

# THE HINDU

## Give sports its due

**A constructive effort linking sports to higher education is the need of the hour**

**CHENRAJ ROYCHAND**

**T**oday, when many small nations are making a mark in Olympics, India is lagging way behind. Its poor involvement in sports other than cricket is a matter of concern.

India's higher education system is the third largest in the world enrolling nearly 22 million students in more than 46,000 institutions, but only a handful make it to the international level in sports. While the nation has been taking measures to develop and implement an accredited education system, efforts are being made to make the curriculum research-based, along with industry interface.

In spite of these efforts, sports has not been given the importance it deserves. The failure to strike a balance between co-curricular activities and academics in higher education has led to a lapse of holistic development of students.

Many colleges do not maintain playgrounds or provide the required sports equipment to aspiring students. Sports trainers and support staff are poorly paid, unlike the academic faculty. The absence of sports-friendly policies and the myth that physical education doesn't aid one's academic progress prevails, even in the best institutions.

**All-round development**

Sports helps in creating a holistic personality, healthy and stable body functions, maintaining hormone levels and higher immunity levels, besides managing stress and depression. Most parents fail to understand this and continue to pressure children to score well in academics. This is not only demotivating but also leads to low self-confidence in children who cannot measure up to their parents' aspirations.

With continuous physical education and participation in sports, most students become confident and learn to overcome failures. Ethical and human values are reinforced through sports in the



younger generation. There is ample evidence to suggest that physical activity has a positive impact on cognitive skills, leading to improved academic performance through enhanced concentration and attention as well as improved classroom behaviour. Students perform better academically when they are physically fit; the brain gets revitalised and they are able to perform more efficiently.

Unfortunately, many higher education institutions eliminate physical education

with the belief that more rigid classroom time would somehow spur students to learn more. Sports inculcates team spirit, leadership skills, strategic thinking and a risk-taking attitude that is essential in an individual's career after having performed well academically.

**Charting a career**

In recent times, various career opportunities in sports have opened up for interested youngsters.

There are different graduate and postgraduate pro-

grammes for those wanting to build a career in sports.

Besides playing at State, national and international levels, a sportsperson can work as a coach/fitness instructor, umpire/referee or sports commentator.

A career in sports journalism and photography is much sought after these days. Individual sportspersons have become consultants in space. Taking up dealership of sports equipment or manufacturing the same is a lucrative business.

Sports Authority of India

(SAD), under its several academies and institutes, provides training to youngsters to become talented sportspersons.

The discipline of sports medicine influences and understands human behaviour in physical activities and sports. Sports scientists or sports medicine specialists are involved in sports nutrition supplements, sports biomechanics, sports psychology and other areas. They counsel and educate budding sportspersons by providing scientific input and enhancing performance.

Today, we have great sports celebrities like Pankaj Advani (Snooker and Billiards), Shikha Tandon and Rehan Poncha (Swimming), Anup Sridhar (Badminton), Rohan Bopanna (Tennis), and Gagan A.P. (Swimming), who have been able to achieve success due to immense support from their educational institutions.

These are success stories of how Indian universities can play a critical role in building India's sporting culture. Hence, a constructive effort is needed to gradually adopt methods of linking sports to higher education, thus ensuring a successful evolution in the Indian education system. This can only happen if sports can be woven into the academic stream.

*The writer is President, Jain University Trust.*



**PANKAJ ADVANI**

I owe it completely to sports for making me who I am today. Sponsorships from government and corporate organisations will give the required push for developing a healthy sports culture in India.

I think it is crucial to strike a balance between sports and academics.

**ROHAN BOPANNA**

It is certainly a dream come true and a matter

of great pride to have the opportunity to represent the nation at the Olympics and the Asian Games. There is no dearth of talented young sportsmen in India. India has a bright and flourishing future in the field of sports. All it requires is the right amount of attention and sponsorship.

**SHIKHA TANDON**

Representing India at the Asian Games and Olympics was the zenith of my career. "I think it's high

time the government took the initiative to develop and nurture young sporting talents. Including sports as part of the regular curriculum in schools and colleges and ample amount of encouragement in the form of sponsorships will definitely give a big boost to all youngsters aspiring to make a career in sports.

**GAGAN A.P.**

I think it is important that parents take the initiative of nurturing the

interest of kids in sports. Employment opportunities must be provided to encourage and help sportsmen in bettering their performance. India is in need of world-class training facilities and research institutes which are exclusively dedicated to help sportsmen. It also needs better coaching, and this will be possible only when experienced sportsmen take up coaching as a profession.