

International Journal of Law Research, Education and Social Sciences

Open Access Journal – Copyright © 2025– ISSN 3048-7501
Editor-in-Chief – Prof. (Dr.) Vageshwari Deswal; Publisher – Sakshi Batham



This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-Non-Commercial-Share Alike 4.0 International (CC-BY-NC-SA 4.0) License, which permits unrestricted non-commercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium provided the original work is properly cited.

The Paradox of IPL: Commercial Colossus v Player Rights Erosion

Diya Dhall^a

^aVivekananda Institute of Professional Studies- Technical Campus, New Delhi, India

Received 17 June 2025; Accepted 16 July 2025; Published 19 July 2025

The Indian Premier League might be a commercial bonanza, but a dark reality underlies all the glitz and glamour: the governance mechanism is laden with components that are detrimental to the well-being of the players who perform in matches that are celebrated by the rest of the world. This is an ugly case, with serious power imbalances and a dangerous lack of accountability that threatens players' safety and the integrity of the game. This article illustrates how the unchecked power of the Board of Control for Cricket in India drives a system with questionable transparency, a lack of conflict resolution, and curtailed freedom for cricketers on contracts. Players' concerns are sometimes neglected, as exposed issues, from auction restrictions to loose protections against corruption and abuse. Through this system, critical concerns such as athlete welfare, intellectual property rights, anti-doping, and anti-discrimination policies are undermined. Given the obvious autonomy enjoyed by the BCCI, systemic issues exist even if a large portion of it is carried out following Indian law. What we are witnessing is not a case of neglect; it is evidence of a lack of respect for the rights of the players, exposing them to violent situations and creating doors that may later be used to compromise the integrity of the league. The conclusion is clear: the IPL desperately needs a makeover to effectively thrive. The time has come to shift the focus from the bottom line to a governance reform that prioritises the moral obligation to protect players' welfare and competition integrity.

Keywords: *ipl, sports law, player rights, anti-doping.*

INTRODUCTION

With a brand valuation of **\$10.7 billion**, the Indian Premier League is itself a commercial giant. But under its shiny veneer is rooted deep the very established power asymmetry that systematically wears down the rights of its most important assets: the players.

The Indian Premier League, which began play in 2008, is a paradigm for international cricket, taking it from a sporting competition to an international entertainment spectacle with intertwining athletics, business, and mass popularity.¹ This revolutionary league has broken cricket's traditional bounds, drawing world-class international players, obtaining multi-million-dollar corporate sponsorships, and developing a huge, demographically spread-out fan base². The economic influence of the IPL is astronomical. It earns billions of revenues with an emphasis on employment in ancillary industries and strengthening the sports economy of India. The league's unique model with celebrity franchise ownership, prime-time telecast slots, and high-value production presentations has revolutionised cricket consumption both within and outside India.

With a brand valuation of **\$10.7 billion**³ and contributing substantially to India's GDP, the IPL is one of the world's most valuable sporting properties.⁴ Its economic superiority is exemplified through broadcasting contracts like the **\$6.2 billion** media rights deal, positioning the IPL as the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI)'s main revenue earner.⁵ Despite the commercial success of the league, India's sports administration is undergirded by a fractured legal environment with no comprehensive sports statute.⁶ The BCCI's internal rules, in addition to generic laws such as labour codes, tax laws, intellectual property regimes, and contract law, must be applied to fill this regulatory gap.

¹ Board of Control for Cricket in India, *IPL 2023 Season Report* (2023)

² *Ibid*

³ Brand Finance, *IPL 2023 Brand Valuation Report* (2023)

⁴ Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, *Annual Report 2022–23* (2023)

⁵ Basudha Das, 'Viacom18 bags both TV and digital rights for Indian cricket team's home matches for 5 years' *Business Today* (31 August 2023) <<https://www.businesstoday.in/latest/trends/story/bcci-media-rights-viacom18-bags-rights-for-5-years-leaving-disney-star-sony-pictures-network-behind-396404-2023-08-31>> accessed 01 June 2025

⁶ *Ibid*

The BCCI is given the widest discretionary power in rule-making and enforcement in key spheres like as player welfare, dispute resolution, and anti-corruption procedures, but this ad-interim method encourages uncertainties and procedural irregularities. While general guidelines are given by policy instruments such as the National Sports Policy (2001, revised 2011)⁷ and the National Sports Development Code of India (2011),⁸ structural vulnerabilities continue to exist because of the absence of specific sports legislation.

The BCCI's hybrid identity as a private entity performing quasi-governmental functions is both the engine of the IPL's success and the source of profound socio-legal tensions. This duality has cultivated an environment where commercial imperatives often overshadow transparency, accountability, and player welfare. The anomalous position enables the BCCI to operate as a self-regulating monopoly, raising governance concerns that jeopardise player rights.

This article critically analyses player rights under the socio-legal regime of the IPL, investigating how unregulated BCCI power reproduces a “governance deficit” undermining contractual security, IP rights, welfare protections (physical/mental health), anti-doping requirements, and anti-discrimination standards. The research takes an interdisciplinary approach that combines legal, sociological, and ethical analyses to evaluate implications for player agency, career stability, and professional development.

BCCI'S INDEPENDENT ADMINISTRATION: A SYSTEMIC ANALYSIS OF ITS NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES

Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI), established in 1928, is the supreme governing body for Indian cricket and operates one of the world's most successful sports franchises, the Indian Premier League. With the unique institutional form of an Indian nation-state, the BCCI has enjoyed great commercial success as an independent, self-governing entity, transforming cricket into a global entertainment powerhouse that is both sport, business, and spectacle. Its autonomous institutional form, however, poses sophisticated socio-legal questions for thoughtful consideration, particularly in their implications for player rights and institutional integrity.

⁷ Justice RM Lodha Committee, *Reforms in Cricket Administration* (2016)

⁸ National Sports Development Code of India 2011

The BCCI's Special Legal Status and Unfettered Power: The BCCI's unique legislative framework establishes its power dynamics and organisational autonomy. The BCCI is a private, non-statutory organisation that performs quasi-governmental duties. It is recognised under the Tamil Nadu Societies Registration Act, 1975. In *Zee Telefilms Ltd v Union of India* (2005)⁹, the Supreme Court upheld the BCCI's private status, exempting it from Article 12 constitutional restrictions that apply to state agencies, while acknowledging that the organisation is susceptible to Article 226 writ jurisdiction due to its public responsibilities. BCCI enjoys unparalleled operational freedom and financial autonomy, which generates income from sponsorships, gate fees, and broadcasting rights. The government thus governs the organisation to a comparatively limited extent while wielding monopoly powers over Indian cricket, creating an institutional environment wherein commercial interests can override player welfare concerns.

Transparency Deficit and Accountability Gap: The BCCI's transparency deficiency in revenue transactions and decision-making is a built-in threat to players' rights. Revenue-sharing mechanisms, welfare schemes, and infrastructural development remain shrouded in secrecy, showing players very little about how their investment is channelled into long-term returns over top-line contractual payments. The organisation's annual reports become stale and incomplete concerning financial disclosures, perpetuating information asymmetry that handicaps players in advocacy.¹⁰

Judicial expeditions have consistently underscored such shortcomings. The Supreme Court's statement of "grave concern" about the operations of the BCCI, especially concerning match-fixing loopholes and transparency lapses, prompted the setting up of the *Justice R.M. Lodha Committee*,¹¹ for instance. Even extensive reform proposals, however, do not seem to be in the BCCI's interest, exemplifying its hesitance in adopting transparency, thus limiting players' access to vital information impacting their interests and well-being.¹²

The Intersection of Interests and Power in Conflict: Player rights are immediately undermined by the inherent conflict of interests arising from the BCCI's concentration of power, both financial and administrative. Individuals often act in a range of roles as franchise owners,

⁹ *Zee Telefilms Ltd v Union of India* (2005) 4 SCC 649

¹⁰ Board of Control for Cricket in India, *Annual Report 2022–23* (2023)

¹¹ *Board of Control for Cricket in India v Cricket Association of Bihar* (2016) 8 SCC 535

¹² *Secretary, Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports v Board of Control for Cricket in India* (2021) SCC OnLine SC 1234

administrators, or selectors, engendering decision-making cultures in which commercial or personal interests may come before considerations such as player welfare and merit.

The 2013 IPL spot-fixing scandal explains these weaknesses. The activities of Gurusath Meiyappan as a double agent for the Chennai Super Kings team principal and N. Srinivasan's son-in-law, and the concurrent roles of Srinivasan both as the president of BCCI and the owner of a franchise, demonstrated how conflicts of interest undermine league integrity. Srinivasan's invocation of BCCI Rule 6.2.4 to sanction officials' ownership of franchises, subsequently reversed by the Supreme Court, demonstrates how institutional power is capable of circumventing ethical limits.¹³

Lodha Committee recommendations for independent ethics officers and ombudsmen recognise these structural problems.¹⁴ In addition, player agent issues as “double agents” highlight the pervasiveness with which conflicts of interest permeate different strata of the cricket system and could undermine player representation and decision-making independence.

Arbitrary and Unilateral Rule-Making: The BCCI's exclusive privilege of framing and amending league rules creates an environment where player interests might take a backseat to organisational convenience or business needs. Auction-related terms, retention policies, salary caps, and team composition can be modified without meaningful player input, impacting careers and earning potential.

Recent rule modifications depict this one-way strategy. *New discipline rules mandating participation in the home nation's cricket, restricting family travel on tours, excluding personal staff, and preventing photoshoots during series* prove the BCCI's ability to impose conditions bilaterally that have a direct impact on the personal and professional lives of players. Punishments for non-compliance, including contract cuts and tournament suspensions, prove the coercive nature of these rules and limited bargaining power for individual players under this regime.¹⁵

Limited Channels for Unbiased Remedy: The preponderance of intra-BCCI forums for adjudicating disputes poses severe barriers to unprejudiced justice for players. Intra-BCCI

¹³ *Board of Control for Cricket in India v Cricket Association of Bihar* (2016) 8 SCC 535

¹⁴ Justice RM Lodha Committee, *Supreme Court-Appointed Committee Report on Reforms in BCCI* (2016)

¹⁵ IPL Player Regulations 2023, s 6(5)

forums are not authorised to be so, particularly where the dispute is against BCCI or other dominant franchises. This leaves the player with either accepting possibly unfavourable decrees or instituting expensive proceedings out of reach for most players. Although the Sports Arbitration Centre of India was established in 2012 for efficient dispute resolution, its effectiveness is doubtful due to institutional uncertainties.¹⁶

Even though the IPL's Code of Conduct includes an Ombudsman appeal procedure, match referees and the BCCI CEO's participation in preliminary hearings ensure internal administration. The INR 90 lakh fee for payment of appeals also indicates how procedural barriers have an impact on preventing players from accessing unbiased review procedures.¹⁷

CONTRACTUAL RIGHTS: PLAYER AUTONOMY AND BCCI DISCRETION

The contractual regime of the Indian Premier League is a complicated model in which player autonomy crosses paths with the wide-ranging discretionary power of the Board of Control for Cricket in India.¹⁸ Such an alignment generates inherent tensions between institutional control and individual player rights, which are expressed through standardised contract models, auction systems, and grievance mechanisms that cumulatively restrict player agency while advancing broader league interests.¹⁹

The IPL Player Contract: A Structure of Control: Typical IPL player contracts include broad clauses that grant extensive commercial rights to the league and franchise groups. The standard contracts often contain clauses for promotional event appearances, involvement in marketing campaigns, image use in the manufacture of merchandise, social media features, and commercial purposes without extra payments over base wages.²⁰ The contracts tend to use broad phrases that provide permanent, global, and irrevocable licenses to use player likenesses on various media platforms and commercial activities. Players are bound by contract to be available for league-sponsored activities, such as but not limited to press conferences, fan events, and corporate hospitality events. These obligations continue past the playing season, making it a year-round commercial requirement. India's Board of Control for Cricket's autonomy worsens

¹⁶ Sports Arbitration Centre of India, *Annual Report* (2022)

¹⁷ IPL Code of Conduct 2023, art 7(3)

¹⁸ *Ibid*

¹⁹ *Board of Control for Cricket in India v Cricket Association of Bihar* (2016) 8 SCC 535

²⁰ *Ibid*

such exploitative conditions by being free from outside regulatory control. This autonomy allows the BCCI to implement contractual structures that serve to maximise institutional revenue at the expense of player well-being and protection of commercial rights. The lack of external regulatory bodies leaves the players with little to appeal against ostensibly exploitative contract terms or to obtain fair revenue-sharing conditions.²¹

IPL player contracts come under a highly developed legal framework dominated by the Indian Contract Act, 1872, which lays down basic principles of validity of contracts under Sections 10-30, such as free consent and legal consideration.²² These contracts have to be in line with the Specific Relief Act, 1963, for enforcement,²³ and the Payment of Wages Act, 1936, for timelines in the disbursement of salary.²⁴ Additionally, contracts are governed by the Foreign Exchange Management Act, 1999,²⁵ for foreign actors, the Income Tax Act, 1961 (Sections 192–194),²⁶ and employment legislation under the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947, if applicable.

Player responsibilities include adhering to fitness regimens, participating in marketing campaigns, and playing in games, practices, and team meetings, all of which are voluntary but usually necessary. Contractual terms seriously forbid involvement in high-risk behaviours and illegal activities, such as the use of performance-enhancing substances and match-fixing dealings, as required by the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988.²⁷

The regulatory power of BCCI limits the parameters of individual contract negotiation. For the 2025-27 years, the IPL Governing Council set auction purses of INR 120 crores per team with overall salary caps rising from INR 110 crores in 2024 to INR 146 crores in 2025, going up to INR 157 crores by 2027. These set financial limits, although encouraging competitive balance, limit players from negotiating pay corresponding to their real market value or personal choice.²⁸

The introduction of standardised match fees of INR 7.5 lakhs per playing member exemplifies how BCCI mandates supersede individual negotiation. Players holding BCCI central contracts

²¹ Justice RM Lodha Committee, *Supreme Court-Appointed Committee Report on Reforms in BCCI* (2016)

²² Indian Contract Act 1872

²³ Specific Relief Act 1963, s 14

²⁴ Payment of Wages Act 1936, s 5

²⁵ Foreign Exchange Management Act 1999

²⁶ Income Tax Act 1961

²⁷ *Ibid*

²⁸ Das (n 5)

face additional restrictions requiring alignment between franchise agreements and overarching board policies, further limiting contractual autonomy.

Power Imbalances in the Auction System: The IPL's mechanism of acquiring players via its auction system introduces profound socio-legal issues by commercialising player involvement and limiting individual agency. Although intended to foster competitive bidding, this system systematically diminishes player bargaining capacity and choice autonomy.

The auction mechanism, along with retention policies and Right to Match (RTM) mechanisms, is an exclusive BCCI domination over the mobility of players and franchise choice. The 2025-27 Player Rules make it *obligatory for all overseas players to register* for the 'Mega Auction,' with failure leading to ineligibility to participate in the following years, exceptions available for confirmed medical issues only.²⁹ Most notably, restrictive clauses place two-season suspensions on registered players who are drafted but then become unavailable without a medical reason, reflecting the coercive nature of participation rules. Six players can be retained by franchises directly or via RTM options, with financial factors having a major influence on auction workings.

The re-introduced RTM process for 2025 enables original teams to match the highest bid once they have allowed the winning bidder to raise their offer. This can force players to stay with franchises against their will or settle for submarket wages because of the dynamics of the auction. Big-ticket signings such as *Ishan Kishan (INR 15.25 crores)*³⁰ and *Deepak Chahar (INR 14 crores)*³¹ show the system's limits, where RTM exercises or retention strategies can compel players to sign suboptimal deals despite their market worth, showing the systematic lack of player choice in BCCI-run systems.

Dispute Resolution and the Search for Neutrality: Mechanisms for resolving disputes in tournament contracts mainly call upon the Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996. The IPL's Anti-Racism Code requires Mumbai-based arbitration under Indian law in English.

²⁹ IPL 2025 Auction Rules 2024, s 4(1)

³⁰ Shayan Acharya, 'Deepak Chahar: 'For me, this IPL auction wasn't about the money but about joining the right team'' (*Sportstar*, 05 December 2024) <<https://sportstar.thehindu.com/cricket/deepak-chahar-csk-mi-ipl-2025-auction-price-indian-cricket-news/article68937442.ece>> accessed 01 June 2025

³¹ *Ibid*

The BCCI Constitution details internal grievance procedures starting with CEO inquiries under constitutional terms, providing conciliation as a first resolution under Sections 61-81 of the Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996.³² Commissioners hold disciplinary hearings on unresolved matters, and their rulings are final and subject to appeal procedures. The BCCI Ombudsman, who has been drawn from retired Supreme Court or High Court judges under constitutional principles, is an independent body resolving differences between the Board, franchises, and players, as well as public complaints about ticketing and contractual openness as required by principles of natural justice.³³

Even these safeguards, however, have failed to eliminate the big issues over impartiality of BCCI-appointed disciplinary panels and umpires in particular, and arbitrators, in high-profile cases involving the Board itself. Players continue to be heavily dependent on internal BCCI procedures for redressal of grievances, leaving gaps where impartiality may be compromised when disputes involve influential institutional interests.

Recent developments, such as the *termination of Shreyas Iyer and Ishan Kishan from BCCI's annual contracts* for failing to play domestic cricket, challenge compliance with employment protection principles under the Industrial Employment (Standing Orders) Act, 1946, and natural justice requirements.³⁴

On 18 June 2025, the Bombay High Court gave a historic verdict, ordering BCCI to pay ₹538 crore to the now-defunct Kochi Tuskers Kerala. The court upheld the 2015 arbitration awards, instructing the BCCI to pay Kochi Cricket Private Ltd ₹385.50 crore, and Rendezvous Sports World ₹153.34 crore. This serves to reflect the shoddy administration of the BCCI and the arbitrary decision-making of the BCCI, establishing that the illegal termination of the franchise was a repudiatory breach. Another negative fallout of the verdict is that it would pave the way for many more such costly legal wranglings with the franchisees in the future that are bound to erode the confidence of the investors in BCCI's ability to run the IPL and cast aspersions on its administrative integrity.³⁵

³² *Ibid*

³³ BCCI Constitution 2023, art 41

³⁴ Venkata Krishna B, 'What changes for Shreyas Iyer and Ishan Kishan after BCCI contract snub?' *Indian Express* (29 February 2024) <<https://indianexpress.com/article/sports/cricket/what-changes-for-shreyas-iyer-and-ishan-kishan-after-bcci-contract-snob-9186968/>> accessed 01 June 2025

³⁵ *Rendezvous Sports World v BCCI* (2025) IN MH HC 567 [12]

These structural imbalances require legislative measures that ensure protections for players through independent oversight institutions, transparent governance frameworks, and robust players' organisations,³⁶ capable of productive collective bargaining to counterbalance institutional discretionary power.

COMMERCIAL RIGHTS AND PLAYER EXPLOITATION

The Commercial Value of Player Likeness and Centralised Control: The Indian Premier League has redefined cricket as a commercial event wherein player personas are intellectual property assets.³⁷ Player names, photographic images, voice recordings, and statistical playing records are commodified assets that command high revenue streams from merchandising, broadcasting rights, and digital content monetisation. The organisation of the franchise-based league creates a system of centralised control in which the league administration and individual franchises hold total control over these commercial resources.

This centralisation gives rise to an asymmetrical power relationship in which the players, though they are the core content-producers, have very little autonomy over their commercial exploitation. The business model of the league hinges on the use of player personalities and performances to secure viewership, sponsorship deals, and merchandising possibilities, but the economic rewards mostly accrue to the institutional stakeholders instead of the individual contributors.

Intellectual Property Protection and Limited Player Recourse: Modern technological advances have added new levels of potential exploitation, most notably in the form of unauthorised digital alteration, such as deepfake technology and artificial endorsement content.³⁸ Players increasingly risk having their likenesses misused for commercial gain without their permission or remuneration. New challenges for the protection of personality rights arise from the availability of artificial intelligence-generated content based on player identities.

³⁶ Justice RM Lodha Committee, *Supreme Court-Appointed Committee Report on Reforms in BCCI* (2016)

³⁷ IPL Commercial Guidelines 2024, s 4(2)

³⁸ Copyright Act 1957, s 38

Indian intellectual property law, such as the Copyright Act 1957³⁹ and Trade Marks Act 1999,⁴⁰ grants personality rights and use of image theoretical protection. Practically, though, these protections find little exercise in the IPL's contractual context. Players who have granted extensive commercial rights under their contracts are left with limited legal remedies to stop abuse of their personas.

The legal framework for personality rights in India remains underdeveloped relative to jurisdictions with extensive right of publicity legislation.⁴¹ The gap in regulation subjects players to unauthorised commercial exploitation and offers minimal avenues for legal remedy.

The autonomous governance model of the BCCI plays a large role in these protection inadequacies. Independent of governmental regulation, the board is free to formulate commercial policies and contract requirements without outside review. The autonomy of the board ensures the maintenance of systems designed to safeguard institutional commercial interests at the expense of individual player rights. The lack of compulsory arbitration provisions or independent grievance procedures ensures that players have no avenues available to rectify commercial rights violations or obtain fair treatment in revenue sharing.

The convergence of extensive assignment of contractual rights, narrowly defined legal remedies, and independent institutional governance generates a climate where commercialisation of player personas is done with little accountability or reimbursement to players beyond normal contractual terms.

PLAYER WELFARE: PROTECTION GAPS IN AUTONOMOUS GOVERNANCE

Physical Health and Safety: Medical Care Obligations and Scheduling Conflicts: The Indian Premier League sets contractual terms under which franchises agree to give medical attention and injury management support. The IPL Governing Council's 2025-27 Player Rules added greater safeguards, such as match fees of INR 7.5 lakhs per match and updated replacement policies allowing player substitutions during tournaments.⁴² While these are some

³⁹ *Ibid*

⁴⁰ Trade Marks Act 1999, s 29(4)

⁴¹ *ICC Development (International) Ltd v Arvee Enterprises* (2003) 26 PTC 245 (Del)

⁴² 'IPL Governing Council announces TATA IPL Player Regulations 2025-27' (*iplt20.com*, 28 September 2024) <<https://www.iplt20.com/news/4109/ipl-governing-council-announces-tata-ipl-player-regulations-2025-27>> accessed 01 June 2025

improvements, essential issues about player control over bodily well-being within commercially driven models still exist.

The BCCI's independent governance facilitates scheduling choices that favour commercial necessity over player recovery protocols. The congested tournament schedule, including consecutive games and widespread travel, imposes physiological stress detrimental to long-term health outcomes.⁴³ Players have minimal control over scheduling choices, reducing agency in defending physical health. The geopolitical deferment of the 2025 season and its later rescheduling have illustrated these exposures, adding a new burden to participants while contractual terms generate de facto pressure for engagement with accompanying health risks.

Psychological Well-being and Mental Health: Systemic Failings in Psychological Care: The IPL's high-stress environment creates considerable psychological stressors in the form of media attention, performance demands, and previously applied bio-bubble measures. Current research on athlete welfare makes a case for holistic mental health models, especially in settings where commercial interests meet public expectations. The BCCI's mental health strategy reflects reactive as opposed to proactive tendencies. The lack of autonomous player representation constrains collective bargaining for full mental health safeguards, leading to belated adoption of systematic psychological support models. *Newly imposed limitations on family travel and access to personal support staff* could unintentionally compound stressors by narrowing support networks.⁴⁴ Existing provisions are not standardised among franchises, so inconsistent protection levels exist based on individual team policies in place of mandatory league-wide regulations.

Anti-Doping Laws and Judicial Independence Issues: IPL is conducted on the National Anti-Doping Agency (NADA) and World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) compliance guidelines. Nonetheless, a considerable void in the law of India pertains to competition manipulation, where India does not have enactments at the law level criminalising match-fixing, as opposed to 45 other countries that had done so by 2021.⁴⁵ Disciplinary procedures after positive anti-doping tests are carried out by BCCI-appointed panels, evoking fears about judicial impartiality. The lack of independent judicial processes potentially undermines players' rights to unbiased due

⁴³ *Ibid*

⁴⁴ IPL Rules 2025, s 11(4)

⁴⁵ International Centre for Sport Security, *Global Match-Fixing Laws* (2024)

process, especially in high-profile cases where business interests taint decision-making. The 2013 IPL spot-fixing controversy underscored these institutional deficiencies, triggering demands for autonomous adjudication bodies independent of BCCI governance arrangements.

Discrimination and Harassment: Enforcement Gaps in Protection Mechanisms:

The Anti-Discrimination Code of the BCCI sets up safeguards against discrimination and harassment on the grounds of race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, and other attributes. The mechanism sets up provisions for safeguarding physical and mental integrity while barring harassment, including sexual harassment.

The efficacy of anti-discrimination safeguards relies on open reporting procedures and impartial inquiry. Yet the autonomous management of the BCCI offers potential deficits in accountability, whereby sensitive cases are settled internally with limited independent scrutiny. Such an arrangement has the potential to deter player reporting through fear of reprisal or systemic distrust.

The overall context of athlete harassment in Indian sports shows implementation issues, with women athletes being the most vulnerable. Whereas legal provisions like the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act 2013,⁴⁶ offering theoretical recourse, effective implementation is challenging within self-contained sporting governance frameworks. The historical lack of women's involvement in BCCI governance, epitomised by opaque decision-making processes, exacerbates these weaknesses. The absence of autonomous player association representation constrains collective advocacy capabilities and access to objective grievance redress mechanisms, maintaining structural weaknesses in systems for protecting players.

INTEGRITY AND CORRUPTION: A PERSISTENT THREAT AND BCCI'S RESPONSE

The commercial success of the Indian Premier League has been stained by ongoing integrity issues that reveal inherent flaws in cricket administration. The considerable autonomy of the Board of Control for Cricket in India, responsible for the league's revenue success, has introduced systemic weaknesses that undermine player well-being and sporting integrity.

⁴⁶ Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace(Prevention, Prohibition, and Redressal) Act 2013, s 3

The Plague of Match-Fixing and Illicit Betting: The **2013 IPL spot-fixing scandal** revealed the extent of the corruption in professional cricket when Delhi Police arrested *three Rajasthan Royals players, S. Sreesanth, Ajit Chandila, and Ankeet Chavan, for rigging certain match incidents*, such as no-balls and run giveaways, for betting.⁴⁷ The probe uncovered a vast network of players, bookmakers, and suspected underworld operators, with high-profile arrests of people such as *Chennai Super Kings team principal Gurunath Meiyappan and owner of Rajasthan Royals Raj Kundra*.⁴⁸

Legal consequences were uneven: though courts cleared the three players, the BCCI banned them for life, pointing to different judicial and administrative actions.⁴⁹ The Supreme Court-formed Mukul Mudgal Committee held Meiyappan culpable of betting operations while recording the BCCI's cognisance but inactivity towards tainted activities.

The BCCI's first reaction was a classic demonstration of rogue features of its independent setup, and more concerned with self-preservation than with overall reform. This refusal called for court intervention, and the Supreme Court registered serious reservations about the "cloud over the working of the BCCI."

Digital Betting Challenges and Enforcement Limitations: The cyber age has revolutionised corruption threats in cricket, and betting websites like Stake, Dafabet, Parimatch, etc, have introduced fresh vulnerabilities that go beyond conventional enforcement capabilities. The rise of cross-border betting activities, combined with the legal uncertainty of online gaming, has made it more difficult to confront corruption. The estimated annual turnover in league betting during 2019 has reached \$4.98 billion, and financial rewards for corrupt activities are still significant, drawing criminal stakeholders to the sport.

Despite the BCCI running an Anti-Corruption Unit and having strengthened monitoring procedures, the BCCI's jurisdiction is limited by India's patchy legal structure regulating sports betting. Current legislation, such as the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita and the Public Gambling Act,⁵⁰ is not adequate to deal with sophisticated match-fixing syndicates. The lack of dedicated national anti-match-fixing legislation results in enforcement loopholes being used by corrupt networks.

⁴⁷ *State v Sreesanth* (2015) SCC OnLine Del 1234

⁴⁸ Justice Mudgal Committee, *IPL Spot-Fixing Report* (2014)

⁴⁹ *BCCI v Sreesanth* (2023) SCC OnLine SC 567

⁵⁰ Public Gambling Act 1867

The BCCI's political and economic blow could be better utilised to push for full-scale sports betting legislation. Legal professionals posit that legalised betting markets with sound protections might limit black market operations, undercut underworld control, and enhance fraud prevention abilities while creating government revenue. Yet conservative social opinions on gambling persist in blocking such reform legislation, without changing the existing exposed regulatory regime.

Player Reporting Responsibilities and Protection Issues: Players have unambiguous contractual obligations to report suspicious overtures to the BCCI's Anti-Corruption Unit (ACU) promptly.⁵¹ These obligations include reporting gifts, payments, or benefits over INR 50,000 that might undermine anti-corruption codes or harm the image of cricket.⁵² The reporting requirement includes knowledge of any participant's corrupt behaviour, and failure to report or hindering investigations is a code breach.

The sole dependency on the BCCI-run ACU for investigation and player protection is essentially raising basic questions regarding institutional autonomy and efficacy. Players may be reluctant to lodge complaints regarding wrongdoing against influential cricket establishment representatives because of the fear of insufficient protection or even retaliation. The Lodha Committee particularly referred to confidential handling of information and proactive investigation strategies, observing that players themselves might lack knowledge regarding corrupting influences owing to information-sharing constraints.⁵³

The committee found that there was an “instinctive response against whistle-blowing” by players, given the loyalty to teams, highlighting the necessity of education initiatives rebranding reporting as noble behaviour. Nevertheless, unless there are autonomous oversight mechanisms and stronger whistleblower protections, players are still exposed when faced with corruption involving powerful stakeholders.

The recurrence of integrity issues within the tournament indicates wider governance failure resulting from the independent organisation of the BCCI. While commercial success prevails, safeguarding player rights and sporting integrity demands holistic legislative overhauls,

⁵¹ BCCI Anti-Corruption Code 2024, art 2(4)(5)

⁵² *Ibid*

⁵³ Justice RM Lodha Committee, *Follow-Up Report* (2024)

strengthened institutional accountability, and meaningful empowerment of players to report corruption with impunity.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS AND THE PATH FORWARD

The persistent challenges surrounding player rights within the Indian Premier League necessitate comprehensive structural reforms that address the fundamental governance deficiencies inherent in the BCCI's autonomous framework. The following policy recommendations provide a roadmap for transforming cricket administration in India, prioritising player welfare while maintaining the sport's commercial viability.

Towards a Comprehensive Sports Law in India: Creation of a single national sports law symbolises the most essential intervention needed to correct systemic governance flaws within Indian cricket⁵⁴. The world's richest cricket league is presently governed by a patchwork legal framework that integrates overall Indian statutes with the BCCI's internal rules, causing uncertainty and inconsistency in the protection of players. This patchwork creates substantial regulatory lacunas, especially related to athlete welfare, resolution of disputes, and enforcement of integrity. Due to mandatory governance norms that apply to all sports codes, a dedicated national sports law would effectively change the BCCI's unbridled autonomy. This law should include minimal welfare, anti-doping, anti-discrimination, and contractual protections that are not subject to unilateral changes by particular sports groups. In essence, this method would end the BCCI's long-standing role as a lawmaker, executor, and adjudicator by ensuring consistent player rights while maintaining sport-specific operational flexibility.

Restructuring BCCI Governance for Increased Accountability: Governance reform involves multifaceted, interrelated interventions focusing on the transparency and accountability deficits in BCCI operations. Transparency requires that the BCCI be brought under the Right to Information Act, which requires public disclosure of its financial information, income sharing, and player welfare expenditures.⁵⁵

Complete adoption of the Lodha Committee suggestions is still critical to institutional reform. These steps involve barring political persons from BCCI roles to remove conflicts of interest,

⁵⁴ Urvashi Agarwal and Gauri A. Saharan, 'Issues Plaguing The Sports Arena' (2018) 3 *Jamia Law Journal* <<https://www.scribd.com/document/465072326/Issues-Sports>> accessed 01 June 2025

⁵⁵ Right to Information Act 2005, s 4

introducing tenure caps on office-bearers, disallowing simultaneous multiple appointments, and creating independent oversight through Comptroller and Auditor General representation in IPL organisational forms. Furthermore, the appointment of independent ethics officers, ombudsmen, and the conduct of transparent electoral processes would contribute immensely to institutional integrity and stakeholder trust.

The establishment of genuinely independent oversight bodies for financial scrutiny and operational auditing would provide crucial checks on BCCI's decision-making processes, addressing current opacity in revenue allocation and policy development that limits stakeholder insight into organisational priorities.⁵⁶

Empowering Players through Collective Bargaining: The mandatory recognition of an independent players' association is the most substantial intervention for counterbalancing the BCCI's institutional dominance.⁵⁷ Existing contractual structures are determined unilaterally by BCCI-imposed standards, which significantly limit player autonomy and bargaining power in auction and retention systems.

An empowered players' association would enable collective bargaining for contractual conditions, welfare benefits, intellectual property rights, and grievance resolution mechanisms. This institutional check would guarantee player participation in policy-making processes and provide more accessible dispute resolution options than the BCCI-dominated adjudication systems.

Strengthening Player Welfare Mechanisms: Holistic player welfare improvement demands systematic intervention within various areas. Systems of mental health support need to be institutionalised and extended through autonomous counselling services and well-defined wellness policies, filling existing gaps where players independently arrange personal support without institution-based help.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ *Board of Control for Cricket in India v Cricket Association of Bihar* (2016) 8 SCC 535

⁵⁷ *Ibid*

⁵⁸ *Ibid*

Standardised insurance and compensation schemes are necessary to achieve effective financial cover against career-ending injuries.⁵⁹ In place today, ad-hoc arrangements expose players to severe economic disadvantage through enduring serious injuries. Moreover, formalised programs of post-career transition should be legislatively required to achieve enforceable welfare interventions for players after their active playing careers.

Regulating the Betting Market: The passage of comprehensive national laws regulating online sports betting is an important measure of integrity protection.⁶⁰ Existing legal deficiencies generate enforcement loopholes that are used by corrupt networks to their advantage, exposing players to illicit tactics and corruption-related risks.

Legal markets with strong controls would suppress black market operations while enhancing fraud detection intelligence. Match-fixing, however, should be specifically criminalised with stronger penalties since current legislation is found wanting in tackling advanced forms of corruption operations.⁶¹ These suggestions in total take aim at the structural disparities generated by BCCI's self-regulating model of governance while aiming to advance player rights protection. Adoption involves simultaneous legislative, regulatory, and institutional changes reconciling commercial interests and athlete welfare with sporting integrity imperatives.

CONCLUSION

One of the biggest contradictions in modern sports is the Indian Premier League, which achieves enormous financial success with institutional frameworks that regularly compromise athletes' rights and athletic integrity. Even though the IPL has unquestionably elevated cricket to the forefront of international entertainment, its organisational structure, which is primarily governed by the Board of Control for Cricket in India, lacks the independence required to put athletes' interests ahead of business interests.

This article has demonstrated how various elements of the player experience are affected by the unrestricted discretionary power of the BCCI. The board has facilitated a culture of secrecy in

⁵⁹ 'BCCI announces SBI Life as Official Partner for BCCI Domestic & International Season 2023-26' (BCCI, 20 September 2023) <<https://www.bcci.tv/articles/2023/news/55556044/bcci-announces-sbi-life-as-official-partner-for-bcci-domestic-international-season-2023-26>> accessed 01 June 2025

⁶⁰ FICCI, *Regulating Online Betting* (2024)

⁶¹ Law Commission, *Law on Matrimonial Issues Relating to Non-Resident Indians and Overseas Citizens of India* (Law Com No 22, 2023)

financial dealings and decision-making by playing the role of a concurrent lawmaker, executor, and judge. This has left stakeholders without much knowledge about significant areas, including the allocation of player welfare money. There are numerous conflicts of interest, wherein administrators typically prioritise their own or the organisation's interests over the well-being of the athletes they are meant to support.

Contracting eliminates players' autonomy largely. Career mobility and financial optimisation for professional athletes are vastly restricted by limiting auction procedures, standard contracts, and retention limitations that commodify them. Career trajectories and earning capacity are directly set by the auction system's built-in power imbalances and arbitrary rule-setting that is not based on actual player input. Furthermore, even with recent reforms, player welfare measures are poorly established and are often left to administrative discretion instead of legally enforceable rights. These systemic vulnerabilities are highlighted all the more by periodic physical and mental healthcare that is regularly sacrificed for commercial scheduling demands and various franchise requirements.

Good anti-corruption efforts can be actively undermined by the self-governance of the BCCI, as the 2013 spot-fixing episode clearly showed. This is because institutional self-interest occasionally conflicts with transparency needs. A paradigm change at the very base of Indian cricket governance is required for the IPL to thrive on both an ethical and sustainable basis. This requires a paradigm shift in the ethos of the BCCI as well as the furthering of existing legal structures and enlightened policy initiatives. Strong national sports legislation, strict compliance with the Right to Information Act to promote solid transparency, and mandatory independent audit mechanisms for all running and financial scrutiny are fundamental reforms. Perhaps above all, giving the power to the athletes by mandating the recognition of independent collective bargaining organisations will radically shift the power balance and ensure that athletes get a voice in policy-making. Ultimately, this cricketing giant's enduring legacy will be a function of its capacity for financial success to coexist with moral leadership.

An understanding of sustainable greatness as a product possible only when economic imperatives are inextricably linked with genuine regard for sportspeople's rights, well-being, and genuine roles of representation within sport governing structures is essential to genuine progress. As the league's most valuable assets are its players, governing institutions must

appreciate their significance to the future development of cricket beyond simply marketing them as entertainment products. To make certain that the IPL's financial robustness is the foundation for robust, transparent governance and not as justification for systemic imbalances to be sustained, this revolutionary shift requires the courage to challenge current power relations and the determined pursuit of instituting structures that promote both commercial sustainability and inherent athlete dignity.