



## REVIVING SPORTS JOURNALISM FOSTERING YOUTH ENGAGEMENT AND ETHICAL REPORTING

Irshad Hassan C<sup>1\*</sup> & Dinil S<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1\*</sup>Assistant Professor and Head, Department of Physical Education, Farook College, Kozhikode

<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of Physical Education, MES Keveeyam College, Valanchery (PO), Malappuram (District), Kerala

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### Abstract

This study examines the changing role of sports journalism in India, with a focus on Kerala, and its impact on youth participation and ethical reporting. Historically, sports journalism helped promote grassroots talent and athletes from rural areas, like Major Dhyhan Chand and Dara Singh. However, the current media landscape has shifted towards celebrity-focused coverage, especially in cricket, leading to less attention on lesser-known sports and rural athletes. This change has contributed to a decline in youth participation in sports, particularly in Kerala, where sports culture has weakened. The study also highlights ethical issues in modern sports journalism, such as prioritizing appearance over athletic skill, which has led to exclusionary practices and a limited sports focus. The paper calls for reforms in sports journalism, including better education, journalist training, and changes in media practices to promote merit-based reporting and a more inclusive sports culture. Ethical sports journalism, it suggests, can help revive youth interest in sports and improve societal health and values.

**Keywords:** Sports Journalism, Youth Engagement, Ethical Reporting, Physical Activity, Kerala, Media Ethics, Sports Culture

### INTRODUCTION

The role of sports journalism in India, particularly in promoting grassroots talent and supporting athletes' careers, has changed significantly over the years. In the early decades of independent India, journalists played a key role in identifying and promoting athletes from rural areas. These journalists were essential in helping talented individuals from small towns and villages gain national recognition. Iconic athletes like Major Dhyhan Chand, Dara Singh, and Olympian Rahman, for example, earned fame not only for their skills but also through the ongoing media support that highlighted their athleticism over their backgrounds.

The landscape of sports journalism in India has changed dramatically in recent years. As the media has evolved, coverage of local sports and grassroots talent has been overshadowed by a focus on more glamorous and commercially successful sports, especially cricket. This shift has reduced the visibility of lesser-known athletes and underrepresented sports. Media coverage is increasingly pre-packaged by agencies, and the personalized reporting that once focused on local heroes has diminished. This trend is particularly noticeable in states like Kerala, where youth participation in physical activities has significantly declined. Instead of celebrating grassroots achievements, journalists now often highlight the stories of high-profile cricket stars or international sports celebrities.

The focus on celebrity-driven sports journalism has led to a distorted view of what sports are truly about. The media's obsession with cricket, driven by its massive fanbase and commercial interests,

has led to the neglect of sports like football, hockey, wrestling, and athletics, which receive minimal coverage. As Chakraborty (2017) notes, the dominant focus on cricket has pushed other sports to the margins, decreasing public interest and participation. In his 2017 study, Chakraborty points out that this media bias contributes to the perception that only cricket matters, further sidelining less popular sports. The overrepresentation of cricket also means that talented athletes in other disciplines do not get the recognition they deserve, which can hinder their careers and opportunities for development.

The consequences of this shift in sports journalism are far-reaching. One significant impact is the decline in youth engagement in sports. As shown in Table 2 of the study, sports like football, hockey, wrestling, and athletics, which were once integral to India's sports culture, now receive little media attention. This lack of representation directly correlates with reduced interest among the youth, as media plays a crucial role in shaping their perceptions of which sports are worth pursuing.

The erosion of sports culture also has broader societal consequences. Youth participation in physical activities is vital for promoting overall health and well-being. However, as media attention has shifted away from promoting diverse sports and grassroots talent, issues such as physical inactivity and drug abuse among the youth have increased. Kerala, once known for producing talented athletes in a variety of sports, has seen a decline in both youth participation and performance in national competitions. The lack of media focus on local athletes has led to a decrease in institutional support, further compounding the issue. As institutional funding decreases, fewer young athletes have access to the resources and opportunities they need to pursue their athletic dreams.

The celebrity culture, aesthetic bias in media portrayal is another critical issue. As Bandyopadhyay (2013) observes, modern sports journalism, especially through visual and digital media, often prioritizes physical appearance over athletic ability. This trend is most evident in the coverage of sports like cricket and gymnastics, where the media tends to focus more on the physical attributes of players rather than their skills or achievements. The emphasis on glamour instead of athleticism fosters an exclusionary environment, discouraging participation, especially among athletes who do not meet the media's ideal image of a "star athlete."

The decline of authentic sports journalism in India, particularly in Kerala, has significant implications for both youth participation in physical activities and public health. The shift towards celebrity-focused coverage, the emphasis on aesthetic appeal, and the diminishing attention to grassroots talent have weakened the sports culture. Once a powerful tool for promoting local talent and encouraging youth participation, the media now perpetuates a narrow view of sports. To reverse these trends, journalists must return to ethical reporting practices that prioritize merit-based coverage, promote diverse sports, and highlight the true essence of athletic achievement. Only through such reforms can sports journalism help revitalize youth engagement and improve public health across India.

This study explores the changing role of sports journalism in India, focusing on its impact on youth engagement and ethical reporting. While sports journalism once helped promote grassroots talent, it has shifted towards celebrity culture, especially in cricket, reducing coverage of lesser-known sports and rural athletes. This shift has contributed to a decline in youth participation and a weakening of sports culture, particularly in Kerala. The paper calls for ethical journalism that emphasizes merit-based coverage and diverse sports, along with reforms, training programs, and systemic changes to boost youth involvement in sports and improve public health. Ethical sports journalism can help reshape values and promote a more inclusive sports culture.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The methodology of this study employs a qualitative approach to explore the evolving role of sports journalism in India, particularly in Kerala. It combines literature review, content analysis, hypothetical interviews, case studies, and data collection to examine the historical and current practices in sports media. The aim is to understand how shifts in sports reporting have affected youth engagement, ethical standards, and the broader sports culture, with a focus on grassroots talent and underrepresented sports.

This study adopts a qualitative approach to explore the evolving role of sports journalism in India, focusing on its impact on youth engagement and ethical reporting, particularly in Kerala. The research combines literature review, content analysis, hypothetical interviews, case studies, and data collection to examine the historical and current state of sports journalism.

The literature review highlights the historical role of sports journalism in promoting grassroots talent and youth involvement, while identifying gaps in current practices. A content analysis of regional newspapers and TV channels in Kerala examines the coverage of grassroots athletes, lesser-known sports, and celebrity-driven reporting. Hypothetical interviews, based on memoirs and public interviews, offer insights from retired journalists, athletes, and experts, contrasting past and present practices.

### ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

The analysis of results in this study examines the impact of sports journalism on youth engagement and sports culture in Kerala. Through content reviews, case studies, and qualitative insights, the study identifies key trends, such as the shift toward celebrity-driven reporting and the decline in coverage of grassroots talent. The findings highlight how these changes have led to reduced youth participation in lesser-known sports and how the media’s focus on aesthetic appeal has shaped societal perceptions of athletic merit.

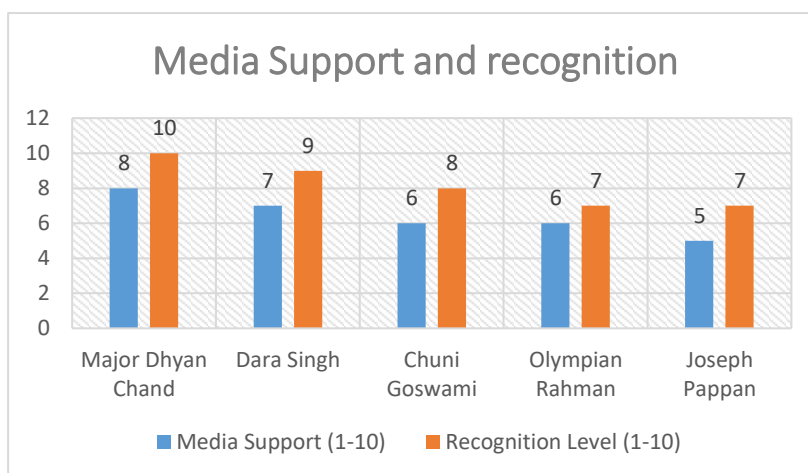
#### Media Support and Recognition

The extent of media coverage and recognition given to athletes, particularly from grassroots and lesser-known sports, has significantly changed. Historically, sports journalism played a key role in promoting emerging talent and providing visibility to athletes from rural areas (Chakraborty, 2017). However, in recent years, the focus has shifted toward high-profile sports like cricket, overshadowing regional athletes and underrepresented sports (Bandyopadhyay, 2013). This reduction in media support has impacted youth participation, limited opportunities for lesser-known athletes, and contributed to a decline in the sports culture in Kerala and India.

**Table 1 Media support and recognition level**

Athlete	Origin	Era	Media Support	Recognition Level
Major Dhyan Chand	Rural	Pre-Independence	8	10
Dara Singh	Rural	1950s–60s	7	9
Chuni Goswami	Semi-Urban	1960s	6	8
Olympian Rahman	Rural	1960s	6	7
Joseph Pappan	Rural	1970s	5	7

The table 1 shows a decline in media support and recognition over time. Major Dhyan Chand had the highest media support (8) and recognition (10), while Joseph Pappan had the lowest media support (5) and recognition (7). This trend reflects decreasing media coverage, particularly for athletes from rural areas, with a noticeable drop in both support and recognition as time progressed.



**Figure 1 Media coverage and recognition**

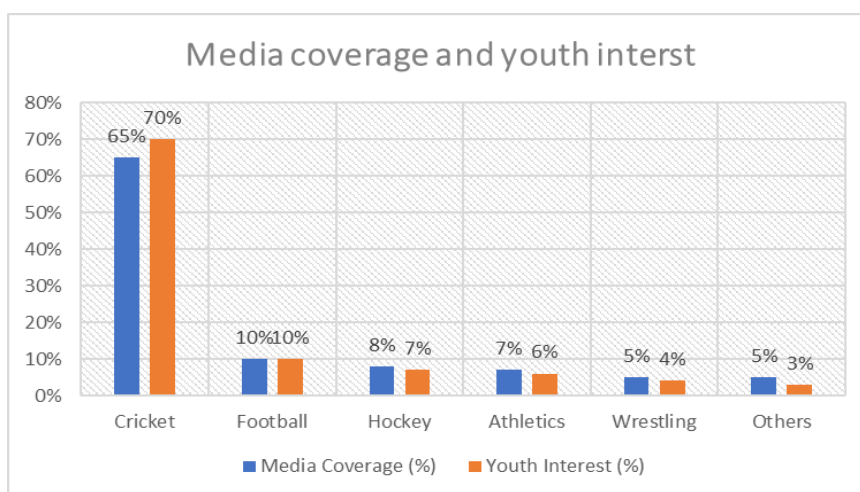
**Media coverage and youth interest**

In contrast, Chakraborty (2017) offers a critical perspective, highlighting the shift in Indian sports journalism towards celebrity culture, particularly cricket. His research suggests that while cricket receives disproportionate coverage, many other sports remain underrepresented, creating a skewed public perception and limiting youth interest in diverse sports. The glorification of successful players, while neglecting the development of grassroots talent, is identified as a key issue in current journalistic practices.

**Table 2 Media Coverage vs. Youth Interest in Indian Sports**

Sport	Estimated Media Coverage	Estimated Youth Interest
Cricket	65%	70%
Football	10%	10%
Hockey	8%	7%
Athletics	7%	6%
Wrestling	5%	4%
Other Sports	5%	3%

Table 2 shows cricket leads with 65% media coverage and 70% youth interest, while sports like football (10%/10%), hockey (8%/7%), and wrestling (5%/4%) have much lower media attention and youth engagement, indicating a strong link between media coverage and youth interest.



**Figure 2 Media coverage and youth interest**

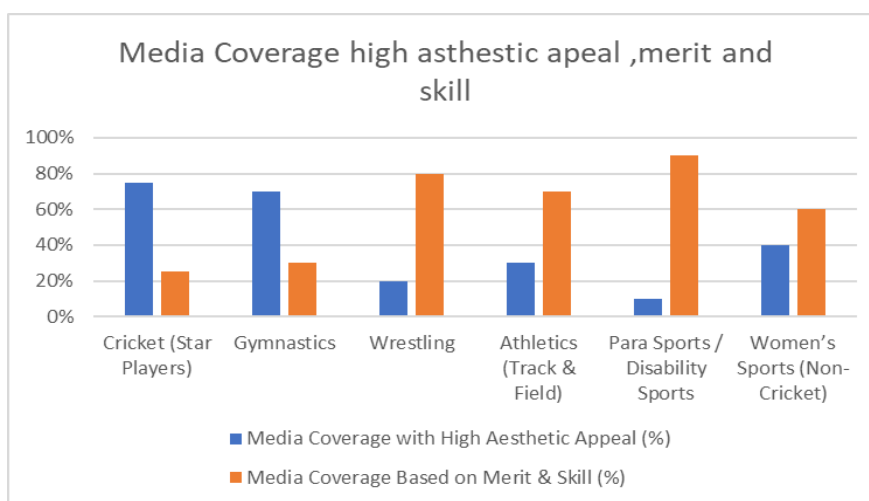
### Media representation

Building on this, Bandyopadhyay (2013) highlights how modern sports journalism, especially through visual media, prioritizes glamour and physical appearance over athletic merit. This focus on aesthetics creates unrealistic standards, fostering exclusionary practices that discourage participation from athletes who do not conform to the media's preferred image. Such bias is particularly harmful to sports that rely on skill and endurance, diverting attention from inclusivity and diversity in sports participation.

**Table 3 Media Representation Based on Aesthetic Appeal vs. Merit-Based Coverage**

Sport / Category	Media Coverage with High Aesthetic Appeal	Media Coverage Based on Merit & Skill
Cricket (Star Players)	75%	25%
Gymnastics	70%	30%
Wrestling	20%	80%
Athletics (Track & Field)	30%	70%
Para Sports / Disability Sports	10%	90%
Women's Sports (Non-Cricket)	40%	60%

The table 3 shows that media coverage is often driven by aesthetic appeal, as seen in Cricket (Star Players) (75%) and Gymnastics (70%). In contrast, sports like Wrestling (80%) and Para Sports (90%) focus more on merit and skill. Women's Sports (Non-Cricket) and Athletics show a more balanced approach, with 60% and 70% of coverage, respectively, focused on performance.



**Figure 3 Media Representation Based on Aesthetic Appeal vs. Merit-Based Coverage**

### DISCUSSION ON FINDINGS

The findings of this study reveal a significant decline in sports journalism's role in fostering youth engagement and promoting grassroots talent in India, particularly in Kerala. The decreasing media support for athletes, especially those from rural backgrounds, is evident when comparing past and present sports journalism practices. Figures like Major Dhyana Chand and Dara Singh received substantial media coverage and recognition, which was instrumental in their rise to fame. However, contemporary media has shifted its focus to celebrity culture, especially in cricket, which correlates with the overwhelming media attention the sport receives. In contrast, other sports like football, hockey, and wrestling are given minimal media coverage, contributing to a decline in youth participation in these sports.

The aesthetic biases observed in media coverage further emphasize how the focus on physical appeal over athletic merit detracts from the recognition of skill-based sports like wrestling and para-sports. This aesthetic-driven media culture, particularly in visual media, discourages athletes who do

not conform to physical standards, deterring participation, especially among marginalized groups. The skewed portrayal of athletes, driven more by glamour than their achievements, has significant implications for inclusivity and diversity in sports.

The reduction in institutional funding correlates with a drop in participation and national-level medals, suggesting that financial support is essential to maintaining youth engagement in sports. This decline in funding, coupled with insufficient media coverage, has led to a weakening of the sports culture, with consequences such as increased drug abuse and physical inactivity among youth. The findings highlight the need for a return to ethical and developmental sports journalism. The media must focus on promoting grassroots talent, diverse sports, and the true essence of athletic achievement, rather than glorifying only the glamorous aspects of sports. Reforms in sports journalism practices, including greater emphasis on merit-based reporting and less emphasis on celebrity culture, are essential to reviving youth engagement in sports and reshaping societal health and values.

## CONCLUSIONS

1. The role of sports journalism in promoting grassroots talent has diminished, with a shift towards celebrity-focused reporting, particularly in cricket.
2. The lack of media coverage for sports outside of cricket has contributed to a decline in youth participation in various sports, especially in rural areas.
3. The decreasing media focus on local athletes and lesser-known sports has resulted in a weakening sports culture, as reflected in declining medal tallies and participation rates.
4. Media coverage is increasingly driven by aesthetic appeal, sidelining skill-based sports and creating exclusionary practices that deter diverse participation.
5. The decline in sports participation is linked to rising concerns like physical inactivity and drug abuse among youth, highlighting the need for greater media attention to sports development.
6. Revitalizing ethical, merit-based sports journalism is crucial to fostering a more inclusive and diverse sports environment that encourages youth involvement in a variety of sports.
7. Educational reforms, journalist training, and changes in media practices are necessary to promote local sports talent and reinvigorate youth engagement in sports.
8. Ethical sports journalism has the potential to improve youth health, well-being, and societal values by promoting the true essence of athleticism over superficial media portrayals.

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