Article – I

Impact of Major Sporting Events on International Relations: A Contemporary Indian Perspective

Nishi Bhamkar and Rounak Doshi

ABSTRACT

Sports refers to organized skill-based activities taking place at an international level where countries and states compete against each other. Sports can be a basis to achieve the object of strengthening one’s international relations. They can be utilized by geopolitical blocks or states to showcase their superiority or develop a relationship with other states. Governments may want athletic victories to display the power of the political and economic system of the state. For political reasons, sports can also be used on an international scale; by participating (or not) in sports events, states can achieve a number of policy goals. It has to be noticed that professional sports were earlier a neglected activity, and in stereotypical families, especially in India, sports is still not considered to be a viable career option. However, in the past, sports have emerged as a strong source for the development of international relations. Sports are not just influenced by the policies of a country, but sporting events can also influence states on certain occasions. International sports tournaments and events serve the larger purpose of impacting international relations among countries. They help countries in developing a bond with other countries and also help them in fulfilling political motives. The purpose of this article is to analyse the significance of international sporting events and their impact on international relations between countries.

Understanding Sports

Sports can be seen as one of the most exciting contemporary phenomena, as it professionally started around 200 years ago in the Modern era, and won the interests of millions. The credit of this achievement goes not just to the participants but also to the viewers who have played a crucial role in bringing sports to its limelight today. It is estimated that 3.6 billion people attended the opening ceremony of the London 2012 Olympic Games on television. Further, Poland’s most widely viewed TV shows were the 2012 European Football Championships, where 15.5 million viewers witnessed the opening match between Poland and Greece, and the Olympic Ski Jumping competition.

1 Rounak Doshi and Nishi Bhamkar are third year students at the National Law Institute University, Bhopal. They have researched on international law, and participated in various competitions relating to public international law.
2012 organized in Salt Lake City was attended by 14.5 million spectators. Furthermore, sporting events such as UEFA Cup, Football World Cup, Cricket World Cup and Indian Premier League are known to have worldwide spectatorship and fame. Sporting is one of the fastest-growing activities and has evolved substantially over such a short span of time. From being enjoyed as a leisure activity to becoming a profession, its evolution has served as a lucrative deal for many. No wonder, due to its commercial possibilities, sports has become very attractive to business. For advertising products, sports stars earn millions and the very events are amongst the most profitable to advertisers. The world of politics cannot fail to gain great popularity in sports. If sports celebrities and victors are profitable for businesses, then politicians who look for an electorate, state leaders who seek to foster domestic pride and even political systems that need to emphasise their superiority may also benefit. With the development of major sports like football, cricket and basketball all around the world, along with individual sports taking a big leap of growth, it is paramount to understand how countries have been using sports for international diplomacy and how international relations worldwide could be improved by one of the most cherished activities in the world.

**Interrelationship between Sports and Politics**

Although different kinds of sports are known to be played in different parts of the world, the European Continent is particularly being known as the sporting centre of the world, especially because of the origin of two major sporting events there, i.e. Football and Cricket. Even these days, the majority of the big football names and cricket players belong to the European continent. Taking into account that there was a time when the English colonial empire ruled over different countries in different parts of the world, and the English officials appointed in these countries spent the majority of their lives in these colonies, thereby, English sports being brought into these countries is unsurprising. Along with the development, oppression, and wisdom that the colonial empire brought into different countries, it introduced these countries with its typical sporting culture as well. Even a gigantic proportion of meetings that took place between

---

colonial leaders and small scale Indian rulers during the colonial period actually happened over a cup of tea while watching a live cricket game.\(^{14}\) Sports have also served as one of the solutions to the excessive amount of racism that was practised in the USA.\(^{15}\) There have been multiple instances where the two disputed races, i.e. the whites and the blacks, came together and represented the USA in multiple team sports.\(^{16}\) Looking at the statistical data, one may find that the USA basketball team, which was composed of all the white people at a time with no access for the blacks, is now dominated by the black community.\(^{17}\) This shows how sports served as a solution against the impediment of hatred among the two races. Taking the example of African nations, where the colonial empire had a huge role to play, the sporting world of these nations is composed of mixed races now, instead of the all-black-all-white team concept that was followed in the past.\(^{18}\)

The role of sports in serving a political purpose was always a part of the system but was never recognized for playing this substantial role. The establishment of diplomacy and international relations through sports was brought into the limelight because of the 1936 Berlin Olympics.\(^{19}\) Since then, there have been several instances such as Elysee Treaty between France and Germany,\(^{20}\) Cricket diplomacy between India and Pakistan,\(^{21}\) Cricket-Football ties between Australia and New Zealand,\(^{22}\) multiple Olympic Games, and the Afghanistan Cricket team’s participation in the Cricket World Cup despite the Taliban take over.\(^{23}\)

A few of the above-mentioned instances will be discussed in detail by the authors, however, it has to be taken into account if sports have a positive impact on international relations and politics, then they have a negative impact too. The negative impacts of the same have been horrific and heart-breaking, one of the prime examples of the same is the Munich Olympics 1972 which were eventually cancelled because of a terrorist attack that took place and ended with the killing of around 18 people including 11 Israeli athletes.\(^{24}\) The Munich Olympics is not just a one-off incident, but one of the many such as the Sri Lankan Cricket team terrorist attack,\(^{25}\) UEFA Madrid bomb blast,\(^{26}\) 1994 FIFA

\(^{17}\) Nikole Tower, In an ethnic breakdown of sports, NBA takes lead for most diverse, Global Sport Matters, https://bit.ly/3dp9fGE.
\(^{19}\) Howard Berkes, Nazi Olympics Tangled Politics and Sport, NPR, https://n.pr/3jwYxBw.
\(^{24}\) Rafael Reuveny, Black September, Britannica, https://bit.ly/3hj7ewG.
Escobar’s murder,\textsuperscript{27} 1996 Cricket World Cup stadium fire,\textsuperscript{28} 1987 Indore cricket pitch turbulence,\textsuperscript{29} etc. All these instances took place to eventually serve the political purpose of causing harm to other nations, tarnishing the image of the organizing nation or causing internal conflicts in the nation where such incidents took place.

After all, the positive and negative impacts that have been discussed so far, it would not be wrong to conclude that politics and sports, both are affected and dependent upon each other. The prime example for this would be India itself where BCCI, despite being the regulatory authority for the game of cricket, has to go through the political channel\textsuperscript{30} in order to organize any cricketing event in India taking into account that cricket can cause major international relationship change, and thus the government has to be taken into confidence. On the other hand, there are multiple instances where political leaders have used sports for their personal agendas, and for improving one’s nation’s international relations as well.

\textbf{Olympics and International Relations}

Olympic Games are known as the most famous sporting event all around the world.\textsuperscript{31} Olympic Games are known for attracting countries from all around the globe for a wide variety of sports that are organized in these games.\textsuperscript{32} Olympics are known as the oldest major sporting event having participation from all around the globe.\textsuperscript{33} Furthermore, one of the editions of the Olympics, i.e. 1936 Berlin Olympics, served as a bedrock event when it comes to sports impacting international relations. Although the Olympics started in the year 1896,\textsuperscript{34} and a lot of countries became a part of the games at a very early stage itself, the impact of the Olympic Games on international relations and diplomacy was majorly observed in 1936 Berlin Olympics. In the year 1933, when Adolf Hitler was leading Germany and it was supposed to be hosting the 1936 Olympics.\textsuperscript{35} A lot of people and leaders from multiple European and American countries started revolting against the organization of the Olympics in Berlin,\textsuperscript{36} the primary reason being Adolf Hitler’s hatred and atrocities against the Jewish people of Germany.\textsuperscript{37} Although the explicit killing of Jews had not started in Germany by then, nonetheless, through the actions of the then government, it was apparent for the German population and the remaining world that Adolf Hitler was not in support of upholding human rights for the

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\item \textsuperscript{27}Worst Sport Terrorism Attack, TIME, https://bit.ly/3jt2WFl.
\item \textsuperscript{28}Worst Sport Terrorism Attack, TIME, https://bit.ly/3jt2WFl.
\item \textsuperscript{29}Worst Sport Terrorism Attack, TIME, https://bit.ly/3jt2WFl.
\item \textsuperscript{31}Young, David C., and Harold Maurice Abrahams. 2021. “Olympic Games.” In Encyclopedia Britannica.
\item \textsuperscript{32}https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/ancient-art-civilizations/greek-art-beginners-guide-greece/a/olympic-games
\item \textsuperscript{33}Facts about Olympic Games, Lead the Competition, https://bit.ly/2SyAkzQ.
\item \textsuperscript{34}Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{35}Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{36}Ibid.
\end{thebibliography}
Jewish people of his nation. There were instances, where German organizations denied the participation of Jewish athletes, even the best ones, in the 1936 Olympics.\textsuperscript{38} When the revolt against Berlin Olympics caught the media’s attention and got worldwide recognition, Hitler’s government had no other option but to sacrifice their personal endeavours against the Jewish for the time being and organize Olympics with utmost sincerity.

Nonetheless, Germany did use the opportunity of organizing the Olympic Games as an incentive to build its international relations with its neighbouring nations. It did result in Germany being recognized on an international stage and also in Germany getting close to its neighbour France. Despite France’s initial opposition to the Olympics being organized in Berlin,\textsuperscript{39} the French contingent ended up giving Roman Salute at the opening ceremony.\textsuperscript{40} Although only for the time being, this showed that Germany had made a few allies through the smooth organization of the Olympics. Nevertheless, the Nazi government of Germany used the incentive of the Olympics to fulfil their political propaganda as well. The German government used international attention as a way of describing the country as a benign and progressive nation, but at the same time, provided fuel for its propaganda of the Aryan superiority, which was later specifically prohibited by the International Olympic Committee (hereinafter “IOC”).\textsuperscript{41}

1936 Olympic Games were not the only Olympic Games that resulted in a change of international relations and public attention, but a few other Olympics also had a substantial role in the same:

\textbf{1948 London Olympics:} In the first post-World War II Olympic Games in London-Germany and Japan were not invited.\textsuperscript{42} This was a way through which the UK, a part of Allied forces, showed its dissent against the Axis powers. London was still recovering from the war, like many other European cities. The town had limited time to prepare itself for the Games and eventually used sports and housing facilities that were already developed for the contest. Allegedly, the Wembley Way, a path from London Underground to the stadium, was built by German prisoners of war retained in the UK.\textsuperscript{43} In this way, the UK showed its dissent against the aggressive German government without ever actually battling against them again.

\textbf{1956 Melbourne Olympics:} Two protests led to the 1956 Olympics of Melbourne taking place with teams from less than 67 countries.\textsuperscript{44} When Israel’s brigades invaded the Sinai

\textsuperscript{40} The Nazi Olympics, Holocaust Encyclopedia, https://bit.ly/3dpczBC.
\textsuperscript{41} Grannan, Cydney. n.d. “7 Significant Political Events at the Olympic Games.” In Encyclopedia Britannica.
\textsuperscript{42} Grannan, Cydney. n.d. “7 Significant Political Events at the Olympic Games.” In Encyclopedia Britannica
\textsuperscript{43} Cydney Grannan, 7 Significant Political Events at the Olympic Games, Britannica, https://bit.ly/2TbvjxE.
Peninsula in 1956, the Suez crisis in the Middle East was at the forefront. A protest against the invasion of Israel and for the support of their allies was organized by Egypt, Lebanon and Iraq, who eventually boycotted the Olympics that year. In the meantime, a few weeks prior to the opening ceremony, the Soviet army invaded Budapest, Hungary. The Netherlands, Spain and Switzerland took their participation out of the Games just to protest this invasion. Despite all this, Hungary remained in the Games, followed by an intense water polo face-off between its team and the USSR resulting in Hungary gaining a substantial victory over the USSR and making a big statement in front of the whole world through the same.

**1968 Mexico Olympics**: Two major political events took place during the 1968 Summer Olympics in Mexico City. Mexican students protested in Plaza de las Tres Cultures in Mexico City’s Tlatelolco neighbourhood ten days before the opening ceremony of the Games. They opposed the use of public funds, instead for social programmes, for the Olympic Games. The Mexican army surrounded the square and fired over 200 demonstrators, injuring over 1,000 people. This resulted in an atrocity known as the Tlatelolco massacre. Additionally, during the 200-meter men’s award ceremony, US sprinter Tommie Smith and sprinter John Carlos protested against the treatment of black citizens in their country. During the play of the US national anthem, they took their first and 3rd podiums barefoot and raised their hands with a black glove on while bowing down their heads. Through this silent protest, they brought the attention of the whole world to the practice of racism in the USA and addressed the concern of their community at a wide level.

**1972 Munich Olympics**: As already mentioned above, Munich Olympics were affected by the deadly act of Palestinian terrorists. It is said that this attack took place in light of the disagreements between Israel and Palestine. This is a prime example for showing that major sporting events are not only an opportunity for addressing international issues and improving international relations but also an incentive for a few to infiltrate

---

the peaceful processions. This Olympics was a specimen for the world to witness the differences between Israel and Palestine, which have not been resolved till this date.54

1976 Montreal Olympics: About two dozen countries, most of them African, boycotted the 1976 Montreal Olympics due to the IOC’s refusal to ban New Zealand.55 The National Rugby Team in New Zealand had visited South Africa,56 a country prohibited from the Olympics because of its Apartheid rules.57 Although the boycott had failed to ban New Zealand from the Games, the apartheid policies in South Africa had received worldwide attention. This resulted in New Zealand adopting an approach to protest against apartheid policies, but at the same time, keeping friendly relations with South Africa.58

1980 Moscow Olympics: During this Olympics, the immediate point of dispute was the Soviet Union’s invasion of Afghanistan and the long-term cold war politics between the USA and the Soviet Union. In order to oppose the said invasion, the USA boycotted the said Olympics and convinced more than 60 other countries to do.59 Although, the Soviet Union did not withdraw its forces from Afghanistan and continued the Olympics, the same was done without any participation from 60+ boycotting countries, thus a huge loss to the Moscow Olympics. Furthermore, these boycotting countries eventually organized and participated in an Olympic Boycott Games called "Liberty Bell Classic" in Philadelphia the same year.60

1984 Los Angeles Olympics: The Los Angeles Olympics involved two major political scenarios- first being the Soviet Union’s retaliation against the USA’s act of boycotting the Moscow Olympics,61 and the second being a South African athlete Zola Budd participating despite South Africa being banned from participating in the Olympics through her Grandfather’s British citizenship.62 Soviet Union used the LA Olympics to make its political intentions clear against the USA. Although, the Soviet Union cited the reason to be the commercialization of sports by the USA, however, it is said that the actual intention of the Soviet Union was to retaliate against the USA. Multiple countries joined the Soviet Union in the said boycott, yet the LA Olympics emerged as the

Olympics with the largest number of participating countries then. The said boycott did not cause much trouble to the USA, but the Soviet Union was able to make its stance clear through the boycott. Later on, all the countries that had boycotted the LA Olympics eventually organized a Friendship Games in Soviet as an alternative to the Olympics.63

2016 Rio Olympics: It was the first time that a separate refugee team was created.64 In the first Olympic Refugee Team, ten refugee athletes were selected.65 This team was created by the IOC to highlight the refugee crisis at the world level. The squad was selected for the athletes who were from Syria, South Sudan, Ethiopia and Congo, and were trained in a host country (Kenya, Belgium, Luxembourg, Brazil, or Germany).66 This refugee team entered the opening ceremony of the games even before the host country i.e. Brazil.67

2020 Tokyo Olympics: Organised in the midst of the Coronavirus pandemic, the 2020 Tokyo Olympic games had a major impact on international relations between countries. They were delayed for a year and were organised in 2021 instead of 2020, but their organisation brought with it many challenges. Japan, the host country had an opportunity to show the world, how fast and efficiently it has rebuilt itself after the Triple Disaster (the 2011 earthquake, tsunami, and Fukushima nuclear accident).68 Meanwhile, some citizens of Japan were unhappy with its organisation of the Olympics when its own citizen was suffering badly and tried to put off the Olympic torch in order to send a message of their strong dissent worldwide.69 Unlike the Olympic games organised in the past, where countries with tensions or ongoing cold wars bunked their participation, the 2020 Tokyo Olympics proved to be a success as even South Korea and China, Japan’s rival nations participated with chivalry. Thus, even though the pandemic closed down international borders, the 2020 Olympics united the countries by emotion and circumstances. A beautiful example of the same is when a good Samaritan helped the Jamaican athlete reach his venue on time, after being lost. In fact, he won gold in his game and dedicated the same to the good Samaritan, who was later officially invited to visit Jamaica.70

65 Ibid.
At times, these games become a stage for countries to show international solidarity towards humanitarian and human rights concerns. For instance, in the 2020 Tokyo Paralympic games, the Afghanistan flag march was duly inculcated amongst the marches of other countries, even when the contingent could not participate because of the Taliban takeover in their country. It shows that countries worldwide support Afghanistan’s struggle against the Taliban and that they want to welcome back Afghanistan as a stable and democratic country.

All these events show how sports and their associated events sometimes serve as a platform for countries to voice their opinions in the international arena and at other times, become that golden thread of unity that keeps the nations bound together for good.

**Elysee Treaty 1963**

The relations between France and Germany were very bitter for a long period of time. During World War II, the rivalry had inflated to an extent that both the nations fought against each other.⁷¹ There were very few efforts made by the leaders of both countries to resolve the disputes. However, finally in 1963, both the countries signed a friendly treaty to improve their diplomatic relations.⁷² The treaty between France-Germany was signed with a view and aim to end their long-term rivalry. The treaty proposed regular meetings between the two countries in light of addressing major concerns such as defence, education and youth. A special clause, uniquely addressing the sporting relationship between the countries, was added in this treaty. Through the clause, it was made mandatory for the sports ministers of the countries to meet once every two months and identify the joint sports opportunities for the youth of both countries.⁷³ This shows how the government chose sports to become a part of the treaty that was aiming to put an end to their long-term rivalry.

These Olympic Games and the related incidents had an impact on the international relations among different countries, with special consideration for world diplomacy. A few of these incidents affected the bilateral relations as well, however, when it comes to India, the Olympics did not have much of an impact other than the 1948 games, when India defeated the UK a year after getting independence from the same.⁷⁴ Tracing the sporting history of India, it can be noticed that Indian politics and international relations are hugely affected by sports such as hockey and cricket.

The sync between India’s international relations and hockey goes way back to 1925, when the Indian Hockey Federation was formed. It organised its first tour to New

---

Zealand in 1926, where the Indian hockey men’s team played 21 matches and won 18.\(^75\) After these matches in particular, Major Dhyan Chand came to be known as the hockey wizard of the world. However, the Olympic Hockey match of 1948 was specifically very important for India. The newly independent republic had an onus to bring out the best from its nation at an international level. It was also the time when the erstwhile Indian Hockey team split, as an array of its strategic players decided to join Pakistan. Despite all these difficulties, the Indian team managed to win the gold, defeating England in the finals. Thus, the team sent a strong message by defeating the very country that colonised it, that the newly independent India was ready to take on the world.

However, even in hockey, an India- Pakistan match takes no time to turn into a cultural carnage between the two nations. Pakistan prevailed in the sport from 1995-2000, but with the economic gap and other social conditions widening between the two countries, India has been on a lead of 8-19 between 2010-2020.\(^76\) The recent stellar performance by both the men’s and women’s hockey teams at the Tokyo Olympics, begets nothing but hope.

Apart from hockey, Cricket has always had a strategic advantage for India’s International Relations with other states. Therefore, in the next section deals with the same in detail.

**India’s International Relations and Cricket Diplomacy**

Sports and gaming tournaments in India have majorly revolved around the much-loved sport of Cricket. Cricket is not just considered to be a sport in India but is also considered to be a medium of livelihood by many, a leisure time activity by some, and even a matter of faith by a few.\(^77\)

Along with India, it is known that cricket is a widely accepted and popular sport in India’s arch-rival country and adjacent neighbour Pakistan as well.\(^78\) Pakistan and India, both have been prime teams in the sport of cricket for a very long time and have been improving the game and its popularity every day since 1947. Since this sport has been very famous among the common public of India and Pakistan for so long, in 1987 the then President of Pakistan, General Zia coined the term ‘cricket diplomacy’ for the first time.\(^79\) In the context of the same, General Zia enacted cricket diplomacy through his surprise visit to India in the year 1987.\(^80\) India’s Prime Minister during this time was Rajiv Gandhi, and during this period, the relationship and tension between India-


\(^{79}\) Emily Crick, Can cricket be used as multi-track diplomacy in the context of Indo-Pakistani relations? With particular reference to the period between 1999 and 2005.

\(^{80}\) Ibid.
Pakistan were much escalated as both the countries had a large number of troops positioned at their respective borders. At the same time, the Pakistan cricket team was playing a test match series against India, and on the day of Zia's arrival, both the teams were playing a match in Jaipur. Although, General Zia mentioned that he came for the purpose of watching the match, but it was actually a visit to meet PM Rajiv Gandhi in person and clear the misunderstandings between the two countries. Soon, it all became very apparent when both the countries removed heavy weapons and a large number of troops from their borders as a signal towards promoting ceasefire and peaceful diplomacy. In furtherance to this, soon after the de-escalation, it was announced that India shall be touring Pakistan after a long period of time. This incident of cricket diplomacy was not a one-off incident but among the several that India-Pakistan have had.

However, after General Zia's death, cricket diplomacy could not develop much except the time when Benazir Bhutto and Rajiv Gandhi met and signed agreements for peace in Kashmir. Cricket was again considered as a factor for improving relations and promoting peace. The same could not be materialized because of the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi. However, later in 1997, India did visit Pakistan for an ODI series after a long time despite the last two series between the two being organized at a neutral venue. Above all this, what is considered to be a substantial series specifically organized for bolstering the India-Pakistan diplomatic relationship was in the year 1999 when the Pakistani team visited India just a year after both the countries tested their nuclear weapons. As a surprise, the Pakistani team was welcomed in a very generous way when the Indian crowd gave a standing ovation to the Pakistani team for their performance in the first game. Although, this series could not serve its purpose as both the countries eventually got involved in a conflict against each other.

A few years later, in 2004, a formal peace process was started between India and Pakistan which eventually ended up with India visiting Pakistan for a Test series for the first time since 1987; this tour took place as a part of the diplomatic initiative between Indian and Pakistan called the 'Friendship Series'. During this series, a large number of visa(s) were issued so that people from India could visit Pakistan to witness the match. This makes it very clear that whenever the tensions escalated between India and Pakistan, leaders from both countries resorted to the remedy of cricket. Almost a year later in

---

81 Ibid.
82 Ibid.
83 Ibid.
84 Feroz Hassan Khan, Prospects for Indian and Pakistani arms control and confidence-building measures.
85 Feroz Hassan Khan, Prospects for Indian and Pakistani arms control and confidence-building measures.
86 Emily Crick, Can cricket be used as multi-track diplomacy in the context of Indo-Pakistani relations? With particular reference to the period between 1999 and 2005 (2006).
2005, the then Prime Minister of India Manmohan Singh invited his counterpart Pervez Musharraf to witness a cricket match in New Delhi. A few moments after this meeting, both the leaders mentioned that a peace process between India and Pakistan was now irreversible.\footnote{Timeline: India-Pakistan Cricket Diplomacy, Hindustan Times, https://bit.ly/3w8RbXz.}

However, a few years later when the 26/11 attacks took place,\footnote{PTI. 2021. “26/11 Mumbai Terror Attack: Biden Admin Proposes U.S. Court to Extradite Tahawwur Rana to India.” The Hindu. July 20, 2021. https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/2611-mumbai-terror-attack-biden-admin-proposes-us-court-to-extradite-tahawwur-rana-to-india/article35426067.ece.} India had cut off its cricketing ties with Pakistan and the two teams did not play a bilateral series against each other for a long time. Nonetheless, during the 2011 Cricket World Cup which was organized in India, these two teams met in an important knockout match, wherein, the then President of Pakistan Asif Ali Zardari and Prime Minister Gilani were invited by the Indian PM Manmohan Singh and the two nations again had the opportunity to improve their international relations through cricket.\footnote{Timeline: India-Pakistan Cricket Diplomacy, Hindustan Times, https://bit.ly/3w8RbXz.} Lastly, in the year 2013, the two teams played a bilateral series in India after a substantial period of time, this series was considered as a huge move towards improving diplomatic ties after the 26/11 incident.\footnote{Timeline: India-Pakistan Cricket Diplomacy, Hindustan Times, https://bit.ly/3w8RbXz.} However, since 2013, the two teams have not met in a bilateral series which brings to light another cricketing event i.e. the Indian Premier League, where players from around the globe participate except their Pakistani counterparts because they are banned from the same since the 26/11 attacks.\footnote{“IPL Controversy Part 4: Pakistan Players’ Participation Banned after the 26/11 Mumbai Attacks in 2009” Reportr Door. 2021. Reportrdoor.Com. April 7, 2021. https://reportrdoor.com/2021/04/07/ipl-controversy-part-4-pakistan-players-participation-banned-after-the-26-11-mumbai-attacks-in-2009/.}

The Indian Premier League is a cricket league organized by the BCCI in India. This league was started in the year 2008 with the purpose of developing and promoting cricket, while at the same time, bringing players from around the globe to play with each other in the same or opposite teams.\footnote{Indian Premier League, IPL, https://bit.ly/3drFsgp.} The IPL has gained enormous popularity over such a short span and is known worldwide for attracting the most viewership in any sporting event in India.\footnote{“IPL Is the Largest Reached Sports Event in 2014: FICCI KPMG Report.” 2015. Indiantelevision.Com. March 30, 2015. https://www.indiantelevision.com/specials/event-coverage/ficci-frames/ipl-is-the-largest-reached-sports-event-in-2014-ficci-kpmg-report-150330.} The IPL, which merely started as a domestic cricket league, is now an international sporting event and thus, it particularly helps India in developing better relations with other cricket playing nations.

Australia and Afghanistan, taking into account that a substantial number of players participate from these countries and receive a massive amount of compensation for their game.\footnote{Aditya Desai, IPL 2021, Republic World, https://bit.ly/3yaiXol.} They are the best examples for the same as the former has developed its cricketing ties with India to an extent that the Indian cricket team is always invited to
dine with the Australian PM whenever they visit Australia for a bilateral series. This gradual improvement in India-Australia ties eventually helped India during the difficult times of COVID19 as well, when Australia became one of the first nations to extend help towards India. Along with this, it has been observed that the substantial amount of racism that was practised against Indians in the Australian territory has now decreased to almost negligible, which has evidently occurred after the commencement of this league.

Afghanistan fared through years of war and insurgency and promoted cricket heavily, under the past regime. It was cricket that gave them a good boost and helped establish healthy relationships with a number of countries. India also developed its ties with Afghanistan through cricket only when it provided its local international stadium situated in Lucknow to Afghanistan for practicing and organizing their home matches. India also became the first nation to play a test cricket match with Afghanistan, wherein, the players from both the nations showed remarkable spirit by sharing the picture with the winning trophy. What followed was a good deal of investments by the Indian Government in the erstwhile state, amounting to a sum of $3 billion.

Now when the country is at the brink of a regime change, with the infamous Taliban takeover, cricket is once again being used as a tool to garner international acceptance. The Afghanistan Cricket Board CEO Hamind Shinwani recently announced that they are willing to participate in the upcoming T2o World Cup and also have series lined against Pakistan and Sri Lanka. This was the country’s first big sports announcement after the Taliban takeover. The country’s U-19 men’s cricket team also recently arrived at Bangladesh to play five ODIs and a four-day match against Bangladesh’s U-19 team. These events are being seen as a subtle international acceptance of the new regime in the tumultuous state. However, there are other states that have put forth their demands

---


102 India best Afghanistan, ESPNCrickinfo, https://es.pn/361MLqV.


to the Taliban, which it must follow in the sporting domain, in order to get a healthy international engagement.

Australia, for one, has recently announced that it will cancel its scheduled test match with Afghanistan if the Taliban do not allow Afghanistan women's team to play.\textsuperscript{106} This step by Australia comes as a strict international backlash when the Taliban regime is already being criticized for its treatment of the women masses of Afghanistan and the gross violation of their human rights. Apart from this, the International Cricket Council (ICC) has also expressed its concerns about women's cricket in Afghanistan, which developed after years of efforts and is now under immediate threat under the Taliban.\textsuperscript{107}

**Conclusion and Suggestions**

In light of the analysis of all the incidents, authorities and stipulations mentioned above, it can be concluded that sports have had a substantive role to play in developing international and bilateral ties among different nations around the globe. Be it international issues that need to be address or conflicting relations between countries, sports has turned out to be a good resort for solving such international problems. Sports not only brings the players and spectators together but also the leaders from different nations.

Be it the problems resulting from World War II or the impediments that arose after multiple terrorist attacks, sports in the past have proved out to be a source for bringing nations together and thus, helping leaders involve in bilateral talks through such sporting events. Several examples have been provided in this study to make the point of the importance of sports in developing international relations. Since the basic aim of this study was to look into the effect of sports on India's international relations, it can be concluded that the famous game of cricket has helped India in developing a relationship with underdeveloped nations like Afghanistan and developed nations like Australia. The game of cricket certainly facilitated the arch-rivals India and Pakistan to improve their ties and resolve their conflicts. If history proves anything then it would be right to conclude that Indian leaders, along with their Pakistani counterparts, have relied upon the game of cricket whenever they found themselves in a precarious situation.

Along with this, events such as the Commonwealth games and the Indian Premier League have helped India strongly in creating an international sphere with other nations. As already mentioned above, IPL, which started only a few years ago, has helped India to develop ties that even facilitated them during the time of a global crisis. With this, it can be concluded that sporting events and international sports tournaments serve the larger purpose of impacting international relations among countries.


International sporting events help countries in developing a bond with other countries and also help them in fulfilling other political motives.

It is also suggested that India should continue the practice of cricket diplomacy in order to resolve its conflicts with its neighbours. It can further extend its horizon to other sports in relation to sports diplomacy. Furthermore, India-Pakistan, unless restricted by other factors, can take the initiative of organizing more bilateral sporting events for bringing the people of both the countries together, it can further help in decreasing the hatred that the people from these countries have against each other and further de-escalating the tension between the two countries.