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## SUSTAINABLE SPORTS: THE NEED OF THE TIMES

**Ms. Pallavi Rai,**

Department of Physical Education,  
Chaudhary Devi Lal University, Sirsa (Haryana)

**Dr. Ramesh Chand Yadav,**

Assistant Professor

Lakshmibai National Institute Physical Education, NERC, Guwahati (Assam)

### ABSTRACT

In recent times, sustainability has become a prominent and widely discussed topic. It is being considered across various industries on a global scale. Therefore, if someone wishes to study sports technology in India, it is imperative to possess a comprehensive understanding of sustainability and its impact on the field. Sustainability encompasses the ability to thrive and succeed in the future without exhausting or depleting natural resources. According to the Brundtland report, a United Nations publication, sustainable development involves meeting the needs of the present generation while ensuring that future generations can meet their own needs. In the context of sports, sustainability entails adopting environmentally friendly practices when organizing sporting events, with the aim of minimizing harm to the environment and reducing the carbon footprint of organizers. Presently, sustainability holds significant importance as it intersects with a wide range of social, environmental, and economic issues. There is a global concern regarding matters such as climate change, economic inequality, and social injustice, which affect people worldwide. In the world of sports, there exist significant challenges that pertain to both the daily functioning and the accountability towards children and future generations. However, it is also important to recognize that sports have a unique ability to uplift and inspire a large number of individuals.

**KEYWORDS:** sports, outdoor activities, natural environment, sustainability, globalization, climate change.

### HOW SPORTING EVENTS IMPACT THE ENVIRONMENT

Stadiums, gymnasiums, and other infrastructure are frequently hurriedly built for conduction of big sporting events just like Olympics or the Football World Cup, leaving a significant and difficult-to-remove increase in the environmental footprint, audience. According to three researchers from Cardiff University in Wales (Andrea Collins, Calvin Jones, and Max Monday), the impact in these events was seven times greater than usual. Water, food, and energy are all spiraling. For instance, Veolia UK, a company that cleans routes, claims that during the 2019 London Marathon, runners left 350,000 plastic bottles on city streets. Along with motorcycles, Formula 1, the Dakar Rally, and other major events, these cause air pollution. The final, which included more than 3,500 participants and over 340 cars, caused 100 tons of trash and destroyed the desert dunes it traveled through, according to Open Democracy. ESG issues, which include environmental, social, and governance concerns, are influencing future developments across industries. Sports competitions are not an exception. The Tokyo Olympics are

emphasizing the use of recyclable and recyclable materials in the historic return of this year's sporting events that we have all been waiting for. Player beds made of materials like cardboard, plastic-recycled podiums, and electronics-recycled medals are some examples.

These innovations should undoubtedly be supported and followed. However, in the grand scheme of things, it is not sufficient to merely make up for the significant negative effects that sporting events have on the environment and society. The social impact of sports is enormous. It works when an organization decides to make a change. This has been exemplified by the football association by partnering with organizations such as Show Racism The Red Card and Kick It Out, football has shown its commitment to racial equality for over a decade. So why can't we do the same for sustainability?

Examining sporting activities and all its stakeholders, including athletes, associations, supporters, and suppliers, in isolation impedes our ability to comprehensively evaluate the situation. The only viable approach is to thoroughly assess the entire supply chain from its inception to its culmination. When it comes to supply chain and sustainability issues, there is a noticeable lack of awareness among the general public, especially compared to industries such as sports and fast fashion. Consequently, it is now of paramount importance for sports leaders and organizations to take action, address these concerns, and transform their supply chains to actively pursue sustainability and fulfill their environmental, social, and governance (ESG) objectives.

This goes above and beyond the distinct need to cease climate change and support the UN fulfill the Sustainable Development Goals. These days, sponsorship involves more than just athletes, leagues, and shows. Issues such as sustainability and diversity are becoming increasingly prominent.

We prefer not to associate with groups that have a reputation for being unreliable in addressing issues such as diversity, inequality, and climate change. This includes both brands and their fans who do not align with our values. Sports brands that do not prioritize environmental, social, and governance (ESG) factors may still achieve some level of success. However, it is crucial to recognize that climate change poses an urgent and time-sensitive threat to our society (Melillo, Richmond & Yohe, 2014). Its impact jeopardizes the lives and livelihoods of people worldwide, necessitating immediate action to mitigate our carbon footprint and prevent catastrophic global changes (Thomas et al., 2004).

In December 2015, the international community came together under the Paris Climate Agreement during the 21st Conference of the Parties (COP21). The objective of this agreement is to combat climate change and reduce carbon emissions, with the aim of limiting the global average temperature increase to 2°C. While many countries initially committed to this cause, significant efforts are still required to achieve these targets. It is imperative that governments, businesses, and individuals at all levels use their influence to reduce their environmental impact, including carbon emissions. The sports industry, without exception, must be held accountable for its actions (Sartore-Baldwin, McCullough, Quatman Yates, 2017; Sartore-Baldwin & McCullough, in press).

Although the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) acknowledges that the sports sector as a whole has a relatively low carbon footprint, it plays a vital role in achieving the Paris Agreement's objective of becoming carbon neutral by 2030 (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, 2017). As emphasized by Belson (2010), while the sports industry's energy consumption and waste generation may be relatively small compared to overall national figures, its impact is magnified by the large number of people involved in sports and the potential to deliver socially responsible messages to audiences from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. Recognizing the influential power of the sports sector in promoting environmental consciousness, the United Nations has designated it as one of the most effective agents for encouraging the general public to embrace sustainability. As a result, the UNFCCC has set specific targets for the sports sector to align with the goals of the Paris Climate Agreement. Firstly, the majority of the sports industry is encouraged to endorse a climate manifesto committing signatories to becoming environmentally responsible organizations. Additionally,

individual sporting bodies, including governing bodies, leagues/federations, teams/clubs, athletes, suppliers, and sponsors, are expected to lead by example and adopt environmentally responsible practices. By making such commitments and taking subsequent actions, these entities enhance their credibility and inspire others, such as clubs and spectators, to follow suit (McCullough, Trendafilova & Picariello, 2016).

Moreover, the UNFCCC highlights the importance of utilizing the sports world's influential social platform to encourage sports audiences to adopt more environmentally friendly behaviors. Sports fans have a strong emotional connection to their favorite teams (Fink, Trail, and Anderson, 2002; Sutton, McDonald, Milne, and Chiperman, 1997). This fan identity can be leveraged by sports organizations to promote and influence sustainable actions (McCullough, 2013; McCullough & Kellison, 2016). Initiatives such as "green games" (Casper, Pfahl, and McCullough, 2017), sustainability information campaigns (Trail, 2016; Trail and McCullough, 2017), and other efforts (Mallen and Chard, 2011) have demonstrated positive changes in behavior. However, it is evident that many athletes lack a clear understanding of how to spearhead a robust sustainability movement (McCullough, Pfahl & Nguyen, 2016; Nguyen, Trendafilova & Pfahl, 2014). Therefore, it is crucial to rely on credible and up-to-date sources of information, including best practices and academic research from industry associations such as the Green Sports League, BASIS, and the Sports Environment League.

To advance the sustainability movement, it is essential for theoretical and empirical research to converge with practical trends, advancements, and initiatives (Cunningham, 2013). These two domains complement each other and contribute to a comprehensive understanding and promotion of sustainability (McCullough et al., 2016). According to Kates and colleagues (2001), the field of climate change or sustainability science faces numerous uncertainties and limited information, necessitating a combination of scientific research and practical application. These fields frequently intersect and influence each other (Bolin, 1996). Therefore, it is crucial to evaluate how the School of Sport Management is responding to the growing momentum for environmental sustainability within the sports sector while considering the UNFCCC's objectives for the industry.

## WHAT IS THE GREEN MOVEMENT?

Through energy conservation, waste reduction, and event clean-up at sporting events, teams, supporters, event organizers, and college campuses across the nation are showcasing their dedication to the environment. These actions not only lighten the load on the environment's resources but also have substantial financial advantages.

Reduced waste and the adoption of greener practices can directly benefit businesses. ● Environmental and social responsibility

- Lower operating expenses
- Cut back on disposal and waste costs
- Creation and expansion of markets for green goods and services
- Enhance worker safety with eco-friendly products

How does sustainable materials management fit into the green movement? One of the biggest consumers of resources, energy, and water are sports fields. These venues' distinctive surroundings offer a special chance to encourage teams and supporters to adopt more environmentally friendly behaviours.

- By changing lighting and air conditioning patterns, facilities can reduce energy consumption and costs.
- Food waste can be reduced and local communities can benefit from sustainable management of food production and donations.
- Many of the materials used in competitions can be recycled and reused, which helps reduce waste going to landfills and provides valuable materials for upcoming products.
- Recycled materials can be used in the construction itself.

Each of these initiatives minimizes the use of materials already in use while using fewer natural resources, thereby

lowering costs for teams and lowering the environmental impact of sporting events.

## SOME STEPS TOWARDS A SUSTAINABLE MOVEMENT

UEFA has already developed an app to assist fans in offsetting the carbon footprint of football matches. Football clubs worldwide are actively working towards reducing emissions and implementing waste recycling initiatives. Several sports are making notable efforts to become more environmentally friendly. For instance, the Tokyo 2020 Green Olympics aimed to be the most environmentally sustainable Games ever held. Under the theme "Be better, together," the Japan 2020 Olympic Organizing Committee prioritized eco-friendly practices. The Athletes Village was constructed using locally sourced wood, and hydrogen fuel cells powered the race vehicles. Renewable energy sources, including on-site solar power, generated electricity, while 99% of the event's waste was recycled. The majority of the water used during the Games, excluding drinking water, came from rainwater or recycled sources.

In Helsinki, Finland, significant strides have been made in sustainability. The country's largest indoor sporting event employs electricity generated solely from horse manure as part of its zero-waste initiatives. The initiative, led by Fortnum Horsepower, collects manure from 4,300 horses across Finland to produce 150 MWh of electricity. Amsterdam's Ajax manager, Johan Cruyff, has found a sustainable solution for replacing the club's 53,000 seats. Many of the old seats are sold as souvenirs or recycled, while the new seats are made entirely from recycled plastic, including 10% recovered from the ocean. Pontedera Stadium in Italy uses plastic recovered from the town's waste to manufacture its seats, contributing to the promotion of a circular economy. Forest Green Rovers, an English second division football club, has been recognized as the world's greenest club by FIFA. Their grounds are powered by solar panels, feature electric vehicle charging stations, employ a water recycling system, utilize electric lawn mowers, maintain an organic pitch, and offer a vegetarian menu for players and fans. They are currently in the process of designing a new stadium made entirely of sustainable local wood.

Even the Super Bowl, the premier championship game of the NFL in the United States, measures success not only by the points scored but also by the amount of food served to fans. U.S. Bank Stadium in Minneapolis employs various sustainable practices, including recycling waste that cannot be recycled into a waste-to-energy plant that generates steam for heating a building downtown. The Volvo Ocean Race, a round-the-world sailing race, is actively tackling the issue of oceanic plastic pollution. One of its yachts collects data on microplastics. In the Indian Premier League, Chinnaswamy cricket stadium in Bangalore, India, implemented a zero waste policy for visitors. Twickenham Stadium, a renowned venue in London, demonstrates its commitment to sustainability by implementing a deposit and refund system for beverage containers sold during games.

Many major international sportswear brands, such as Patagonia, Lily Lotus, Adidas, and The North Face, actively support the sustainability movement. They offer clothing, footwear, and innovative products free from synthetic water repellents like perfluorocarbons (PFCs), using materials such as organic cotton and recycled plastics. Companies like Bluesign and GOTS (Global Organic Textile Standard) guarantee the sustainability of their sportswear, while the Fair Clothing Foundation ensures ethical working conditions for the people involved in producing such clothing.

## BOTTOM LINE: BRINGING SUSTAINABILITY TO LIFE

Focus should be placed on a few important issues, including how sports organisations may start to make major progress on ESG and keep receiving large amounts of revenue through sponsorship deals and business opportunities. A more sustainable future can be achieved by implementing a comprehensive plan that focuses on design and sustainability and developing collaboration models with other sports teams and organisations throughout the supply chain. To further streamline the process, it makes sense to concentrate on the following five crucial components of a successful sustainability strategy: water, waste, carbon, products, and packaging. A little creative

thinking to make the sport more sustainable can focus on jerseys, fan travel, stadium architecture, or other potential areas for development after considering the influence of sports like racism on football.

## CONCLUSION

The sports industry has come a long way, but it still has a long way to go, just like the business world. The sports sector is moving in the right direction, just as adding more women to boards of directors is a positive step but still insufficient to effect genuine and long-lasting change throughout the company. But now it needs to go from taking tiny, gradual measures to turning modest aims into great, audacious actions that encourage genuine change. There is still a long way to go, even though the Tokyo Olympics may be the most environmentally friendly Olympics yet.

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