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**Title:** Analysing the Legality of Mixed-Martial Arts (MMA) in India and the Strategic Options Available to Unveil the Sport

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# Analyzing the Legality of Mixed-Martial Arts (MMA) in India and the Strategic Options Available to Unveil the Sport

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## Abstract

One may be surprised to know that the world's most popular combat sport, mixed martial arts or MMA, is one of the highly competitive and exciting sports in India and abroad. However, it has failed to achieve the same official recognition that many other sports, played along the same lines have earned, whether from an Indian purview or even internationally. The authors of this paper aimed to explain the current legal status of MMA in India and, subsequently, abroad. They sought to comprehend the reason of the lapse in the official recognition for the sport. This research is based on the present-day governance of the sport from an Indian purview and the existence of its organizational structure, both domestically and internationally. Furthermore, the paper would explain the impacts of this non-recognition on the athletes and the sport itself along with the problems that they entail. Finally, future scope would also be explored with regard to the recognition of the sport and the potential hurdles it faces.

**Keywords:** combat sports, future scope, Mixed Martial Arts (MMA), organizational structure, recognition

## Introduction

Martial arts bears a long and enduring history in India and around the world, with some forms, such as Kalaripayattu having an almost 3000-year old history in the country and continues to exist to this very day (Kerala Tourism, [n.d.](#)). Additionally, considerable importance has been given to combat sports and martial arts, for instance, wrestling, boxing, etc., being promoted throughout the country to develop talent in order to compete in the sports at the international level. Keeping this rich history and the prevalence of similar combat sports, Mixed Martial Arts (MMA), one of the most popular combat sports on the planet, with the United Fighting Championship (UFC) the most popular MMA competition, raked in over 800 Million USD worldwide in 2020 (Nash, [2021](#)) alone. It has a viewership

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of over 100 million in India (Rock, [2019](#)), along with the probability of legal recognition and promotion as a sport in the country; however, the reality is far from it.

In present-day India, MMA, despite the fact that no law has banned it or declared it an illegal sport, is still not government recognized by the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports along with its governing body in India. MMA India, is yet to be recognized as an official National Sports Federation (Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, [n.d.](#)). This non-recognition has several implications regarding the lives of the sportsmen who participate in it. However, before dwelling further into this, it is pertinent to first understand the history and current legal position of this sport both nationally and internationally to arrive at a conclusion as to the possible future changes from its current status.

### **Brief History of MMA in India**

Firstly, the sport of MMA, as its name indicates, is a combination or mixture of several martial art forms, such as boxing, grappling, Karate, Jiu-jitsu, Muay Thai, etc. It has turned out to be one of the fastest-growing and most popular combat sports in the world (The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, [2019](#)). It is being practiced in numerous countries worldwide, especially in the United States of America, where it's most popular promotion, known as the Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC), is conducted.

In India, the first formalized introduction of MMA could be traced back to the formation of the All India Mixed Martial Arts Association (AIMMAA) by Daniel Isaac, who also created one of India's first MMA training gyms being Tiger's gymnasium in Akhar. Additionally, the organization created many grassroot programs and was the largest promoter of the game which finally led to the creation of the Super Fight League. The Super Fight League was the first major MMA tournament in India and was created by Raj Kundra and Sanjay Dutt in the year 2012. The league was later transformed by Amir Khan and the structure of the tournament involved players fighting against each other, representing 8 teams (Rangarajan, [2020](#)). Looking at some other similar leagues, the Kumite 1 League was founded in the year 2017 and was backed by the World Kickboxing Network with Mike Tyson as the Brand Ambassador for the inaugural season (Times of India, [2018](#)). Apart from these leagues, there

exist many smaller or special event tournaments, such as the Matrix Fight Night organized by Tiger Shroff (Ghosh, [2021](#)) along with the International events in India, such as the Brave Combat Federation tournaments. Despite this lack of recognition and a formalized organizational structure, India has still provided the sport with many talented athletes. These athletes include Arjan Bhullar, a Canadian nationalized Indian who used to fight for the UFC and won 3 out of his 4 heavyweight bouts before signing for the One Championship. Moreover, Kantharaj Agasa, an up and coming fighter who has been predicted to be very successful in the next few years among others.

### **Current Legal Status and Organizational Structure of MMA in India**

Nowadays, as mentioned earlier, MMA India is not recognized as a national sporting federation by the Ministry of Youth and Sports Affairs (Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, [n.d.](#)). Therefore, it does not have an exclusive regulatory authority and serves a similar role regarding the BCCI with complete independence over its regulation and functioning.

This is justified by the case of Zee Telefilms Ltd. & Anr vs Union Of India ([2005](#)), where the Supreme Court held that case, since the BCCI was a financially independent organ. Therefore, it could not come under the purview of Article 12 and a similar parallel could be drawn between the two. Thereby, keeping the governance of the organization outside the scope of judicial review and further looking at the case of Indian Olympic Association vs Union of India ([2014](#)), where the court held that due to the state like the functioning of the IOC and the government's contribution to it. Therefore, the government has the authority to regulate it to an extent. The same cannot be put forth regarding these organizations as they are not government-assisted. Furthermore, the sport isn't even officially recognized, hence, removing the public importance narrative as well, thereby keeping such organizations outside the scope of government regulation regarding the governance of MMA.

With regard to the tournament structures, several tournaments exist within India, such as the previously mentioned Super Fight League and Kumite 1 League, which all follow the Unified Rules of Mixed Martial arts. These rules originated from the New Jersey State Athletic Control Board (India Netzone, [2017](#)). Despite numerous MMA competitions conducted by different organizers, by and large, there are two main promoters of the sport in the country. These promoters are MMA India which is the only

organization recognized by the International Mixed Martial Arts Federation (IMMAF). The other is the All India Mixed Martial Arts Association (AIMMAA) that used to be associated with WMMA (World Mixed Martial Arts Association (WMMAA) which is another international MMA organization. It merged with the IMMAF in 2018 in an attempt to create a single unified body for the betterment of the sport and in order to apply for membership into Global Association of International Sports Federations (GAISF) (Pandey, [2018](#)).

### **Current Legal Status and Organizational Structure of MMA Abroad**

The largest showcase of MMA on an international spectrum would go to the UFC that consists of fighters from around the world. Moreover, it is conducted primarily in the United States of America with special events occurring elsewhere for special events. UFC is owned by Zuffa, LLC, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Endeavor Group Holdings. Despite being a private entity, the legality and conduction of UFC in the various states of the US is governed by the different state athletic commissions (Berabbi, [2020](#)). Even the sports rules and guidelines were created by the New Jersey State Athletic Control Board (Berabbi, [2020](#)), which has become the standard for MMA for a large part throughout the world. Moreover, it has evolved into what is now known as the Unified Rules of Mixed Martial Arts (New Jersey State Athletic Control Board, [2022](#)). These rules are followed by a majority of the MMA competitions held around the world. These competitions include America's second-largest MMA competition, that is, Bellator MMA which follows a similar regulatory structure sanctioned by state athletic commissions throughout the US (10 Play, [2021](#)). Hence, despite its independence which is similar in nature to the Indian de facto regulatory bodies, the level of state control is much higher.

From an international purview, IMMAF(created in the year 2012 under the support of UFC) serves as the governing federation for Amateur Mixed Martial Arts despite not being officiated by the IOC (Holland, [2021](#)). All international tournaments, such as the UFC in the US, CABMMA (Comissao Atlética Brasileira de MMA) in Brazil and in Sweden are sanctioned under the IMMAF. Several other federations have also slowly started joining the IMMAF, such as the previously discussed AIMMA and Bulgarian Federation for Mixed Martial Arts (Fighters Only Magazine, [2014](#)) among many others, taking the total number up to 110 member organizations from 50 nations (IMMAF, [2021c](#)). Despite this, IMMAF is

currently unrecognized by the IOC as an International Sporting Federation (International Olympic Committee, 2021). It is yet to gain membership of the Global Association of International Sports Federations (GAISF) and WADA, being rejected in its last attempt at trying to gain observer membership/status in GAISF (IMMAF, [2020](#)) and membership into WADA. This led to a severe outcry from the MMA community and the IMMAF, who are currently pursuing legal action against WADA and potential action against GAISF due to its exclusion. The IMMAF claim was rejected due to political reasons as GAISF had given no genuine reason for the IMMAF'S exclusion despite meeting all the required criteria which would be mentioned in the subsequent parts of the paper. Furthermore, it was heightened by the fact that the previous reason given by GAISF for its exclusion was the existence of two separate bodies being the aforementioned IMMAF and WMMA. These bodies merged to rectify this issue, leading to the question of what basis was used to deny inclusion during the subsequent attempts as a unified body being the IMMAF (The International Mixed Martial Arts Federation [IMMAF], [2019](#)). However, on a brighter note, after subsequent efforts the IMMAF finally gained signatory status to WADA on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2021 (IMMAF, [2021c](#)).

Looking at a few other countries around the globe, different sets of rules and regulations may be seen followed by different countries. For instance, until 2013, MMA was an illegal sport in Canada under Section 83(2) of the Canadian Criminal Code.<sup>1</sup> This was later revoked and a process to regulate the game through various state sporting commissions, similar to the US was introduced Statutes of Canada, 2013. In China, the Wushu Sports Management Center of the General Administration of Sport in China has sanctioned the Ranik Ultimate Fighting Federation (RUFF) tournament. In Sweden, the Swedish Mixed Martial Arts Federation (SMMAF) is the regulator of MMA and has recently been inducted into the association of Swedish Budo and Martial Arts Federation, granting it a national sport status (O'Leary, [2021](#)). This recent trend of MMA being given a national sport status may also be seen in other countries, such as South Africa, Taiwan, etc.

Hence it is clear that the current legal stance of MMA abroad is mixed and despite having no officially recognized professional international body,

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<sup>1</sup> Section 83(2) of the Canadian Criminal Code.

the IMMAF exists as the current unofficial sporting federation that regulates the sport. Furthermore, looking at the governance of the sport on a country-to-country basis, it varies from place to place, with the sports national regulatory bodies being either privately owned, government officiated or a mixture of both. Additionally, it must be noted that for the most part, most countries around the world rely on the Unified Rules of Mixed Martial Arts for the implementation of the sports rules and procedures with either a few changes or direct implementation of the rules.

### **The Need for Recognition of MMA in India**

To understand the need for the recognition of MMA in India, firstly, the various advantages must be comprehended that both the sport and its players get while being officially recognized by the Indian Youth and Sports Affairs Ministry and on an international level by the International Olympic Committee.

Firstly, according to a player, due to MMA's non-recognition as an official sport, its fighters do not receive many of the privileges that regular athletes under-recognized sports get. These benefits include things, for instance, payment for travel costs, nutritional requirements, boarding and lodging, and equipment costs etc. For instance, the Scheme of Assistance to National Sports Federations formulated in 2001 and revised throughout the years, guarantees several advantages to players along these lines. In order to help athletes to travel for camps, they are allowed to travel by economy class on flights if the journey is more than 500km, or alternatively could take A/C 2 tier on the train. They receive RS. 1500 per night for boarding charges in X and Y category cities<sup>2</sup> in India while attending camps, whereas, sports kits worth Rs. 10,000 ronce a year, medical insurance up to 5 Lakhs, and pension post-retirement (Sports Odisha, [n.d.](#)), are among a variety of other benefits (Sports Odisha, [n.d.](#)). Furthermore, even looking at the present-day Olympics, the IOC announced a cash prize of Rs 70, 40, and 25 lakhs for gold, silver, and bronze medalists, respectively (Panj, [2021](#)), apart from the Indian government even announcing that elite athletes would get a stipend of up to Rs. 50,000 a day for pre-competition training (New India Express, [2017](#)). All these benefits could only be received if MMA and an official National federation for the same are recognized both

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<sup>2</sup> Categorisation of cities in India based on Population.

in India and with regard to other international tournaments, such as, Olympics and Asian games, those respective international organizations.

Apart from these benefits, a major drawback regarding this non-recognition is that unlike other athletes of various sports that are recognized both on an international level and a domestic level is their ability to appeal the decisions of their respective sporting federations to higher authorities being arbitration centers, such as the Court of Arbitration for Sport or alternatively Indian Court of Arbitration of Sport due to no arbitration clauses. This becomes highly problematic as taking sporting issues to the judiciary is not ideal due to the non-specialization of the judiciary to deal with the same. Additionally, long resolution period, hence leaves arbitration with specialized panels as the best form of redressal. This is furthered by the judiciaries' clear stance to avoid dealing with even recognized NSF's (National Sporting Federation) as could be seen in the case of *Sushil Kumar vs The Union of India case*. In this case, the court held that it would not intervene in the functioning of NSF'S unless there is "strong evidence against their acts being unfair, arbitrary, or contrary to the core principles and practices". This principle would only be worsened for non-recognized NFL'S who are private entities not even having an officiated role as the organizers of the sport they represent (*Sushil Kumar vs The Union of India, 2005*).

This problem existed even for recognized and official national sporting federations until the case of *Rajiv Dutta vs Union of India (2014)*, where, the Delhi High Court directed the Wrestling Foundation of India to implement an arbitration clause that enabled athletes to appeal the federation's arbitration board's verdict as directed by the National Sports code of 2011 (National Sports Code, [2011](#)). Despite its initial non-adherence, which was rectified in the later *Sushil Kumar case*, a landmark decision that uplifted and enfranchised the athletes. The same upliftment cannot be seen regarding the MMA fighters who, at least on an Indian level, would have to adhere to the decisions of whichever league they compete in or unrecognized federation they compete under.

Even on an international spectrum, the same problem could be seen, wherein UFC fighters only have the option to have their issues resolved by a third party arbitration firm being McLaren Global Sport Solutions Inc. that has been hired by the UFC (Ultimate Fight Championship [UFC], 2022). Despite this being a third party arbitration firm, the same level of



confidence, as opposed to the recognition of CAS cannot be guaranteed. Especially, considering a recent event regarding the equestrian being the 2018 Equestrian Community Integrity Unity (ECUI) Scam wherein a private investigative firm, hired by the International Federation for Equestrian Sports being Quest Global Ltd along with the FEI themselves had been accused of collaborating. It led to several discrepancies in its procedure and testing rules with regards to the testing of certain horse stirrups. Despite severe backlash and criticism, no action was taken either by the FEI or Quest Global Ltd. to resolve the issue and release official testing reports, further adding to the lack of transparency (Pogo, [2018](#)). As the federations hire these private firms by themselves, decisions against their favor would lead to a hostile situation for the hired company, unlike a truly independent organ, such as CAS.

Apart from MMA fighters, despite the fact that the IMMAF has set up an independent arbitration committee to resolve such disputes (IMMAF, [2021b](#)), another problem that arises is the recognition and enforcement of these awards. These awards are presented by such tribunals in other countries, especially in the cases where countries like India haven't even recognized the sport yet alone decisions of its arbitral body. The same problem regarding the international enforcement disadvantage compared to CAS could be seen in other individual sporting arbitration bodies, such as BAT (Basketball Arbitral Tribunal), which is an independent Basketball arbitration organization created by FIBA (The International Basketball Federation) (Radke, [2019](#)). Hence, it highlights the need for national recognition, which in turn would lead to both, the ability to take up issues to CAS, who in turn could issue enforceable redressal awards that would be recognized in India

Furthermore, regarding the policy decisions of the sport, there could be no government intervention in the same due to their non-recognition, which may lead to several problems pertaining to the athletes whether being unsafe working environments. Since these private organizations, especially unrequited ones in smaller countries like India might run them on a purely profit basis with things, such as bad pay, insufficient training camps, medical facilities etc. being a common site (Pandey, [2018](#)). On the other hand, recognized National Sporting Federations as held by the case of *Indian Olympic Association vs Union Of India* due to their state like functions and assistance from the national government may be regulated

through government rules to an extent due to the national importance of sports and the public benefit involved in it especially due to the government's various contributions both financial and other to these federations Zee Telefilms Ltd. & Anr vs Union Of India (2005). Therefore, the non-recognition of such organizations would leave them outside the ambit of government control, which would be a huge drawback to the athletes for all the prior mentioned reasons.

Lastly, another major problem that exists is the monopoly power that these organisations may have over the sport and its athletes, leading to non-competitive behaviour. The best example of this would be using the BCCI that, despite official recognition from the organ, has been constantly criticised and plagued for/with various problems. These problems include corruption, various scandals, such as IPL scams, corruption, unfair selection processes, and even hindering the competition through unfair influence, such as the ICL (Indian Cricket League) by Essel Sports Private Ltd. etc. (Bhandari, 2018). Despite the BCCI's massive role regarding the cricket, the country's most viewed and arguably important sport, the undisputed governance of the sport with no government or judicial intervention is allowed due to its financial independence as held by the previously mentioned Zee Studios Case (Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, n.d.), the need to recognize such NSF's becomes of paramount importance. This narrative was also held by the National Law Commission under the opinion that the BCCI is not a private organisation and should come under the purview of the RTI act despite its financial independence. Finally, in the year 2018, The Central Information Commission, the top appellate body with regards to RTI issues, ruled that the BCCI would come under the purview of the RTI Act (The Law Commission of India, 2023). Furthermore, with regards to issues of doping, The BCCI, after years of reluctance, has finally joined the NADA (National Anti-Doping Agency) and, in turn, has become officially recognised as a national sporting federation despite its financial autonomy (Business Standard, 2019). Therefore, it enables the athletes to resolve their issues with regards to doping to a higher authority being the NADA and in turn the international WADA (World Anti-Doping Agency). The same protection given through at least some sort of recognition is nowhere to be seen in the sport of MMA.

Now, moving onto an organizational perspective, the recognition of an official governing body has several advantages in terms of an overall

sporting perspective. Looking at the prior mentioned Scheme of Assistance to National Sports Federations, nationally recognized sporting federations have several advantages over their non-recognized counterparts. This includes funding to set up training camps, organization of national level tournaments, prize money for the various tournaments, the previously mentioned athlete benefits etc. Additionally, the fund provides for the hiring of specialized coaches for each sport, national team coaches among a variety of other personnel who are essential for the development of those sports in the country (Bach, [n.d.](#)). All of these benefits combine to help the sport develop youth, improve the quality of the athletes along with the standard and popularity of the game leading to its all-round betterment. Hence, this non-recognition leads to a huge loss with regards to the promotion and development of the game at a national level. It reduces the number of quality athletes, youth promotion, quality coaches, etc. that lead to the betterment of the game as opposed to if it was nationally recognized and availed these benefits.

### **Future Scope for Legal/Olympic Recognition of MMA, Domestically and Abroad**

For MMA to be officially recognized as a sport both internationally and domestically, its International Federation (IF) must meet certain requirements to qualify for the same.

From an international viewpoint, Article 25 of the Olympic Charter deals with the recognition of international sporting federations and provides that IF's may be recognized if they meet certain requirements being :

“The statutes, practices, and activities of the IFs within the Olympic Movement must be in conformity with the Olympic Charter, including the adoption and implementation of the World Anti-Doping Code as well as the Olympic Movement Code on the Prevention of Manipulation of Competitions. Subject to the foregoing, each IF maintains its independence and autonomy in the governance of its sport.” (International Olympic Committee, [2021](#))

Therefore, MMA requires an international federation for professional athletes, whether IMMAF or a newly created organization that implements the code of WADA and the Olympic Movement Code, stage regular world and continental championships, be committed to youth development and have robust and independent governance structures (Bach, [n.d.](#)).

Though, this may help an IF to be recognized by the IOC, however, it is not enough to permit a sport along with its IF into the Olympics as there exists 5 major requirements for them to be able to have a chance to be included in the Olympics. These 5 criterias are as follows:

1. “The Olympic Proposal
2. Value Added to The Olympic Movement
3. Institutional Matters
4. Popularity
5. Business Model” (Stillmed, [2015](#))

An Olympic proposal refers to a defined organizational structure and requirements for the sport with regards to the Olympics which includes number of events, quotas for athletes, venues required, competition format, and high-level athletes.

Value-added to the Olympic movement refers to the contribution the sport offers to the world and whether it brings out the values of Olympism. The three essential points for this are the duration or history of the game's existence, the legacy it entails with it and finally, the contribution it would bring to the youth of the world.

Institutional matters refer to a list of 18 requirements from IOC recognition of the International Sporting Federation all the way to a minimum number of World Championships and Court of Arbitration of Sport Compliance among others.

Popularity refers to the popularity of the sport with regards to media coverage, ticket sales of previous years, and host country popularity.

Finally, the business model refers to the total costs of conducting the event as opposed to the revenues it could potentially bring to judge whether it would be a viable sport to include financially (StillMed, [n.d.](#)).

If a sport and its IF meets the following conditions along with accepting the above mentioned WADA and Olympic Movement code, its IF could theoretically gain entry into the Olympics. Hence, on an international level, MMA would need to meet these conditions to officially gain recognition along with its IF. Additionally, as a prerequisite to join IOC, it is pertinent

that such an IF must be a member of the aforementioned GAISF and WADA (Bach, [n.d.](#)).

As mentioned in the previous parts of the paper, despite IMMAF claiming to have met all the criteria's and being rejected from GAISF based on political reasons (The Fight Library, [2020](#)), MMA presently exists in a commercial manner. The sport in the last decade saw a huge transformation not only in terms of popularity, however, regarding its organizational structure along with its functioning too which would allow it to transit into a truly transnational sport, fit for Olympic participation. The sports exist worldwide through various organizers, such as UFC, which is primarily in USA or one championship in Singapore. Such events can never be legitimately transnational due to majority of the fighters still being from their home states (Seto, [2019](#)).

The analysis of these changes regarding the 5 Olympic requirements mentioned above may be seen as follows:

With regards to Olympic Proposal, the sport needs to develop a modeled plan in order to implement the current Unified MMA rules into an Olympic suitable format to ensure fighter safety and to be able to stay on schedule. This may be done in a similar fashion to how AIBA or the Amateur International Boxing Association that governs amateur boxing in the Olympics amended the standard rules of boxing into an Olympic format (Gerbasi, [2017](#)). Several means to do this have already been discussed with regards to the UFC being shorter round formats and thicker gloves (Janzen, [2022](#)).

However, the creation of a well-defined Olympic proposition remains yet to be seen and relies upon the IMMAF if they receive IOC recognition.

Value-added to the Olympic Movement primarily looks into three factors including history, legacy, and contribution to youth. The sport in its preliminary stages, the Pankration, may be seen in the earliest editions of the sport in Historic Greece. It has continued to evolve and develop into what may be seen as MMA today, carrying with it a tremendous legacy. With regards to youth development, the sport in a similar fashion to every other combat sports promotes athleticism and self-defense in a manner less dangerous than other existing Olympic sports, such as boxing (University of Alberta, [2015](#)).

Moving to Institutional matters, the 18 requirements, such as WADA acceptance, gender equality, and world championships, the sport claimed to achieve all these requirements. It gained WADA signatory status, had world championships since 2014, and Unified rules that are differentiated for professionals and amateurs. Most importantly, an International Federation, albeit not recognized by the IOC (Bach, [n.d.](#)) despite having met the requirements, such as an independent body that implemented WADA and the Olympic Movement Code on the Prevention of Manipulation of Competitions (International Mixed Martial Arts Federation [IMMAF], 2021a). Furthermore, women inclusion is a very important factor which MMA excels at with many prominent female fighters present in the sport and every promoter having female editions of the sport as well (Nag, [2020](#)).

Coming to the 4<sup>th</sup> requirement, that is, popularity by far the easiest to prove with the sport having around 600 million fans from across the world including 60+ countries with some major events even garnering 100 million views for a fight (The Fight Library, [2020](#)). This becomes important to consider the declining viewership for the games in recent editions (Walsh, [2021](#)).

Finally, moving to the last ambit, that is, business model, the sport through its various forms has been generating tremendous revenue with the largest competition. The UFC generated 1 billion dollars in 2021, therefore demonstrating the sports' financial sustainability (Gift, [2022](#)).

From future recognition, within the Indian purview, the first criteria for a sporting federation to meet is whether the preexisting Indian organization or the creation of a novel organization meets the requirements of Article 29 of the Olympic Charter, 2021. The Charter states that,

to be recognized by an NOC and accepted as a member of such NOC, a national federation must exercise a specific, real, and on-going sports activity. It must be affiliated with an IF, recognized by the IOC and be governed by and comply in all aspects with both the Olympic Charter and the rules of its IF. (International Olympic Committee, [2021](#)).

The first problem that occurs with regards to the formation of an official national sporting federation is that currently there exists no IOC recognized international sporting federation for MMA. Considering the completion of this first step, only then could a national sporting federation gain official

recognition by the National Olympic Committee. Furthermore, the committee would have to comply with the norms of the Olympic Charter which includes things, such as, complying and coming under WADA along with agreeing to CAS arbitration. Despite this, as mentioned earlier, many countries still gave the sport and its organizing bodies an official status along with formalized recognition as an NSF's domestically, separate from those countries' respective NOC's recognition. For instance, India too has several NSF's that are not recognized by the NOC, such as Kabaddi. However, two problems exist regarding the first one, especially in India the likelihood of this is low due to MMA not being an Indian indigenous sport (National Sports Code, [2011](#)). Secondly, since such non NOC recognized NSF's would not be able to gain Olympic recognition, which is important.

Hence, the process of an MMA NSF, gaining such recognition is a long and enduring process. It acts as a primary method to gain membership into the IOC and further its respective NOC relies on the recognition of its International Sporting Governmental Body. However, non-NOC official recognition through an independent governmental decision is always another alternative to get official recognition domestically and availing whatever benefits such recognition may offer. Though, the likelihood of this happening in India would seem to be very bleak, especially considering that such means would not result in automatic recognition by the world's largest sporting regulator being the IOC and the respective country's NOC's. Hence, it bars the Olympic participation and in turn the lack of the government's incentive to actively promote and invest in such a sport in the first place. Therefore, the most likely outcome or possibility for official recognition in India would be the International Federation being the IMMAF getting international recognition and possibly Olympic inclusion leading to subsequent recognition within India.

### **Conclusion**

The current research explained that several advantages of official recognition of an NSF exist for athletes as well as for the growth of the sport as a whole, such as, youth development, government assistance, travel and kit costs, boarding and lodging, and training stipends. These benefits are essential for sports to develop and reach new peaks. Due to the lack of such recognition, MMA as a sport faces several disadvantages as opposed to its fellow combat sports, such as boxing and wrestling. These sports produce several world-class athletes that are amongst the best and constantly bring

laurels back home, as could be seen from the past few Olympics, commonwealth games, and Asian games.

MMA attracts very good viewership for its events in India and abroad. Hence, generating revenue would not be very challenging. Professionally managed league tournaments for MMA may tap revenue from various sources, for instance, box office receipts for live arena events, TV/cable distribution right revenues, advertising and sponsorships (TV/Cable), merchandising/consumer products, alternative media (internet, mobile), and pay per view (PPV) revenues. This is a welcome development as it would free the MYAS from funding MMA tournaments and may spend the scarce money for other events.

The only way for MMA to actualize these advantages is through the official recognition of its governing bodies at both domestic and international levels to enable the sport to reach new peaks. It is a necessary and eventually inevitable task with the peak in the popularity of the sport in recent years and the fact that the sport has met the various requirements needed for IOC and, in turn, Olympic recognition.

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