30% of what is prescribed. Landing pits also demonstrate approximately 40% deficiency, as per Khelo India audits (SAI, 2022). Lack of essential equipment hampers skill development starting at the grassroots.

Analyzing nationally aggregated data, an acute shortage of qualified coaches emerges. The ratio of coaches to athletes stands at 1:114, falling well below the recommended 1:10 ratio (SAI, 2022). Even the present coaches are concentrated around urban areas, with rural areas having negligible appointed coaching staff (Chavan, 2021). Temporary appointment is standard, leading to attrition. The limited professional growth prospects have quantifiably increased coach resignation trends (Thakur, 2022).

Athlete dropout rates due to financial constraints are over 40% from training academies, negatively impacting coaching continuity (Bose, 2020). Though funding is allocated under programs like Khelo India, utilization in athletics remains below 50% as administrative delays persist (Rathore, 2021). The lack of sports science support staff, including physiotherapists and data analysts, also stems from budget constraints (Chavan, 2022). Thus, financing emerges as a multidimensional challenge.

While schemes aim to strengthen athletics coaching, gaps in monitoring implementation have limited impact. Developing context-specific solutions by working with coaches and athletes remains essential to transform policies to on-ground outcomes.

Proposed Strategies:

The analysis highlights the need for multifaceted strategies to build sustainable growth in Indian athletics coaching. Specific recommendations based on the study findings are outlined below:

Infrastructure Development: Adopt a decentralized approach for infrastructure creation by leveraging district-level plans and resources (Rathore, 2022). Set state-wise targets for constructing athletics tracks, gymnasiums and sports science facilities over the next five years (Thakur, 2020). Refurbish existing infrastructure through private sponsorship and corporate social responsibility funds (Bose, 2021).

Enhancing Equipment Access: Implement equipment banks at the state and district levels to be issued to trainees. Promote localized manufacturing hubs in athletics clusters through public-private partnerships (Kapoor, 2019). Create a transparent online portal for track and field equipment inventory and booking.

Coach Recruitment and Retention: Introduce tenure-based contracts, minimum 50% reservations in government coaching jobs for sportspersons and transparent recruitment drives to tackle vacancy backlog (Sharma, 2021). Create a cadre of community coaches through skills training of ex-athletes and volunteers to serve in rural areas. (Chavan, 2022).

Capacity Building: Make periodic coaching workshops, mentoring schemes and continuing education mandatory for full-time, contractual and community coaches (Thakur, 2022). Develop e-learning capsules on technical events, sports science, etc., accessible via mobile for grassroots coaches.

Athlete Funding and Support Staff: Expand coverage of sports scholarships for economic hardships through corporate funds (Bose, 2020). Hire support staff like physiotherapists, analysts and sports psychologists on a contractual basis at state centres. Develop a revenue model to sustain their salaries through training fees, equipment rental charges, etc.

Policy and Programming: Formulate grassroots coaching development and infrastructure rejuvenation as priority areas in policy documents (Mukherjee, 2022). Enhance monitoring of scheme implementation through ICT tools, audits and grievance redressal. Set targets for key metrics like coach availability accredited tracks per state and monitor progress.

The proposed interventions address ground realities around infrastructure, resources, personnel, policy, and finances to strengthen the athletics coaching ecosystem ultimately. A collaborative approach between policymakers, sports organizations, corporations, and the community can help drive successful implementation.

Action plan

The action plan to implement the proposed interventions for developing Indian athletics coaching:

Objectives:

1. Upgrade athletic infrastructure across India
2. Improve equipment availability and access
3. Increase the number of qualified coaches
4. Enhance capacity building for coaches

5. Provide robust funding support to athletes
6. Appoint adequate support staff
7. Strengthen monitoring and policy implementation

Action Plan (2022-2026):

The steps involved are;

1. Construct at least one synthetic track conforming to international standards in each district by 2024.
2. Establish state-level equipment banks with online inventory by 2023.
3. Recruit qualified coaches to fill 60% of vacancies at state training centres by 2023 and 100% by 2025.
4. Introduce 30 hours of annual continuing education for coaches from 2023.
5. Provide sports scholarships to athletes facing economic hardship - 25% more recipients per year.
6. Hire contractual physiotherapists, analysts, and psychologists for all state training centres by 2025.
7. Formulate a Grassroots Athletics Coaching Policy by 2023 with 5-year development targets.
8. Institute third-party audit of scheme implementation from 2023.
9. Set up a dedicated project monitoring unit to track monthly progress on key metrics and take corrective actions.

Implementation:

1. District and state budget allocation for infrastructure.
2. Corporate CSR funds for equipment banks and facility upgrades.
3. Collaboration with expert bodies like SAI, AFI, State Association and College and School for coach recruitment and training.
4. Partnership with technical institutes and the private sector for capacity building.
5. Database of potential beneficiaries for scholarships and support staff.
6. A high-level committee will formulate policy and monitoring mechanisms.
7. The action plan sets time-bound targets, outlines implementation methods leveraging public-private partnerships and establishes robust tracking to enable sustainable growth of Indian athletics coaching.

IV. Conclusion:

This paper has comprehensively analyzed the challenges confronting Indian athletics coaching today. Key problem areas identified through an extensive review of literature and data include deficiencies in training infrastructure, equipment scarcity, shortage of qualified coaches, financial constraints for athletes and gaps in policy monitoring. While schemes like Khelo India have created an enabling base, much more must be done to build a robust coaching ecosystem.

The study proposes context-specific strategies to sustainably overcome existing resources, personnel, financing and governance barriers. Construction of international standard infrastructure, equipment banks, tenure-based coach recruitment, capacity building programs, funding support for athletes and strengthening of policy implementation are advocated. Through public-private partnerships and decentralized planning, these strategies can be impactfully implemented.

A strong coaching framework is indispensable for India to achieve its vision of becoming a global athletics powerhouse and winning medals at prestigious international events. The strategies outlined in this paper aim to provide a blueprint for systemic change. It calls upon sports administrators, coaching experts, corporations and communities to work together to transform policy into practice. The inspiring potential of Indian athletes can only be fully realized when coaching limitations are addressed through sustainable solutions. This requires urgent action and continued efforts to build coaching excellence at all levels in the long run. The future of Indian athletics depends on the strength of its coaching foundations.

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