

## **Sports in Darjeeling: Legacy, Problems and Prospects**

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### **Abstract**

Sports and physical education are necessary components of human development, good health, and companionship with a spirit of friendly competition. This has a positive impact on the overall development of the personality. Brilliance in sports enhances a person's sense of achievement, national pride and patriotism. A study of sports history is crucial to understand the evolving sporting heritage of a nation. Darjeeling, 'Queen of Hills' is also popular in many forms of sports. However, not much of work has been done in Sports History of Darjeeling; though there is a craze for sports in the society. Unfortunately, the legacy of sports (especially football) in Darjeeling declined after the agitation of 1980s and not gaining any momentum for a revival. The main thrust of the study is to reveal the legacy of the sports in Darjeeling accompanied by the history of sports in India and its critical evaluation.

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**Keywords:** Physical Education, Human Development, Companionship, Darjeeling, Sports History.

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### **History of Sports In India**

The history of sports in India is very ancient and dates back to the Vedic era. It is likely that a few of today's Olympic disciplines are advanced versions of games of strength and speed that flourished in ancient India. Chess, wrestling, polo, archery and hockey are some of the games believed to have originated in India. However, with the coming of the British, Football and Cricket became popular sports in India.

The origin of football in India can be traced back to mid nineteenth century when the game was introduced by British soldiers. Football spread among the masses thanks to the efforts of one Nagendra Prasad Sarbadhary. Several football clubs like Calcutta FC, Sovabazar, Mohun Bagan and Aryan Club were established in Calcutta around 1890s. Calcutta, then capital of British India, soon became the hub of Indian football. Tournaments like Gladstone Cup, Trades Cup and Coochbehar Cup was also started around this time. Durand Cup and IFA Shield were started in late nineteenth century making them two of the oldest football competitions in the world.<sup>1</sup>

The first "native" team to achieve success was Sovabazar Club, which won the Trades Cup in 1892. The Indian Football Association (IFA) was established in Calcutta in 1893, but did not have a single Indian on its board until the 1930s. The Indian team also won gold medals in football at the 1951 and 1962 Asian Games, and finished fourth at the

<sup>1</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Football\\_in\\_India](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Football_in_India) (accessed on 02/07/12)

1956 Olympics in Melbourne. Indian football would go through a barren phase in 70s, 80s and 90s, gradually losing its foothold as a top Asian team.<sup>2</sup>

The oldest football club as such in India was the Dalhousie Club of Calcutta (1878). Indian Football Association (I.F.A.) was formed in 1893. Indians preferred playing football barefooted. History was created in 1911, when Mohun Bagan led by Sibdas Bhaduri overhauled East Yorks Regiment in the final 2-1 to lift the IFA Shield as the first Indian team.<sup>3</sup>

The entire history of cricket in India and the sub-continent as a whole is based on the existence and development of the British Raj via the East India Company. In 1864, Madras v. Calcutta match was arguably the start of first-class cricket in India. The most important fixture in the 19th century was the Bombay Presidency Match which evolved, first, into the Bombay Triangular and then into the Bombay Quadrangular. Sports like cricket came to be utilized by the British as an important means of anglicizing the indigenous rulers from 1880 onwards. The rich Gujarati Parsees of Bombay too used cricket as a symbol of their anglicized behavior. Ashish Nandy aptly remarks in this context, but "anglicized Indians were bound to see cricket as an identifier of social status and as a means of access to the power elite of the raj."<sup>4</sup>

Field hockey is the official national sport in India, and the country has won eight Olympic gold medals in field hockey, though cricket is the most popular sport.

### **Legacy of Sports in Darjeeling**

The major sports in Darjeeling are cricket, football and hockey. Other sports like basketball, volleyball, table tennis, squash, lawn tennis, athletics, swimming, billiards, boxing and gymnastics are played as well. Beside, Horse Race and Golf was also popular in Darjeeling. However, as a part of sports, Horse Race and Golf discontinued in Darjeeling but was very popular during the British Regime.

### **Lebong Race Course**

About 8-km from the town, Lebong Horse Race Course is one of the smallest and highest Race Course in the world. Races used to be held during Spring & Autumn season under the management of local Gymkhana Club since 1925 but it shut its gates in 1984. The course is presently under the army.<sup>5</sup> Old timers recall that Governor's Cup, Burdwan Cup and Steward Cup used to be held in Darjeeling.

<sup>2</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Football\\_in\\_India](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Football_in_India) (accessed on 02/07/12)

<sup>3</sup> Kausik Bandyopadhyay, "Sport, Culture, Nationalism: Football in Colonial Calcutta, 1877-1934" in *Salesian Journal of Humanities & Social Sciences: Darjeeling and the Indian East*, II, (May 2011), 1.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103.

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.telegraphindia.com/1120112/jsp/siliguri/story\\_14994313.jsp#](http://www.telegraphindia.com/1120112/jsp/siliguri/story_14994313.jsp#). T9LddewmbIU (accessed on 02/08/12).

Dawa Tshering Bhutia popularly known as 'Dawa Jockey' is one of the two last surviving jockeys of the golden age of the fifties. The other man is Naswan Madan a soft-spoken person, proprietor of the Chowrasta stores and the previous owner of the Central Hotel. He rode horses for the glory and romance of racing.

The great Darjeeling classic, the Governor's Cup was the most coveted trophy in the races. Dawa had won it five times which speak volumes of his professional competence. Only small ponies were allowed to race, they were brought from Manipur, Imphal, Kalimpong and Tibet. There were several licensed bookmakers or bookies present in little stands besides the totalisators. Famous among them were Thompson, Awaaz, Chumbey, Ramchatti and others. The odds of each horse rose and fell depending upon the volume of the bet. The Lebung races were no different from its bigger counterparts of Bombay and Kolkata. Dawa's biggest moment in life came when he won the Governor's Cup in 1952. The other four Governor Cups he won as a jockey were in 1957, 1958, 1960 and 1962.<sup>6</sup>

Unfortunately, the roar of the crowds are no longer heard, the fanfare, glamour and gaiety have gone except for the occasional sound of a helicopter that lands on the helipad. The area is under the Army.

### **Golf Course**

Senchel Golf Course was also famous in Darjeeling. The golf course in Darjeeling was built around in 1900. "It was leased out to a club called Golf Links in 1907 by the then district commissioner for 99 years," said Jordan Norbu, a golfer from Darjeeling. After the British left the country in 1947, Golf Links had virtually become defunct. However, the army personnel used the turf till the late 1980s. They left the area as documents proved that the land belonged to the Darjeeling Improvement Fund (district administration).<sup>7</sup>

One of the country's highest golf courses at Tiger Hill in Darjeeling is set to be revived with the state tourism department inviting an expression-of-interest from both national and international firms. Singh (Raghvendra Singh, the principal secretary of the West Bengal Tourism Department) said the course would be made operational on a public-private-partnership (PPP) model.<sup>8</sup> This 9-hole Golf Course is one of the highest Golf Courses in the world (altitude 8,150 ft). It is near Tiger Hill and has a Club House and a Tourist Lodge.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.darjeelingtimes.com/opinions/social/404-the-governors-cup-1952.html> (accessed on 16/08/12).

<sup>7</sup> [http://www.telegraphindia.com/1120112/jsp/siliguri/story\\_14994313.jsp#.T9LddewmbIU](http://www.telegraphindia.com/1120112/jsp/siliguri/story_14994313.jsp#.T9LddewmbIU) (accessed on 02/08/12).

<sup>8</sup> [http://www.telegraphindia.com/1120112/jsp/siliguri/story\\_14994313.jsp#.T9LddewmbIU](http://www.telegraphindia.com/1120112/jsp/siliguri/story_14994313.jsp#.T9LddewmbIU) (accessed on 02/08/12).

## Football

Football is a popular and celebrated sport in Darjeeling. It has a rich legacy in Darjeeling. Darjeeling Gold Cup Football Tournament was once a celebrated fixture in football calendar of the country with major clubs in the nation and from across South East Asia participated in the tournament. The Tournament also evoked a great deal of response from fans and footballers alike from the hills and the plains. Gorkha personnel serving in the British Army had originally instituted the Gorkha Gold Cup which had been started in 1975 with Mohun Bagan AC the first champions. From 1975, Brigade of Gold Cup started in Darjeeling. Actually, Mr. Pemba Bomzon said that Gorkha Brigade was a Cup sent from Hongkong to District Magistrate of Darjeeling, the Ex-Officio President of Gorkha Cup. This cup used to be held in the month of October.<sup>9</sup>

The tournament was regularly held until 1985 with East Bengal Club the last champions before the tournament could no longer be held due to the Gorkhaland agitation which started in 1986. In those days the Darjeeling District Sports Association used to organise the tournament with top teams from Kolkata and across the country taking part. The Governor of Bengal has been made the chief patron of the tournament, while former footballers Shyam Thapa, Chuni Goswami and Prasun Banerjee besides current India captain Baichung Bhutia are the patrons of the tournament.<sup>10</sup>

The role of Sports Association & Clubs is also of great importance in the sports of Darjeeling. For instance, Darjeeling Gymkhana Club and G.D.N.S. are still organizing the tournaments to enrich and promote the sport activities in Darjeeling.

Darjeeling Gymkhana Club Ltd. was established in the year 1909 and occupies an important place in the tourism map of Darjeeling, "Queen of Hills." One of the most well equipped Clubs of the region with facilities of Indoor and Outdoor games; it is prominently located above the Mall Road next to Raj Bhawan. At present, it has membership strength of around 400 permanent members and 49 special members (mainly 1st Class Gazetted Officers).<sup>11</sup> Darjeeling Gymkhana Club Ltd. was previously known as Darjeeling Amusement Club. Gymkhana Club was the premium club founded by the British Government.

M.K. Brahmin said that the Club used to organize the tournament at 9 hole Golf Course at Tiger Hill. Polo was also organized by Gymkhana Club. The Club organizes the Lawn Tennis Tournament. In Gymkhana Club, there is the biggest roller skating rink in Eastern India made of Burmese teak wood. Famous players like Michael Perera and Geet Sethi also played at Gymkhana. They also organize coaching for Badminton and Lawn Tennis in winter season.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Pemba Bomzon, Former Secretary of Darjeeling District Sports Association & Gorkha Hill Athletic Association (19/07/12).

<sup>10</sup> <http://arunfoot.blogspot.in/2010/11/darjeelings-gurkha-gold-cuprevived.html> (accessed on 13/08/12).

<sup>11</sup> <http://darjeelinggymkhanaclub.com/legacy.html> (accessed on 13/09/12).

<sup>12</sup> Interview with MK Brahmin, Assistant Secretary, Darjeeling Gymkhana Club, on (19/07/12).

Beside, The Darjeeling Gymkhana Club used to organize two seasons for horse racing in May and June, October and November on Wednesdays and Saturdays at Lebung. The principal race meeting was during the Puja holidays when there were four days of sports and events very keenly contested. His Excellency the Governor of West Bengal is the President of the club and the District Magistrate is the Ex- Officio Executive Member of the Committee. The Club is managed by an elected Executive Committee comprising of 14 members.

Gorkha Dukha Niwarak Sangha (G.D.N.S.) was formed in 1932. However, G.D.N.S. widely started to organize the tournament from 1952 onwards. Pemba Doma Trophy started in 1956 for Volleyball. Even till now, Dulichand Agarwal Trophy for girls and S.D. Lama Cup for boys for Volleyball are organized. Mr. Pemba Bomzon said that Hurley Cup was introduced by Darjeeling & District Sports Association. Later on, the name was changed into Darjeeling District Sports Association in 1970s, then to Gorkha Hill Football Association and eventually changed into Gorkha Hill Sports Association in 2012 which is affiliated to Indian Football Association (I.F.A.). Apart from Hurley, Malla Shield, Jashoda Giri League tournament used to organize. Many teams of Bhutan, Sikkim used to participate till 1970s. Some of the famous football clubs of Darjeeling were Darjeeling Dynamo, Tarun Khelkud Sangh, Himalayan Sporting Club, M.R.F.C., Singamari Lions and so on.<sup>13</sup>

But later, within D.G.H.C., Gorkha Hill Games & Sports established in 1989. In 1992, Gorkha Hill Football Association was formed and in 1998, Gorkha Hill Sports Association formed to promote the sports in Darjeeling. SAI was also established in Lebung to provide coaching to the young players. Darjeeling District Sports Club was formed in Darjeeling to promote Cricket and Basketball.<sup>14</sup>

Archery is also a famous sport in Darjeeling. In Kalimpong, there is an Archery Association. Recently, Peril Lepcha won Junior National Archery (Traditional) Tournament.

From Aero Sports to Water Sports, Darjeeling is also popular in Adventure Sports. There are many forms of Adventure activities in Darjeeling. The popular ones are Trekking, Mountaineering, White Water Rafting, Paragliding, Camping, etc.

Trekking in the Darjeeling Hills began almost a century ago. Infact, the first organised trekking route in India was established here along the Sangalila range. The trek begins in Darjeeling and proceeds through Maneybhanjyang, Tonglu, Sandakphu and ends in Phalut. The alluring natural beauty is replete with countless varieties of Rhododendrons, Magnolias, Orchids and Wild Flowers.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Pemba Bomzon, Former Secretary of Darjeeling District Sports Association & Gorkha Hill Athletic Association (19/07/12).

<sup>14</sup> Interview with Pemba Bomzon, Former Secretary of Darjeeling District Sports Association & Gorkha Hill Athletic Association (19/07/12).

<sup>15</sup> <http://sikkim-darjeeling.india-tours.net/darjeeling-travel/adventure-sports-indarjeeling.html> (accessed on

Darjeeling is the popular adventurous location for mountaineering. As there are many peaks and mountains to climb, it is a paradise destination for mountaineers. Climbing the higher peaks of Darjeeling needs tremendous strength, energy, vigor and zeal. One has to undergo tremendous training programmes in order to qualify.<sup>16</sup> The Himalayan Mountaineering Institute (HMI) was established in Darjeeling, India on November 4, 1954 to encourage mountaineering as an organized sport in India. With the impetus provided by the first prime minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, HMI was established in Darjeeling. Tenzing Norgay was the first director of field training for HMI. HMI regularly conducts Adventure, Basic and Advanced Mountaineering courses.<sup>17</sup>

Water Rafting is an adventurous sport, which is relatively new in Darjeeling Hills, having been introduced in 1991. The White Water Rafting on the river Teesta & Rangeet (Triveni), the scenic beauty of the banks, surrounding hills, its flora & fauna and sighting of several varieties of fishes is simply enchanting.<sup>18</sup>

### **Sports in India: A Critical Evaluation**

The importance of sports and games is being increasingly recognised in India, from both the educational and social points of view. More and more funds are being allocated for encouraging sports in schools, colleges and universities; in fact, sports have become an essential part of the curricula.

The year 1982 was significant in the history of sports in India. In that year, India organized the Asian Games for the first time. The following table represents the gradual increase in fund allocation for sports since the sixth five year plan:

Five Year Plan	Duration	Allocation for Sports (INR million)
6th	1980-1985	270
7th	1985-1989	2,070
8th	1992-1997	2,100
9th	1997-2002	4,730
10th	2002-2007	11,450
11th	2007-2012	46,360

Source: Ankan Banerjee on August 19th, 2011<sup>19</sup>

03/10/13).

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.mustseeindia.com/Mountaineering-in-Darjeeling/top-15-adventure-activities-india/374377> (accessed on 03/10/13).

<sup>17</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Himalayan\\_Mountaineering\\_Institute](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Himalayan_Mountaineering_Institute) (accessed on 04/10/13).

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.exploredarjeeling.com/rafting.html>

<sup>19</sup> <http://thesportdigest.com/2011/08/806/> (accessed on 16/07/12).

Despite a significant increase in the fund allocation, it is pertinent to mention that not more than 1% of budgetary allocation has been directed to sports in India.

The fact that professional sportsperson in our country face a lot of hardships cannot be denied. There are usual problems of lack of infrastructure and funds, lethargic approach on the part of government agencies and indifference of the corporate sector in providing sponsorships. However the fundamental problem lies in the absence of a sporting culture in India. Sports in India are considered a secondary and supplementary activity. This explains to a large extent, the apathy on the part of the government machinery towards sports. The corporate indifference too stems from the fact that they are not sure that the sponsorship money will be efficiently used in promoting the game and for the welfare of the players.

International sports are highly competitive where only the best and the brightest can hope to reach the top position. Past experience has shown that the government run organisations like the Sports Authority of India (SAI) have consistently failed to produce athletes who can compete at the international level. Hence government should withdraw itself from the administration and running of sports at the senior levels.<sup>20</sup>

### **Problems and Prospects of Sports: India & Darjeeling**

Sports in Darjeeling face the same problems as India is facing. The success of any sport depends upon on three factors - Organization, Management and Administration. Therefore this section would reveal the problems and prospects of sports in India compares the conditions of sports in Darjeeling.

#### **Problems**

The problems that are seen at management level can be dubbed as the root of all problems in sports today. There are numerous sports governing bodies in many countries, which operate very unprofessionally. This is a very common problem in developing countries. In India politicians who have no interest in developing the sport occupy top positions in sports associations. They are all given honorary positions and since they have no experience in the sport the growth of that sport is hampered. Both in the context of India and Darjeeling, sports associations and governing bodies should change their mindset and should entrust serious job roles with ex-sports wo/men on decision-making posts.

Secondly, inequality in the finances is a major threat to popular sports like Football. Economic imbalances in football leagues are a major drawback in the sport today. Issues of differences in salaries across sports is causing a very evidential competitive imbalance which will have a near term disadvantage which may result in declining

<sup>20</sup> [http://www.policyproposalsforindia.com/article.php?article\\_id=195&languageid=1](http://www.policyproposalsforindia.com/article.php?article_id=195&languageid=1) (accessed on 15/07/12).

popularity of the sport amongst the fans. Players cannot take to sports professionally neither in India at large nor in Darjeeling in particular. So, with the passage of time, the short career of the players diminishes with the sunset.

Development of Sport at grass root level should be focused in order to motivate the players for greater interest. Development of grass root sports is the starting point of disciplined and structured move of the future. Sports in India and in Darjeeling are not so advanced in the grass root level and the players' lacks platform to rise in the sports.

Discipline in Sports was a major problem in the past and it persists today. That's the reason why there is negligence in the case of Doping, Match fixing, biased selection procedures and violence in sports. These are key problems that are hampering sports. However, Darjeeling being a small town, these features are seen in miniature for minimum in the lower administration level.

Another point is the lack of proper training that lead to the poor performances of the athletes and the players. Due to the lack of efficient and expert training and coaching, the players are lacking competence which ultimately weakens the performance. This is the problem for both India and Darjeeling. For example, in preparing for on 2012 London Olympics, the Sports Authority of India submitted a proposal to the Sports Ministry urging it to address the travelling and dietary problems faced by the Indian athletes while training and competing in international events abroad.

Academically, in India at large or specifically in Darjeeling, there is a stress on insufficient sport studies and perspectives. That's why the students are facing the problem of merely theoretical approach even in sports lacking in a holistic education with inadequate pragmatic problems solving measures. Nonetheless, our country lacks proper organization, exposure, coaching, training and financial stability all it together hampering the future of sports.

### **Prospects**

The performance of Indian athletes at the international level is not very convincing. Therefore, a few steps may be recommended to make these initiatives more comprehensive. First, the allocation of funds, as the percentage of budget, should be increased to broad-base sports in the country. Second, sports should be made as an integral part of the education system to inculcate sports culture from the school level. Third, the effectiveness of the developmental projects should be evaluated periodically. Fourth, uniformity should be maintained in sports specific activities of various states of India to provide equal participation opportunity to its citizens. Finally, a structure of good governance should be incorporated to make the system transparent and accountable.

The corporate sector should be encouraged to take full control of the management of games and training of athletes. This only will ensure greater accountability on the part of the players and the coaches to show results. It should restrict its role to promoting sporting activities at the school and college levels and in providing jobs to meritorious sportsperson. In Darjeeling as elsewhere, one finds inadequate number of qualified trainers or coaches in sufficient for the growth of sports. The need for qualified and maximum number of trainers and coaches in a for the well being of the students interested in sports.

First, physical fitness is of the utmost importance for everyone, young and old. Participation in games and sports invariably ensures good health, fitness and, generally, freedom from ailments of various types. Exercise in some form or another is necessary, and sports provide an easy method to ensure such fitness. For this purpose, some fitness camps and clubs could be organized so that the athletes and players can utilize the facilities.

Secondly, regular participation in sports provides a healthy channel for diversion of energies. This is the need of the hour for our country and for Darjeeling. If regular tournaments would be organized in National, State and in local levels, the players will remain dynamic and fit. Participation should be the motto of sports. The spirit of sportsmanship helps to inculcate lasting values.

According to sociologists, society gains in many ways when the government encourages sports and games everywhere, provides playgrounds, the necessary equipment and other facilities, and rewards outstanding sportsmen, so as to encourage others also to play games. The crime graph dips, which means that the incidence of general crimes decreases because the right spirit and the right approach to things is developed on the playground. Similar points should be implemented in context of the region.

The Government, Management and even the corporate sector should be encouraged to take full control of the management of games and training of athletes. It should make all efforts to encourage young boys and girls to take up sports as a full time profession and not as a secondary activity. The meritorious sportspersons or students should get the opportunity to show their real talents.

### **Assessment**

In the late 1950s, when Darjeeling had a population of 60,000, it boasted of 18 lawn tennis courts, a nine-hole golf course, a mini racecourse, along with more than a dozen badminton and table tennis facilities. Today, when the population has tripled, there is neither a golf course nor a horse course. The town has only four lawn tennis courts to show off and two of them belong to educational institutions. In the past, international

players like Prakash Padukone - the first Indian to win the All England Badminton Championship - had visited Darjeeling to play at the Nripendra Narayan Bengali Hindu Public Hall. National football teams like East Bengal, Mohun Bagan and clubs from Nepal, Bangladesh and Bhutan used to regularly participate in hill tournaments.<sup>21</sup>

Chandan Singh Rawat was probably a household name in Darjeeling. An ex-Olympian and international football player, Chandan Singh Rawat was a prominent and regular player in the Indian National team - post independence. Bhaichung Bhutia and Sunil Chetri (born in Darjeeling) are gifted sons of football for the Himalayas. Presently, Bharat Chhetri from Kalimpong is the captain cum goal-keeper of Indian Hockey Team.

After a gap of 25 long years the All India Brigade of Gurkha Gold Cup will be held in Darjeeling with the financial support of the Government of West Bengal and it will be organised by the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Sports Association and the local district administration. Even Identity crisis can be combat with the quest of talents from Darjeeling, as Sports in India is a major factor in promoting national integration.

## **Conclusion**

Today sport emerges as an important component of socio-economic development of a country. The active participation in sports improves community health and productivity, reduces medical expenses, imbibes discipline in character and enhances social cohesion. The execution of a mega sporting event helps in developing infrastructure, generating employment, securing inflow of foreign capital and thus contributes significantly to the economic development of a country. Therefore, it can be said that the impact of sports on the society is multi-dimensional.

To revive sports culture, the Government should revisit the sporting framework of Darjeeling. Otherwise, the immense potential in sports can never be realized. It can be expected that the government will play a proactive role in promoting sports in India to establish the country as a sporting nation. That's why the promotion of sports is a social necessity in India and in Darjeeling. For the promotion of sports, government, local sport clubs, educational institutions, mass media and other related stake holders and authorities can play a major role.

<sup>21</sup> <http://himalnews.wordpress.com/2010/04/29/sports-politics-statehood-strifesloth-steamroll-sports-dreams-%E2%80%93-typically-bengal/> (accessed on 25/08/12).