

From Statute to Structure: Operationalising India's Sports Governance Architecture

6 June 2026

Introduction

On 22 May 2026, the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, Department of Sports (MoYAS), notified two sets of rules under the National Sports Governance Act, 2025 (NSG Act): (i) the National Sports Governance (National Sports Board) Rules, 2026 (NSB Rules) *vide* G.S.R. 404(E); and (ii) the National Sports Governance (National Sports Tribunal) Rules, 2026 (NST Rules) *vide* G.S.R. 405(E) (*collectively*, "Rules"). Both were published in the Official Gazette on 25 May 2026 and came into force on the date of publication.

Read together with the NSG Act, the Rules do not merely prescribe service conditions for two new bodies. They begin to translate the NSG Act's architecture into an operating framework: the NSB Rules institutionalise recognition, disclosure, public records, governance guidance and financial accountability for the National Sports Board, while the NST Rules supply the service architecture, interim-relief powers, decree-like enforceability and technology-enabled processes for the National Sports Tribunal. The headline development is therefore operationalisation, not merely notification.

Background

1. The legislative background to the NSG Act may be traced, in part, to the National Sports Development Code of India, 2011 (Code). The Code was introduced to improve the management and functioning of National Sports Federations, including by promoting transparency and accountability, prescribing age and tenure limits for office-bearers, encouraging free and fair elections, addressing age fraud, preventing sexual harassment in sports, and bringing recognised federations within the framework of the Right to Information Act, 2005.
2. The NSG Act, which received the President's assent on 18 August 2025, builds on this existing governance framework. As reflected in its Statement of Objects and Reasons, the legislation seeks to strengthen sports governance in India, promote sporting excellence, improve outcomes, and enhance India's performance in major international competitions. To this end, the NSG Act establishes two key institutions: the National Sports Board (NSB), as the regulatory body, and the National Sports Tribunal (NST), as the adjudicatory forum. The provisions of the NSG Act are being introduced in a phased manner: the provisions for the setting up and regulation of National Sports Bodies, including the National Olympics Committee, National Paralympic Committee and National Sports Federations, were notified with effect from 1 January 2026, followed by the National Sports Governance (National Sports Governance Bodies) Rules, 2026 on 12 January 2026. The provisions establishing the NSB and the NST were also notified with effect from 1 January 2026.
3. The Statement of Objects and Reasons further records the need for comprehensive legislation to reduce disputes and litigation involving, *inter alia*, sports federations, and identifies factionalism and administrative interventions as concerns which may adversely affect the organised development of sports and related activities in India.
4. At the same time, the NSG Act recognises the importance of autonomy in sports administration. It provides that National Sports Bodies are to be guided primarily by the relevant international charters and statutes (International Charters and Statutes), and records that the Central Government "respects

the principle of autonomy" of sports governing bodies. This balance between statutory governance reform and autonomy norms forms an important backdrop to the Rules.

5. These reforms must also be read alongside India's broader strategic ambitions, including the prospective bids for the 2030 Commonwealth Games and the 2036 Summer Olympic Games, and the commercial impetus articulated in the National Sports Policy 2025. The credibility of India's sports governance architecture is now a matter of both regulatory and reputational consequence. [Ergo Update on National Sports Policy 2025](#)

The Board Rules: Recognition and Compliance

6. The Board Rules operationalise the NSB as India's central sports regulator. The NSB's powers include: (i) granting, suspending or cancelling recognition of National Sports Bodies; (ii) conducting inquiries into governance failures; (iii) constituting ad hoc administrative arrangements where federations collapse; (iv) issuing ethics guidance; and (v) framing Safe Sports Policies. Only recognised National Sports Bodies remain eligible for Central Government funding—a powerful compliance lever.
7. In addition to its statutory functions under the NSG Act, the NSB is empowered, under the NSB Rules, to:
 - i. maintain a roster of the National Sports Election Panel and a register of affiliate units of National Sports Bodies (in accordance with the NSB Rules), both of which are deemed "public documents" within the meaning of Section 74 of the Bharatiya Sakshya Adhinyam, 2023;
 - ii. specify model guidelines or regulations on matters of sports governance, including in relation to the constitution, operation and procedures of committees of National Sports Bodies;
 - iii. undertake consultations with relevant stakeholders;
 - iv. recommend the adoption of international covenants and best practices to National Sports Bodies and their affiliate units; and
 - v. organise training programmes, workshops, seminars and conferences, including in collaboration with International Sports Bodies.
8. The deeming of the election panel roster and the register of affiliate units as public documents brings these records squarely within the evidentiary framework of the new criminal evidence regime, and may have significant ramifications for litigation and dispute resolution involving National Sports Bodies.
9. The NSB will comprise a Chairperson and two Members, appointed by the Central Government from a panel recommended by a search-cum-selection committee. Members will serve a term of three years (or until age 65, whichever is earlier) and will be eligible for reappointment for one additional term. Importantly, Members are prohibited from holding any position in any International Sports Body, National Sports Body, or National Sports Promotion Organisation during their tenure.
10. A key question is whether the NSB has been designed with sufficient respect for sports autonomy. A domestic regulator may be seen as redundant where international bodies already determine recognition and autonomy. International federations may treat domestic governmental or court-led restructuring as third-party interference, as the AIFF experience demonstrated. The NSB must therefore regulate with restraint, transparency and close fidelity to International Charters and Statutes.

The Tribunal Rules: Fast-Track Dispute Resolution

11. The Tribunal Rules establish the NST as a specialist, digital-first adjudicatory forum to provide for the independent, speedy, effective and cost-efficient disposal of sports-related disputes. The NST is headed by a sitting or former Supreme Court judge or High Court Chief Justice, with two eminent members.
12. Importantly, the jurisdiction of civil courts is barred in respect of matters falling within the NST's purview, and its orders are executable as civil decrees. The Tribunal Rules also contemplate an online portal for filing, notices, documents and virtual hearings, enabling end-to-end digital case management.

13. Together, these features signal a move away from fragmented and protracted litigation towards a more structured dispute-resolution framework for Indian sport. By consolidating jurisdiction for covered disputes and enabling digital case management, the NST is intended to provide a clearer and more predictable pathway for sports-related disputes.

Dispute Resolution: Identifying the Correct Forum

14. The new framework does not route every sports dispute to the NST. It creates a structured pathway depending on the nature of the dispute and the governing rules of the relevant sport.
- vi. Stage 1 (Internal Dispute Resolution Committee (DRC)): Every National Sports Body is required to constitute an internal DRC, organised in line with its bye-laws and the applicable International Charters and Statutes. This is the first forum for federation-level disputes.
 - vii. Stage 2 (National Sports Tribunal): For sports-related disputes under the NSG Act, the NST enjoys jurisdiction to the exclusion of civil courts. However, Section 20 of the NSG Act carves out from NST jurisdiction: (i) matters arising during the Olympic, Paralympic, Commonwealth or Asian Games (and similar events organised by international federations); (ii) disputes falling within the exclusive jurisdiction of internal DRCs, other tribunals or courts; (iii) disputes falling under the jurisdiction of the Court of Arbitration for Sport, Lausanne (CAS) or international sports federations; (iv) doping-related matters governed by the National Anti-Doping Act, 2022; and (v) matters where the International Charters and Statutes require a specific forum.
 - viii. Stage 3 (Appeal): Appeals from non-interlocutory orders of the NST lie to the Supreme Court of India within 30 (thirty) days, except where the applicable International Charters and Statutes require recourse to CAS.
15. This structure preserves specialised international sports arbitration where International Charters and Statutes require it, while creating a domestic statutory forum for eligible Indian sports disputes. For investors and commercial stakeholders, this should yield a more predictable forum map: domestic governance disputes move toward the NST, while matters involving international competitions, athlete eligibility and federation recognition continue to be governed by CAS where the applicable international rules so provide.
16. A significant area of ambiguity nonetheless remains. The NSG Act does not exhaustively define what constitutes a “sports-related dispute” for the purposes of NST jurisdiction. Nor is there clarity on the precise demarcation between disputes which must first be adjudicated by the internal DRC and those which may be brought directly before the NST. Whether general commercial disputes touching the sports sector, such as sponsorship agreements, broadcasting rights or athlete endorsement contracts, fall within the NST’s domain, and whether a party could in such cases bypass a private arbitration clause by approaching the NST, are open questions. The absence of clear statutory guidance on these threshold issues may generate preliminary jurisdictional contests, potentially undermining the very efficiency the new framework seeks to achieve.

Stakeholder Implications and Implementation Priorities

- i. National Sports Bodies and affiliate units: Constitutions, election processes, affiliate registers, internal DRC mandates, codes of ethics, safeguarding protocols, conflict disclosures and record-retention practices should be reviewed through the lens of the NSG Act and the NSB Rules. The public-document treatment of election-panel and affiliate records will raise the evidentiary and transparency stakes in election and recognition disputes.
- ii. Athletes and athlete-support personnel: Forum mapping is now critical. The first question is whether a grievance belongs before an internal DRC, the NST, CAS, an international federation or an anti-doping forum. The 30-day Supreme Court appeal window and charter-based CAS carve-outs add urgency to early advice and to careful preservation of communications, minutes, notices and selection records.
- iii. Sponsors, broadcasters and investors: Recognition, public records, audit architecture and a specialised dispute forum should improve diligence and reduce the governance opacity. At the same time, open questions on the boundary between statutory sports disputes and purely commercial

disputes will matter directly to transaction structuring, dispute clauses, representations and warranties on governance, and risk allocation in sports-facing investments.

- iv. *Counsel*: Dispute clauses in sports-related contracts, including those involving federations, leagues, athlete services, academies and sports-administration arrangements should be revisited. Arbitration clauses may face non-arbitrability or forum-competition arguments if a dispute is later characterised as a statutory sports dispute. Clear drafting and forum strategy will matter more, not less. The scope of the NSG Act extends to National Sports Federations such as the All India Football Federation and the Amateur Kabaddi Association of India. The Board of Control for Cricket in India, on the other hand, being a private body, is yet to be recognised as a National Sports Federation by the MoYAS and included within the purview of the NSG Act.

Comment

17. The Rules are a necessary and commercially relevant next step in India's sports-governance reform. They do not create new abstract commitments; they begin to institutionalise recognition, transparency, adjudication and record-based accountability. The regime is meaningfully more structured today than it was before, but it is not yet fully procedurally complete.
18. The strongest feature of the NSB Rules is that they make the NSB look less like a symbolic regulator and more like an institutional governance platform. Public-document treatment for certain records, annual audited accounts, in-term conflict restrictions and the power to issue model governance guidance together point toward a more professionalised compliance culture. The autonomy question, however, remains live: a statutory domestic regulator must operate with restraint, transparency and close fidelity to International Charters and Statutes if it is to avoid being characterised as third-party interference under the rules of international federations. The NSG Act itself contains restraint mechanisms, including the requirement that National Sports Bodies be guided primarily by International Charters and Statutes, and safeguards around normalisation processes where international recognition is lost, but the texture of the relationship between the NSB and international federations will ultimately be set by practice.
19. For NST, the Rules give it a genuine institutional texture through tenure, conflict screening, post-tenure cooling-off, interim relief powers and decree-like enforceability. Yet two persistent questions will define its first phase of operation: first, whether the open-ended category of "sports-related disputes" will invite threshold litigation on jurisdiction; and second, whether a three-member Tribunal will be able to support the volume and time-sensitivity of the disputes likely to land before it. Sports disputes are unusually time-sensitive, a delayed hearing often destroys the right being litigated, particularly in elections, team selection, event entry, accreditation and suspension matters. Early publication of practice directions on urgency listings, interim relief (including the availability of *ex parte ad interim* protection in event-sensitive matters), confidentiality and anonymity standards, and the interface with federation-level DRCs and international fora will be critical.
20. Three further steps would aid implementation. First, the MoYAS should publish a consolidated explanatory note with model forms, filing formats, fee schedules (if any), and a public matrix mapping disputes to fora. Second, the NST should issue practice directions on case management, including mediation where appropriate. Third, the Central Government should clarify, by amendment or authoritative guidance, the appellate path against the full range of NSB actions: recognition, suspension, election-control and ad hoc-administration orders are bound to be litigated, and leaving the appellate route partially mapped (Section 10(3) of the NSG Act addresses appeals against recognition/registration suspension or cancellation, but not every category of NSB action) will generate the very threshold litigation the NST is intended to eliminate.
21. Comparatively, India now appears to be moving toward a statutory-regulator-plus-statutory-tribunal structure, rather than relying on grant-linked governance codes (as in some leading jurisdictions) or on ADR-heavy sports-dispute systems (as in Australia and Canada). The Indian model may yield consistency and stronger public-law accountability, but it may also invite early forum contests unless procedural guidance arrives promptly. That trade-off, and the speed with which it is resolved, will shape the regime's first chapter.

Conclusion

The notification of the NSB Rules and the NST Rules moves the NSG Act from statutory aspiration to institutional design. The first phase of operation will likely be defined by autonomy calibration, forum allocation, urgency practice and institutional capacity rather than by the merits of the regime itself. For stakeholders across Indian sport: federations; athletes; sponsors; broadcasters; investors and counsel, the message is that the regime has entered its operational phase, and compliance, forum strategy and governance diligence should be calibrated accordingly.

- *Ashraya Rao (Partner); Siddharth Marwah (Partner); Dhritiman Roy (Counsel) and Sania Abbasi (Senior Associate)*



About Khaitan & Co

Khaitan & Co is a top tier and full-service law firm with over 1300+ legal professionals, including 340+ leaders and presence in India and Singapore. With more than a century of experience in practicing law, we offer end-to-end legal solutions in diverse practice areas to our clients across the world. We have a team of highly motivated and dynamic professionals delivering outstanding client service and expert legal advice across a wide gamut of sectors and industries.

To know more, visit www.khaitanco.com



This document has been created for informational purposes only. Neither Khaitan & Co nor any of its partners, associates or allied professionals shall be liable for any interpretation or accuracy of the information contained herein, including any errors or incompleteness. This document is intended for non-commercial use and for the general consumption of the reader, and should not be considered as legal advice or legal opinion of any form and may not be relied upon by any person for such purpose. It may not be quoted or referred to in any public document, or shown to, or filed with any government authority, agency or other official body.

www.khaitanco.com | © Khaitan & Co 2026 | All Rights Reserved.

Ahmedabad · Bengaluru · Chennai · Delhi-NCR · GIFT City · Kolkata · Mumbai · Pune · Singapore