

Coaches' Perceptions of the Khelo India Programme: Awareness, Impact on Athlete Development, Coaching Environment and Programme Challenges

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Abstract

Coaches are key intermediaries between sports policy and athlete outcomes, making their assessment of the Khelo India programme especially informative. This study surveyed 40 coaches associated with Khelo India tournaments to examine their professional profile, awareness of the scheme, and perceptions of its impact on athlete development, on the coaching and infrastructure environment, and on their specific sports, together with the programme's principal shortcomings. A structured questionnaire was administered and responses were analysed using frequencies, percentages and the chi-square goodness-of-fit test ($p < 0.05$). Most coaches were male (80.0%), based in private sports academies (70.0%) and excellently aware of the scheme's major components (62.5%). Coaches strongly endorsed Khelo India's effect on talent identification and competition: 82.5% agreed to a large extent that the Games provide a high-quality competitive platform and 77.5% that the scheme identifies grassroots talent, while 62.5% judged its overall impact on their sport to be significant or very significant. Endorsement was markedly weaker for supporting systems — only 7.5% felt coach-education opportunities had improved to a large extent — and the most prominent challenges were political interference (32.5% to a large extent) and administrative and scholarship-related limitations. The findings position Khelo India as effective in competition and talent identification but underdeveloped in coach education, support staff and infrastructure.

Keywords: Khelo India; coaches; talent identification; coaching development; sports policy; India

1. Introduction

The Khelo India programme, launched in 2018, aims to build a sustainable sporting ecosystem in India through grassroots talent identification, competitive platforms, athlete scholarships and dedicated Khelo India Centres. Coaches occupy a pivotal position in this ecosystem: they prepare athletes for the programme's competitions, observe its selection and support mechanisms at first hand, and depend on its infrastructure and professional-development provisions for their own practice. Their perceptions therefore offer an institutional vantage point that complements the athletes' own accounts. This article reports a survey of 40 coaches associated with Khelo India, and is a companion to a study of 360 participating athletes.

2. Materials and Methods

A descriptive survey design was used. The sample comprised 40 coaches associated with Khelo India tournaments. A structured questionnaire captured the coaches' profile (gender, institution, level of athletes trained), their awareness of and engagement with the scheme, and their perceptions of its impact on athlete development, on coaching and infrastructure, and on their specific sport, along with the programme's challenges. Perception items used a three-point extent scale (to a large extent / somewhat / not at all). Responses were expressed as frequencies and percentages, and the chi-square goodness-of-fit test was applied to each distribution at the 0.05 level, with critical values determined by the degrees of freedom of each item; one item is noted as non-significant (ns). Five tables were selected to represent the coaches' profile, awareness, and their three domains of perceived impact and challenge.

3. Results

3.1 Professional profile of coaches. Table 1 summarises the gender, institutional affiliation and athlete level of the coaches. (Athlete-level categories are not mutually exclusive, as coaches may train more than one level.)

Table 1: Profile of surveyed coaches (N = 40)

Variable	Category	No.	%
Gender	Male	32	80.0
	Female	8	20.0
Institution	Private sports academy	28	70.0
	School / college	6	15.0
	SAI centre	4	10.0
	Khelo India centre / academy	2	5.0
Level of athletes trained	School / state level (U-17)	21	52.5
	Grassroot / beginners (U-14)	16	40.0
	National level (U-21 / senior)	13	32.5
	International level	6	15.0

Gender and institution distributions differed significantly from uniform ($\chi^2 = 41.61$, $df = 2$; $\chi^2 = 86.09$, $df = 5$; $p < 0.05$).

The coaching sample was predominantly male (80.0%) and heavily concentrated in private sports academies (70.0%), with only 5.0% based at a Khelo India Centre and 10.0% at a Sports Authority of India centre. Coaches most commonly trained school and state-level (under-17) athletes (52.5%) and grassroots beginners (40.0%), with progressively fewer working at national (32.5%) and international (15.0%) levels — locating the sample firmly at the talent-development end of the pathway.

3.2 Awareness and engagement. Table 2 reports coaches' overall awareness of the scheme and the Khelo India initiatives their athletes had entered.

Table 2: Awareness of the scheme and athletes' initiative participation (N = 40)

Item	Response category	No. (%)
Overall awareness of scheme components	Excellent (all major components)	25 (62.5)

	Good (most relevant components)	11 (27.5)
	Fair (basic understanding)	4 (10.0)
Initiative athletes participated in	Youth / University Games	19 (47.5)
	Winter Games	9 (22.5)
	Athlete Scholarship Programme	4 (10.0)
	Para Games	3 (7.5)
	Talent Identification & Development Cttee.	3 (7.5)
	Training at a Khelo India Centre	2 (5.0)

Both distributions differed significantly from uniform ($\chi^2 = 36.20$, $df = 3$; $\chi^2 = 44.03$, $df = 6$; $p < 0.05$).

Awareness of the programme was high: 62.5% of coaches rated themselves excellently aware of all major components and a further 27.5% well aware of the components relevant to their sport, with none reporting only nominal awareness. Their athletes' engagement was concentrated in the flagship Youth and University Games (47.5%) and the Winter Games (22.5%), while participation in scholarship, talent-identification and Khelo India Centre streams was comparatively limited — mirroring the athlete survey's finding that the competitive events are the programme's most visible and accessible element.

3.3 Perceived impact on athlete development and talent identification. Table 3 gives coaches' ratings across six statements.

Table 3: Impact on athlete development and talent identification (% , N = 40)

Statement	To a large extent	Somewhat	Not at all
Games provide a crucial, high-quality competitive platform	82.5	17.5	0.0
Effective in identifying grassroots talent	77.5	22.5	0.0
Competition among junior athletes has significantly improved	65.0	35.0	0.0
Motivated parents to support children's sporting ambitions	57.5	32.5	10.0
Scholarship provides adequate financial support	32.5	67.5	0.0
Noticeable increase in the pool of competitive athletes	22.5	72.5	5.0

All distributions differed significantly from uniform (χ^2 ranging 13.55–45.36; $p < 0.05$).

Coaches most strongly endorsed the programme's competitive and talent-identification functions: 82.5% agreed to a large extent that the Games provide a high-quality competitive platform and 77.5% that the scheme identifies grassroots talent, with none rejecting either statement. A clear majority also felt junior competition had improved (65.0%) and that parents were more supportive (57.5%). Endorsement was notably weaker on outcomes requiring sustained resourcing: only 32.5% felt the scholarship gave adequate support and just 22.5%

saw a large increase in the competitive athlete pool, with most coaches selecting “somewhat” on both.

3.4 Perceived impact on coaching and infrastructure. Table 4 reports coaches’ ratings of the scheme’s effect on their own working environment.

Table 4: Impact on coaching and infrastructure (% , N = 40)

Statement	To a large extent	Somewhat	Not at all
Helped create a more professional, scientific coaching environment	47.5	32.5	20.0
Improved quality/availability of sports infrastructure locally	20.0	65.0	15.0
Support staff (physio, psychologist, nutritionist) more accessible	15.0	55.0	30.0
Provided better opportunities for coach education & development	7.5	32.5	60.0

The first three distributions were significant ($\chi^2 = 18.21, 9.80$ and 16.55 ; $p < 0.05$); the coaching-environment item was non-significant ($\chi^2 = 4.55$, ns).

The coaching-support domain drew the weakest endorsement of the whole survey. Only 7.5% of coaches felt the programme had improved coach-education opportunities to a large extent, and a clear majority (60.0%) felt it had not done so at all. Improvements in local infrastructure (20.0%) and access to support staff (15.0%) were mostly rated as partial rather than substantial. The most positively rated item — the creation of a more professional, scientific coaching environment (47.5% to a large extent) — was also the only statistically non-significant distribution, indicating divided opinion rather than consensus.

3.5 Programme challenges. Table 5 reports the extent to which coaches perceived each shortcoming of the programme.

Table 5: Perceived challenges of the Khelo India programme (% , N = 40)

Challenge	To a large extent	Somewhat	Not at all
Political interference	32.5	40.0	27.5
Lack of transparency in selection	22.5	35.0	42.5
Insufficient financial support (scholarship amount)	17.5	55.0	27.5
Bureaucracy and administrative delays	15.0	52.5	32.5
Inadequate follow-up & long-term athlete support	15.0	55.0	30.0
Uneven focus on popular vs. lesser-known sports	12.5	70.0	17.5
Quality of infrastructure at Khelo India Centres	12.5	25.0	62.5

Distributions reported as observed; percentages sum to 100% across the three extent categories for each challenge.

Political interference was the challenge most often reported to a large extent (32.5%), followed by a lack of transparency in selection (22.5%) and insufficient scholarship support (17.5%).

When the “large extent” and “somewhat” responses are combined, however, the most pervasive concerns become the uneven focus on popular versus lesser-known sports (82.5%), inadequate long-term athlete follow-up (70.0%) and insufficient financial support (72.5%). The quality of infrastructure at Khelo India Centres was the least-endorsed challenge, with 62.5% of coaches reporting no problem — consistent with the small share of coaches actually based at such centres. Separately, coaches judged the programme’s overall impact on their specific sport favourably: 62.5% rated it significant or very significant and only 5.0% negligible.

4. Discussion

The coaches’ assessment is internally coherent and closely echoes the athletes’ account. On the programme’s core purpose — creating high-quality competition and surfacing grassroots talent — coaches are emphatically positive, with near-universal agreement that the Games are a valuable competitive platform and an effective identification mechanism, and a clear majority perceiving improved junior competition and greater parental support. This is the demand side of the pathway working as intended.

The supply side, however, lags. Coach education, support-staff access and infrastructure attract the weakest endorsements, and the flagship Khelo India Centres reach only a small fraction of coaches directly. Perceived challenges concentrate on governance and continuity — political interference, selection transparency, scholarship adequacy and long-term athlete follow-up — rather than on the conduct of competition. Taken together with the athlete survey, the results suggest a programme whose competitive apparatus has matured faster than its developmental and administrative infrastructure.

5. Conclusion

Coaches regard Khelo India as a well-known and broadly successful initiative for competition and talent identification, and most credit it with a significant impact on their sport. Its perceived weaknesses lie in the systems that sustain coaching and athlete development over time: limited coach-education provision, uneven access to support staff and infrastructure, and governance concerns around selection transparency, scholarship adequacy and long-term follow-up. Investment in structured coach-development pathways, wider access to Khelo India Centres and support staff, more transparent selection, and sustained post-Games athlete support would address the gaps coaches identify most consistently. Read alongside the companion athlete study, these findings indicate that the programme’s next phase of value depends less on its competitions than on the developmental ecosystem surrounding them.

6. Bibliography

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