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Sports Studies in India

Expanding the Field

Edited by

MEENA GOPAL AND PADMA PRAKASH

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Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	ix
<i>List of Figures and Table</i>	xi
Introduction: A Sporting Engagement <i>Padma Prakash and Meena Gopal</i>	1
SECTION I. SPORTS AND SPORTS STUDIES: EXPANDING THE FIELD, BREAKING BOUNDARIES	
1. The Struggle for Sports Commons: Sports Markets and the Labour Movement <i>S. Janaka Biyanwila</i>	19
2. Globalizing Sportscapes: Football in Mumbai's Socio-Spatial Dynamics <i>D. Parthasarathy</i>	36
3. India's Olympic Encounter: Sport, Identity and Nationalism <i>Boria Majumdar</i>	51
4. Indian Volleyball: From Local Contexts to Global Realities <i>Bino Paul</i>	60
5. Sherpas in Himalayan Mountaineering: Identity, Labour and Power in Sport <i>Vrinda Marwah</i>	70
6. Women's Cricket in India: Expanding the Inclusionary Possibilities of Sport <i>Raadhika Gupta</i>	89
7. Testing the Limits of Science: Sex Difference and Athletic Ability in Elite Sports <i>Madeleine Pape</i>	114

SECTION II. REFLECTIONS ON SPORTS STUDIES:
TRANSCENDING DISCIPLINES

8. A Sociological Understanding of Sport in India 133
Elizabeth C.J. Pike
9. Labours of Care in Sport: Reflections on Feminist Practice in Athletics 150
Meena Gopal
10. Perspectives on Sports History in India: Present Challenges and Future Directions 159
Kausik Bandyopadhyay

SECTION III. NURTURING SPORTS:
CRUCIBLES OF GROWTH

- ✓ 11. A City and a Sport: Hockey in Calcutta 175
Nikhilesh Bhattacharya
12. Goa's Football Story: A Brief Narrative 190
Frederick Noronha
13. Local Clubs and Sports Culture in Kerala: Community at the Centre 196
S. Mohammed Irshad
14. Nurturing Sports Talent: What Role Do Academies Play? 205
Pulasta Dhar

SECTION IV. STATE, SPORTS, AND DEVELOPMENT:
POLICY AND REGULATION

15. The Uneven Development of Sport Policy in India: Need for a Coordinated Governance Structure 215
Kruthika N.S. and Sarthak Sood
16. Mega Sport Events, Development, and Tourism: Case Study of the Commonwealth Games 2010 237
EQUATIONS

17. Doping in Sports: Ramifications for India 251
K.P. Mohan
18. Performance-Enhancing Substances in Sports: Towards Country-Specific Harm Reduction Strategies 266
Kaveri Prakash
19. Sport for Development and Peace: From Global to the Local 276
S. Ananthakrishnan
20. Reimagining Play: Football, Muslim Women, and Empowerment 292
Sabah Khan

SECTION V. MOVIES, MEDIA, AND TECHNOLOGY

21. The Nationalist Imaginary in the Bollywood Sports Film 305
Nissim Mannathukkaren
22. Sports, Celebrity, and the Sports Biopic 322
Pramod K. Nayar
23. Breaking into the Press Box and After: A First-Person Account 334
Sharda Ugra
24. State, Market, and Media in Indian Cricket 345
Avipsu Halder
25. Who Watches Cricket?: The New Spectator in the Sporting-Entertainment Complex 356
Vidya Subramaniam

- Notes on the Editors and Contributors* 371
- Index* 379

A City and a Sport

Hockey in Calcutta

Nikhilesh Bhattacharya

As the twentieth century approached its middle point, Keshav Datt was at a crossroads in life. In this, he was no different from millions of young men and women in the Indian subcontinent—a land of immense diversity recently freed from foreign rule but also severed in two. Like countless families in Bengal and Punjab, the Datts had borne the brunt of Partition.¹ Datt ended up in Bombay, staying with his eldest brother Romesh, who worked in the customs department. In his mid-20s, Datt had no permanent home or a job. There was one thing, though, that set him apart from the unemployed multitudes: He was a top hockey player. A product of Government College, Lahore, he had toured East Africa with an India invitation team led by hockey legend Dhyan Chand in 1947 right after India's independence (Chand 1952: 84–6). He had gone on to represent India in its first Olympic Games as an independent country in London in 1948. Playing as either centre half or right half, he featured in all five of India's matches. The team defeated Great Britain 4–0 in the final to win the gold (Organising Committee for the XIV Olympiad 1951: 406–12). The erstwhile rulers had been humbled and Datt was one of twenty men who were independent India's first Olympic champions (Organising Committee for the XIV Olympiad 1951: 546).

While Datt was in Bombay, he connected with an old friend from college. He stated: 'He was working for Calcutta Port Trust and said, "They are looking for a centre half"'. So Datt went to Calcutta around 1950 and joined Calcutta Port Trust. That was his first permanent job where he stayed for a year. He never left the city, finding employment in the tea sector and continuing with a sporting career that saw him win another Olympic gold medal in Helsinki in 1952. He also played in the domestic circuit for the famous Calcutta club, Mohun Bagan.

Datt's move to Calcutta to join the Port Trust connects him to two other Olympians, Joe Galibardy, a member of the British India team that won

- xvi. Interview with Neville Galibardy, Chingford, UK, 3 June 2013. Details about Galibardy's life are based on this interview along with documents in the personal collection of the family.
- xvii. Interview with Leslie Claudius, Calcutta, 4 May 2012.
- xviii. Transfer certificate issued by Goethals Memorial to Joseph T. Galibardy on 19 August 1932, personal collection of the Galibardy family, UK. The school, incidentally, produced another hockey Olympian, Cyril Mitchie, who understudied first-choice goalkeeper Richard Allen in the same 1936 Olympic Games where Galibardy featured.
- xix. Service Certificate issued by Bengal Nagpur Railway to J. T. Galibardy on 25 July 1950, personal collection of the Galibardy family, UK.
- xx. Service Certificate issued by Bengal Nagpur Railway to J. T. Galibardy on 25 July 1950, personal collection of the Galibardy family, UK.
- xxi. Service certificate issued by the Commissioners for the Port of Calcutta to J. Galibardy on 28 June 1956, personal collection of the Galibardy family, UK.
- xxii. A good example is the profile by Ezeiel and Arumugam (2012).
- xxiii. Interview with Jaswant Singh Rajput, Calcutta, 18 January 2013.
- xxiv. Interview with Gurbux Singh, Calcutta, 17 May 2012.
- xxv. Most of the Olympians, for example, were in agreement on one thing: the move to Astro-turf was inevitable for the survival and spread of hockey globally.

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