

Youth and Sports in Kerala: Current Situation, Challenges & Lessons to be learnt from Other States

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Big Picture about Youth and Sports in Kerala

- ❑ There is a Strong sports culture in Kerala in the field of athletics, football, volleyball, rowing, and water sports
- ❑ Traditionally, sports personalities from Kerala excels in track & field, football, and aquatic sports
- ❑ The state puts emphasis on grassroots sports development, school participation, and inclusive youth programmes
- ❑ Famous Sports Personalities include P.T. Usha, Jimmy George, Anju bobby George and many others
- ❑ Kerala's Sports Policy 2023 focused on
 - developing talent
 - improving infrastructure
 - supporting athletes through institutions and schemes

Current Sports Landscape in Kerala

- **The State is working towards Expansion of community sports and 'Health for all' vision**
 - a. Expanding sports ecosystem, moving from 'one playground per panchayat' to playground in every ward
 - b. Allocation of significant portion of local self-government funds on sports development
- **Investment and growth of the sports economy & high quality sports infrastructure**
 - a. Approx. ₹1,500 cr. spent on basic sports infrastructure, around ₹ 5,050 cr. worth of investment proposals mobilised through sports conclave
 - b. ₹220.86 crore allocation (2026–27) – **51.9% hike from previous year budget (~₹145.4 crore)**
 - c. ₹1,500 crore spent on infrastructure
 - d. ₹5,050 crore investment proposals via Sports Conclave
 - e. Kerala Infrastructure Investment Fund Board (**KIIFB**) funded modern stadiums and indoor complexes (Modern stadium in Kasaragod, Multipurpose indoor stadium at Nadakkavu worth Rs. 31.53 cr.)

Establishment of India's first Sports Planning & Research Wing in Jimmy George Indoor Stadium, Vellayambalam, Thiruvananthapuram by Department of Sports and Youth Affairs, Kerala

- a. Scientific Sports Planning, idea is to plan for early talent identification
- b. Data-driven training programmes, towards Evidence based sports policy

What are the problems experienced by Athletes in Kerala?

- **There is a high participation but low elite performance**
 - a. Strong school and community participation but weak conversion into national and international medals
 - b. Many talented athletes drop out after school due to lack of structured elite pathways
- **Lack of high-performance training systems**
 - a. Limited high-performance centres, sports science, physiotherapy, nutrition, and performance analysis
 - b. Training often depends on individual coaches rather than scientific systems.
- **Inadequate financial incentives**
 - a. Lower cash rewards compared to states like Haryana and limited athlete stipends and scholarships
 - b. This discourages youth from pursuing sports as a full-time career
- **Poor career Security & Post-Retirement Support**
 - a. Fewer sports quota government jobs, weak post-retirement support and pension schemes
 - b. This makes sports a risky career choice for young people.
- **Infrastructure quality issues**
 - a. Many playgrounds and stadiums exist but maintenance and quality vary widely
 - b. Elite-level standards are inconsistent

What are the problems experienced by Athletes in Kerala?

- **Fragmented sports administration**

- a. Multiple bodies involved (Sports Department, Sports Council, federations) leading to overlapping responsibilities and slow decision-making

- **Weak talent identification mechanisms**

- a. No fully integrated state-wide early talent scouting system
- b. Rural, coastal, and tribal talent often overlooked

- **Academic pressure on young athletes**

- a. Rigid education system and limited flexibility for training and competitions, leading to dropouts

- **Urban–rural and regional imbalance**

- a. Better facilities concentrated in cities and limited access to quality coaching in remote areas

- **Under-Utilization of Natural Advantages**

- a. Water sports and rowing not systematically developed
- b. Lack of specialized academies despite natural resources

What are the Institutional Challenges and demands made by Athletes in Kerala?

- **What are the demands of sports personalities in Kerala?**
 - a. Better maintained sports infrastructure and upgradation of modern facilities
 - b. Need of high performance training centres, specialised trainers for different sports

- **Delayed recognition and reward payments**
 - a. Demand for Higher cash rewards for medal winners, demand for regular monthly stipend for athletes, better funding for grassroots sports
 - b. Sports professional seek similar structured incentive policies as that of Haryana (Highest cash rewards providing state among India)

- **Delayed government job appointments**
 - a. There is a need for more govt job and long term career security for sports personalities
 - b. There is also a need for Pension schemes for sportspersons

- **Weak coordination between institutions**
 - a. Need for stronger college-level sports programmes
 - b. Need for systematic training pipelines to avoid losing talent at the early stage

Athlete Welfare & Operational Gaps

- **Limited Sports Science, Nutrition & Medical Support**
 - a. Require injury rehabilitation centres, physiotherapy support and scientific coaching
 - b. Experts speak: Kerala still lags behind states like Haryana, Odisha, Karnataka in sports science ecosystem developments
- **Limited funding from state alone**
 - a. Need emphasis on state fundings and PPP model (Public-Private Partnership)
- **Pending food allowances and hostel infrastructure concerns**
 - a. Concerns about substandard living conditions and lack of basic support services for athletes
 - b. Poor sports hostel facilities and travel support issues
- **Lack of sports specific developments (especially water sports)**
 - a. Despite Kerala's vast backwaters, water sports remain underdeveloped, need structured talent development.

How much does Kerala State government Spend on Sports?

Comparison with other states

State	State Budget Allocation (Latest)	Central Khelo India Infrastructure Allocations
Kerala	₹220.86 crore (Plan) (finance.kerala.gov.in)	₹50.00 crore (Press Information Bureau)
Odisha	₹1,315 crore (FY 2024–25) (sports.odisha.gov.in)	₹34.25 crore (Press Information Bureau)
Haryana	₹589.69 crore (State provision) (haryanacmoffice.gov.in)	₹66.59 crore (Press Information Bureau)
Jharkhand	Education, Sports, Arts & Culture” sector (which includes sports) allocated about ₹18,076 crore.	₹9.63 crore (Press Information Bureau)
Karnataka	Education, Sports, Arts & Culture” sector (which includes sports and youth affairs) allocated about ₹40,954 crore.	₹109.11 crore (Press Information Bureau)

How Kerala differs from Other States regarding their focus area on Sports Development

b. On Budget and incentive comparison

State	Focus	Incentives
Kerala	Infrastructure + grassroots	Moderate incentives
Haryana	Elite medals	Very high cash rewards + job quota
Odisha	High-performance centres	PPP model + scientific training

Infrastructure & Performance Comparison

State	Infrastructure Model	Talent Development System	Performance Outcomes	Key Gap / Strength
Kerala	Ward-level playground expansion; strong school & college infrastructure; KIIFB-funded stadiums	School-based participation; emerging research wing	SGFI Rank: 4th	Strong participation, weaker elite conversion
Haryana	1,489 sports nurseries across villages; dedicated sports complexes	Structured rural talent scouting; job quota system	Major Olympic & Asian Games contributor	Strong medal-focused ecosystem
Odisha	High-Performance Centres (PPP model); world-class hockey stadiums	Sport-specific excellence hubs	Hosted Hockey World Cup; strong international output	Elite training strength
Jharkhand	Residential sports academies; public sports complexes	Tribal & grassroots talent identification	National-level athletes in archery, hockey	Strong access model, limited elite infrastructure
Karnataka	Institutional academies; sports authority support; sports science integration	Coaching education + university linkage	Consistent national-level performers	Balanced institutional model

Best Practices in other states

State	Core Model	Key Interventions	Outcomes
Odisha	Elite High-Performance (PPP Model)	Sport-specific centres; Global partnerships; Sports science integration	International hockey hub; Hosted World Cup; Strong elite pipeline
Haryana	Incentive-Driven Medal Model	High cash rewards; Job quota; 1,489 sports nurseries	Major Olympic & Asian Games medal contributor
Jharkhand	Grassroots + Access Model	Residential academies; Tribal talent focus; Pay-and-Play facilities	Strong pipeline in archery & hockey
Punjab	Institutional Sports University Model	Dedicated Sports University; Sports medicine; Athlete welfare	Professional sports ecosystem; Career stability
Karnataka	Sports Science & Institutional Integration	State Sports Authority; Academy system; Coaching education	Balanced national-level performance; Strong sports science base

What Kerala Can learn from other states?

Learning Area for Kerala	Adopt From which state?	Suggested Reform for Kerala
Sport-Specific Excellence Hubs	Odisha	Create dedicated centres for athletics, football & water sports
Incentive Alignment	Haryana	Increase structured cash rewards & timely job appointments
Grassroots Talent Pipeline	Jharkhand	Strengthen residential academies & tribal/coastal scouting
Athlete Career Security	Punjab	Expand sports quota jobs & post-retirement pathways
Sports Science Integration	Karnataka	Build a strong sports science & data-driven training ecosystem

Strategic vision: From where Kerala stands now to possible ways for Better development of Sports

- Strong community participation base
Strong infrastructure expansion
Strong educational integration

Kerala = Inclusive Participation Model

Kerala must move from:

Participation → Performance

Infrastructure → Incentive Alignment

Community Sports → Elite Sports Ecosystem



Thank you....