

Evolution of Field Hockey in India Past and Future: A Study

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Abstract

This paper attempts to study the **status of Indian hockey, with its former glory and imminent aspirations.** Field hockey, the national game of India, has traces of being played in some form or the other dating back to 4000 years ago in Egypt (Saradindu, 1972a), but many believe that this game was born in Persia 500 BC before the earlier discovery. From Persia to Greece, the game travelled and there is evidence of the Romans having their own version of the game called pagnacia.

Players association must be set up for transparency, collective bargaining and for players voice to be heard. Similarly, coaches appointed for national and state teams should be based on certain parameters, performance review tournament wise against pre-set targets including, decent remuneration followed by three to five years stints must be guaranteed to make sense of their engagement, providing stability and demanding results. The India men's national field hockey team was the first non-European team to be a part of the International Hockey Federation. In 1928, the team won its first Olympic gold medal and until 1960, the Indian men's team remained unbeaten in the Olympics, winning six gold medals in a row. The team had a 30–0 winning streak during this time, from their first game until losing in the 1960 gold medal final. India also won the 1975 World Cup. India's hockey team is the most successful team ever in the Olympics, having won eight gold medals. India emerged as champions at the games in 1928, 1932, 1936, 1948, 1952, 1956, 1964, 1980. India also has the best overall performance in Olympic history with 77 victories out of the 126 matches played. They have also scored the most goals in the Olympics than any other team. They are also the only team to ever win the Olympics without conceding a single goal in 1928 and 1956. The men in blues are also one of the most successful team in Asia. They have won the Asian Games three times in the year 1966, 1998 and 2014. India came out on top in the Asia Cup in 2003, 2007 and in 2017. They are also the most successful team in the Asian Champions Trophy by winning the competition three times in 2011, 2016 and in 2017. The team has also won the Champions Challenge and World Hockey Series once. Grass root coaches to be trained by international players and foreign coaches and are required to be developed for modern hockey. Respective state governments must empanel its veterans and drive the development agenda with the help of young coaches.

Key words: International Hockey Federation, men's national field hockey, India.

Introduction

One of the most ancient games in the world -- a crude form of the sport was played in Egypt some 4,000 years ago -- the history of hockey can be traced back to 1527 in Scotland. Back then, it was called 'hokie' -- where players hit around a small ball with sticks. However, the first version of modern-day field hockey was developed by the British sometime between the late 18th and early 19th century. It was introduced as a popular school game then and made its way to the Indian army during British rule in the 1850s. The availability of large plots of land as playing fields and the uncomplicated nature of equipment meant that hockey gradually became the popular sport of choice among children and young adults in India, with the country's first hockey club being formed in then Calcutta (now Kolkata) in 1855. In the next few decades, national competitions like the Beighton Cup in Calcutta and Aga Khan tournament in Bombay (now Mumbai) popularised the sport further, especially in erstwhile provinces of Bombay and Punjab. There were talks of forming a hockey association in India in 1907 and 1908, but it didn't materialise. The Indian Hockey Federation (IHF) was only formed in 1925, one year after the formation of the International Hockey Federation (FIH).

The IHF organised its first international tour in 1926 to New Zealand, where the Indian hockey men's team played 21 matches and won 18. The tournament saw the emergence of a young Dhyhan Chand, who would go on to become arguably the best player the world has ever seen. After a rocky relationship with the Olympic Games until 1924 -- hockey was only played in 1908 and 1920 and dropped for the other editions - - the presence of a global sports body (FIH) ensured that hockey gained permanent Olympic status starting Amsterdam 1928. The Indian Hockey Federation applied and earned an FIH membership in 1927, thus ensuring that the Indian hockey team would play its first Olympics in 1928. It was the beginning of a legacy - decorated with eight gold medals - a record till today.

Dominating the Olympics The Indian hockey team clinched the Olympic gold medal in its first attempt in 1928. India played five matches, scoring 29 goals and conceding none, with Dhyhan Chand scoring 14 of them. The hockey wizard became the cornerstone of the Indian hockey team as it won two more gold medals in 1932 and 1936, completing a hat-trick of Olympic hockey golds. Dhyhan Chand was made captain in 1936 in what would prove to be his final Olympic Games. When the Olympics returned after World War II in 1948, India found a new genius in the legendary Balbir Singh Sr. as he steered them to a second hat-trick of Olympic gold medals in 1948, 1952, and 1956, this time as an independent nation. The period was one of the most significant in the history of hockey in India. While Pakistan halted the gold run in the final at the 1960 Rome Olympics, India would ascend to the top step at Tokyo 1964. However, it was apparent that India's domination of the sport was weakening. The Indian hockey team had won silver at the 1958 and 1962 Asian Games, before finally winning gold in the 1966 edition. However, India only managed a bronze at Mexico 1968, in what was then their lowest finish in the Olympics. The 1970s: Women's team goes international Hockey expanded its reach beyond the Olympics with the first Hockey World Cup held in 1971

in Spain. Though Pakistan beat Spain to win the title and India finished third, the sport was steadily gaining popularity in Europe, and innovations were underway. India did manage another bronze at the 1972 Olympics in Munich, before making the World Cup final in 1973, where they lost to the Netherlands. While India's representation in global hockey was largely restricted to the men, the women's team made its first appearance in international competition at the inaugural women's Hockey World Cup in 1974, finishing a creditable fourth.

There seemed to be an upturn when the men's team won its only World Cup title in 1975. But the 1976 Montreal Olympics was the first to be played on astroturf – artificial grass fields specially curated for the sport - and the men's Indian hockey team finished seventh. It ended India's Olympic podium run for the first time while the women's team mustered a similar finish at the 1978 World Cup. In this decade, the men's team also ended up with three consecutive Asian Games silver medals in 1970, 1974, and 1978. 1980s-2008: A period of stagnation The 1980s actually began well for the Indian hockey teams. The men's team took advantage of a depleted field to win their eighth Olympic gold at Moscow 1980 while the women's team finished fourth in what was the first edition of women's hockey at the Olympics. At the 1982 Asian Games in New Delhi, where women's hockey was played for the first time, the women's Indian hockey team clinched a historic gold at home while the men's team won silver. However, there were no more accolades forthcoming after this period. India were slow to take to the astroturfs, with local players still mostly playing on natural grass fields, which meant that the Indian hockey teams fell short at global events. Neither the men nor the women were able to make the semi-finals at the World Cups or the (only men's) Champions Trophy, with their medals restricted to a bronze each at the 1986 Asian Games. Dhanraj Pillay's debut for the Indian hockey team in 1989 breathed new life into the sport as India boasted of a global superstar once more. However, without adequate support, Pillay was unable to inspire a wave of success for the Indian hockey team, though he almost single-handedly ended India's Asian Games gold drought with a stellar individual campaign in 1998. The women also continued to struggle globally through this period, though they won silver at the 1998 Asian Games. The introduction of hockey at the Commonwealth Games in 1998 provided another platform for global hockey. The Indian men's and women's teams finished fourth in the inaugural edition. The women's Indian hockey team then went on to win gold at the 2002 Commonwealth Games, an edition where the men were unable to qualify. The women then won silver in the 2006 edition, as the men could only manage sixth place, and bronze at the 2006 Asian Games. Sports hostel talent must be given a clear road map towards performance and consequent economic benefits if players have to stay the course and deliver superior performance in national and international tournaments. Organising international hockey tournaments in grass or gravel surfaces with the relevant rules just like the French tennis open tournament that still persists with the clay surface is a good example why India must not shy away from the old surface and old rules to dominate the sport with skill and technique that was mesmerising the world. We need to play to our strengths and get the world to align when we have shown we can raise the sponsorship levels and get

large crowds to watch matches live. The decline of Indian hockey hit rock bottom in 2008 when the men's team, for the first time since 1928, failed to qualify for the Beijing Olympics.

Objective:

This paper intends to explore and analyze in **past** eight decades, India has seen many success at the highest level of its 'national game' – **hockey** but still the game struggles in traditional pockets across the country for its **future goals**.

Evolution of field hockey in India, past and future

Evidence has been traced to the Aztec Indians playing this game in Mexico. Centuries ago, the game with different names was played in European countries and in Ireland it was called '*hurley*' and was played as the national game. The French called their game *hoquet*, and early roots were found in Holland too, but modern hockey owes its origin to England from middle of the 16th century. In England it was called *bandy* and earlier in 1425 it was called *commock* but the name '*hockie*' has its origin in 1838.

Hockey is believed to date from the earliest civilizations. The Arabs, Greeks, Persians, and Romans each had their own versions and traces of a stick game played by the Aztec Indians of South America have been found. Hockey can also be identified with other early games, such as *hurling* and *shinty*. During the middle Ages a French stick game called *hoquet* was played, and the English word may be derived from it (Britannica 2020).

The evolution of field hockey as an Olympic Summer Sport in the inter-war years was marked by two contrasting developments. England, the home of modern hockey, made a solitary appearance in Antwerp in 1920 and won gold but thereafter refused to play while the other constituent parts of Great Britain stayed away from Olympic hockey altogether. On the other hand, India, then a colony under British rule, aligned with countries on the Continent and joined the newly founded International hockey federation (FIH) to take part in the 1928 Amsterdam Games and, over the next decade, played a crucial role in keeping hockey within the Olympic fold. Where the English refused to tread (Nikhilesh, 2015).

Hockey was introduced into India by the British during the end of the last century. Mostly confined to the British and Indian soldiers, the hundreds of cantonments across the country were the nurseries of this magnificent game. Indian citizens outside the army regiments first took to the game in Kolkata way back in 1885 and the first domestic tournament the Beighton cup was inaugurated in 1895 and later 1896 the Aga Khan Tournament was held in Bombay (Saradindu 1972b)

Promoting Hockey at National level

The game gained momentum and popularity in most parts of Punjab and all educational institutions took to it in a large scale. The first association came into being in 1908 and Bengal Hockey Association took the lead and thereafter, the Army sports control board was established in 1919. The Indian Hockey federation came into being on 7th September, 1925 and Gwalior was the Head Quarters which was later shifted to Delhi 1927.

The popularity of the game in India was established after India became a member of International Hockey Federation and India was included in the 1928 Amsterdam Olympic Games. India made it to the international arena with a bang and won its first Olympic gold medal in 1928 and its victory put India on the global map of sports and games. The game became so popular that the Services, Railways and various institutions invested in promoting the game across the country and consequently, 100's of local tournaments were being organised nation-wide.

The British introduced the game in India before independence amongst the sepoys and very quickly to avoid embarrassment of defeat in the hands of Indian soldiers refused to play with game for a long time in India and focussed on Football which they played well. The British kept away from 1928 to 1936 in Olympic hockey to avoid defeat in the hands of bravehearted, talented and fit Indian soldiers representing India, though having won both the previous Olympic gold medals before 1928. It was only in 1948 after Indian independence Britain returned to the Olympic arena in London Olympics were India beat England in the final to retain the Gold medal. Such was the talent, grit, team work and extreme focus to fight to finish and be a winner. However, the country's association with the sport has been long and glorious. The sport gained popularity in India when the British Regiments introduced it in the early nineteenth century; the natives quickly picked up the game. While field hockey had been typically played on a playground, it has now moved to a more modern synthetic hard court or grass turf. When compared to ice hockey, field hockey was more suited to the climatic conditions in the Indian subcontinent and as also much cheaper to maintain.

The first Hockey Club had been formed in Kolkata in 1885-1886, followed by the Bombay Provincial Hockey Association and a similar one in Punjab (Bikramjit et. al. 2017a).

Known to be one of the oldest forms of sport in the world, field hockey is believed to have come into existence about 1,200 years before the Ancient Games of Olympia. Also, despite the widely held belief that field hockey was India's national sport, the sports ministry washed off some of the game's glory in 2012 when it declared that India did not have a national sport (Press Trust of India, 2012).

India claims to be the foremost in many things in the world. The world admits that she is foremost in hockey'. Hockey, like all modern sports, had been taken to India by the British and became a Popular Sport in the Indian army much encouraged by the British officers in charge. Dhyan Chand, the '*Bradman of hockey*' and its greatest ever player, was introduced to the game while serving the army (Basudhita 2015).

The case is presented in a manner where the performance of the Indian team is depicted in various tournaments. Goals scored, games won and the medal tally. The performance is split into two eras one prior to 1980 and other post 1980 Moscow Olympics. The current state of the domestic tournaments, the player's discipline, coaching and umpiring standards, the sponsorship of the game by the Government and other related factors have been closely studied.

This case rendition is from the perspective of a Player, Umpire and the Coach former University, State player, National Umpire in India and USA and Coach of a leading club, India and Coach Under 21 Girls team, Pittsburgh, USA, 2000-01, who played the game in natural surface, umpired and coached in artificial surfaces.

India Hockey at the global competitions

India has qualified for the upcoming Tokyo Olympics where they will look to put an end to 40 years of wait for an Olympic medal. India's golden era was filled with glory until 1980. Forty years without an Olympic medal in the sport would have been unthinkable for the nation ruling the roost. Since then it has all gone downhill for the team. After 1980 Olympics, the team's performance Failing to win a medal at the Olympics or the World Cup the only respite is that India dominates the Asian arena by winning Asian Games, Asia Cup and Asian Champions Trophy (Scroll.in, 2020).

From February 2017, the Government of Odisha has started sponsoring the Indian national field hockey team, both men and women team. In a first-of-its-kind association, the state has decided to support the India's field hockey team, since there is no support in any tangible form by successive governments to bring back the glory of the past!

World Cup: India's Performance Track Record depicted in **Table A**.

Table A World Cup Track Record of Indian Team

No	Year	Host	Position	Win	Loss	Draw
1	1971	Barcelona, Spain	3 rd	5	0	1
2	1973	Amstelveen, Netherlands	2 nd	4	3	0
3	1975	Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia	1 st	5	1	1
4	1978	Buenos Aires, Argentina	6 th	4	1	3
5	1982	Bombay, India	5 th	5	0	2

6	1986	London, UK	12 th	1	1	4
7	1990	Lahore, Pakistan	10 th	1	1	5
8	1994	Sydney, Australia	5 th	3	2	2
9	1998	Utrecht, Netherlands	9 th	3	0	4
10	2002	Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia	10 th	3	1	5
11	2006	Mönchengladbach, Germany	11 th	1	1	5
12	2010	New Delhi, India	8 th	1	1	4
13	2014	The Hague, Netherlands	9 th	2	1	3
14	2017	Bhubaneswar, India	6 th	2	1	1
Total			1 Title	40	14	40

One gold and one silver in 14 world cup tournaments (refer **Table A**) a disastrous run for the team and clearly indicated the slide in performance since 1978 only solace is that 1980 Moscow Olympic gold medal that too many countries boycotted the games for political reasons. The champion's trophy that was introduced in 1980 until it was scrapped in the year 2017 was a nightmare of a tournament for India refers **Table B**.

Table B Champions Trophy Performance of India Source Wikipedia

Sno	Year	Host	Position	Win	Draw	Loss
1	1980	Karachi, Pakistan	5 th	1	3	2
2	1982	Amstelveen, Netherlands	2 nd	3	0	2
3	1983	Karachi, Pakistan	4 th	2	1	2
4	1985	Perth, Australia	6 th	1	1	3
5	1986	Karachi, Pakistan	5 th	2	0	3
6	1989	Berlin, West Germany	6 th	1	0	4
7	1995	Berlin, Germany	5 th	0	3	3
8	1996	Madras, India	4 th	2	1	3

9	2002	Cologne, Germany	4 th	2	1	3
10	2003	Amstelveen, Netherlands	4 th	2	0	4
11	2004	Lahore, Pakistan	4 th	1	1	4
12	2005	Chennai, India	6 th	1	0	5
13	2012	Melbourne, Australia	4 th	3	0	3
14	2014	Bhubaneswar, India	4 th	2	0	4
15	2016	London, UK	2 nd	2	2	2
16	2017	Breda, Netherlands	2 nd	2	3	1
		Total	2 Runners-up	27	16	48

The Champions trophy performance is depicted in **Table 7** clearly indicating the slide and lacklustre performance in successive tournaments indicating the rot the game developed in the country.

National Tournaments and Grass Root Level Competitions

Many leading tournaments such as Beighton Cup, Agha Khan Cup, MCC Murugappa Gold Cup, Nehru Senior Hockey Tournament, Junior Nationals, and Senior Nationals are all losing shine and hardly attract any crowds. The only tournament that has some viewership and money for the players is the hockey league.

The new generation had growingly drifted away from hockey. States, such as Uttar Pradesh, which were once the bedrock of field hockey training in India, saw most training centres shutdown while also scrapping local annual hockey tournaments (Avasthi, 2015).

Many tournaments continue on natural surface at the grass root level which are sponsored by the local community and gathers local crowds cheering their respective teams. One gets to hear or see tempers rising in such tournaments and many end-up with rough play, lathi-charge and police intervention. Such is the state of the game now in many parts of north India where the game still draws enthusiasm.

Inter district tournaments, Rural Nationals, Inter-school tournaments, School Nationals, Junior Nationals; Inter-University tournaments are not in the priority calendar of Hockey India body. Sponsoring Indian university team for National, world university games and international tournaments is seldom heard of. Senior and Junior National tournaments formed the basis for attracting talent and sourcing players for the big teams in the domestic circuit and the national team. Slowly but sturdily over the last two decades most of these tournaments have neither been taken seriously or conducted with the purpose to build a viable pipeline of players and for scouting talent for the national teams.

Sports hostels were created to fully focus on grass root hockey providing them scholarship, accommodation, kit, equipment and coaching by NIS coaches. But other than few sports hostels in the country the rest created a pool of talent desperately looking for jobs in Banks or government sector to settle down financially, since most of the players from rural-poor social and economic background. Sports hostels did attract talent but did not provide a sturdy feed of national players owing to the coaching structure and career opportunities for the players. Lack of motivation to scale up performance in the absence of reward, recognition and employment opportunities resulted in this model losing its shine over the years.

Diverse Aspirations

In a country like ours, sports laurels don't result in economic freedom, job guarantee or pension and majority of the players coming from lower income group look for stable jobs. Sports such as Tennis, Cricket, and Badminton have managed to up the standards and also make a mark in the global scenario, whereas hockey performance has not been encouraging over the years, resulting in the youth taking to popular sports which are yielding better results.

Hockey India league had achieved exactly the opposite of what it intended to – not only was its road to success short-lived but additionally it also revealed blatant weaknesses within the sport, ranging from the lack of direction and internal synergy amongst the players to the continued lack of and poor state of existing infrastructure. The training for field hockey players in India required improvement at various levels – physical, technological and psychological (Ali, 2014).

A member of the Indian Hockey team at the 1984 Olympics, Shashwat Singh, said that he had watched all the HIL matches in 2012. All throughout the world, the game is now being played several notches up in terms of skills and speed, but in India it remains the same as it was during my time. He added that a lack of proper infrastructure was the major reason behind such dismal performance. The country has just one blue-pink turf matching international standards, located in Ludhiana; but even that wouldn't be sufficient to better the quality of the game (Kalia, 2012).

Conclusion

Qualitative and quantitative performance parameters of all administrators must be evaluated and shared in public for review and continuance in office which must be regulated by the government and sports authority of India. All administrators of the sports must possess some standard qualification with connection to the sport and have a decent standing in the society. Must live for hockey and not on hockey as the saying goes!

All appointments in government jobs must be temporary during the playing days and based on contributions must get regularised into permanent appointment with social security benefits, housing benefits once they retire from the sport. Mandating such measures will ensure players to remain connected with the game as officials, coaches, administrators or umpires and remain focused on the game even after retirement, since they are beneficiaries of government jobs and social security benefits.

Investment in training of umpires by leading international umpires at the grassroots level will improve umpiring standards and understanding of the rules and their interpretation. This will go a long way in improving the discipline of players and their adherence to the rules of the game. The government of India must mandate that sports bodies in the country be managed by professionals with corporate experience with knowledge of the sport to manage associations, instead of leaving it to politicians or veteran players with ulterior motives managing the affairs of the game.

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