



“Youth at Risk in the Era of Professional Kabaddi: Doping, Drug Abuse, and the Transformation of National Kabaddi towards Professionalism in Haryana”

By

Mr. Suraj Bhati *

Dr. Jitender Kumar **

*Mr. Suraj Bhati , Research Scholar, Department of Physical Education, Chaudhary Ranbir Singh University, Jind, Haryana State of India

**Dr. Jitender Kumar, Assistant Professor, Department of Physical Education, Chaudhary Ranbir Singh University , Jind, Haryana State of India

1. Introduction

The young generation has always been the centre of the cultural and sporting life of Indian society. The traditional sports were well embedded in the rural life, community formations, and informal physical training systems, e.g., Kabaddi. These sporting activities served not only as a form of sporting exercise, but also as a socialisation, discipline, and group identification. However, over the past decades, Indian sports, and Kabaddi, in particular, underwent a radical change as they started to be commercialised, expanded media presence, and institutional professionalisation.

Haryana is at the head of this change. The state has a high sporting culture with a high percentage of the national and professional Kabaddi players in India. Kabaddi has been redefined as a career choice for the youth with the introduction of professional leagues, corporate sponsorship, and televised competitions. This change has improved visibility and monetary rewards, but has increased the performance pressure, competition, and physical stress of young players.

In the context of such change, the issue of doping and drug abuse among young people is in urgent need of academic consideration. Professionalisation of Kabaddi presents strains, which are comparable to those found in the elite sports of the world, such as the quest for physical excellence, rapid recuperation, and longevity. In this paper, it is presented that youth athletes who are caught between traditional and professional Kabaddi can be even more vulnerable to using substances as a performance enhancement tool as well as a coping tool.

2. Youth Vulnerability: A Theoretical Framework in Professionalising Sports

The youth susceptibility in sport should be conceptualised as a social construction influenced by the institutional, cultural, and economic powers. Sociologically speaking, sport is not a value-free activity; it is indicative of larger power relations, value systems, and social expectations. With the shift of Kabaddi as a recreational and community-based sport to a professionalised system, the experiences of the youth athletes are altered considerably (Bjørndal et al., 2024).

In theory, young athletes are in a halfway position between aspiration and precarity. Professional Kabaddi can give rise to upward movement, fame, and money on the one hand. Conversely, it subjects athletes to volatile careers, risks of injuries, and monitoring their performance. This doublespeak increases the psychological vulnerability, especially of young participants who have a rural and economically marginalised background, and in which sport is a major path to social progress.

Risk behaviour psychological theories imply that the youth have a high likelihood of engaging in harmful practices when the perceived reward is greater than the perceived risk. The benefits of selection, contracts, and recognition could be used in professional settings of Kabaddi at the expense of long-term health issues. Risky behaviours such as supplement use and informal drug use can be normalized in sociologically, peer networks in training camps and academies (Schubring et al., 2025).

In this way, young people are not just vulnerable to the professionalisation of Kabaddi, but it is a structural product created by systems that focus on performance results rather than the comprehensive development of young people.

3. Professionalisation of Kabaddi in Haryana: Structural Transformation

The Haryana re-modelling of Kabaddi is indicative of the general trends in the Indian sport regulatory bodies. Historically, the game was played in akhara (local training ground) and village competitions in which the informal rules and elders of that community controlled it. It was focused on training strength, stamina, and discipline, which were frequently connected with cultural principles of masculinity, honour, and endurance.

Kabaddi has been restructured through the introduction of professional leagues and institutional training systems to be a market-based sport. Professionalisation encompasses official contracts and licensing of

coaches, talent search, and analysis of performances (Clausen et al., 2025). Even though these trends have improved infrastructure and created more awareness among people in the world, it has also commodified the bodies of athletes and have commodified physical performance, making it a viable and measurable commodity.

Professional Kabaddi has been active in the competitive labour market with political and economic support of young players as a resource to be developed, showcased, and replaced. Such an environment can foster over-specific physical optimisation and therefore the performance-enhancing drugs become more attractive. The pressure of winning or losing contracts may as well drive the athletes into encouraging short-term performance at the long-term health costs (Thomas, 2025).

Table 1: Transformation of Kabaddi from Traditional to Professional Sport

Dimension	Traditional Kabaddi	Professional Kabaddi
Organisational Structure	Community-based, informal governance	Institutionalised, league-driven systems
Training Environment	Local akharas and village grounds	Academies, franchises, and professional coaching
Motivation	Physical culture, community pride	Performance, contracts, visibility
Career Security	Limited, non-commercial	High rewards but unstable careers
Ethical Orientation	Collective values and fair play	Performance-oriented, competitive logic

4. Doping in Kabaddi: Emerging Ethical and Performance Pressures

Doping in Kabaddi has not been given the academic or media coverage as provided in international sports events like athletics or cycling. Nevertheless, with the growing professionalism and competitiveness of Kabaddi, the danger of doping cannot be overlooked. The physical aspects of the game of Kabaddi, explosive power, endurance, fast recovery, and injury resistance, provide the grounds under which the performance-enhancing factor becomes attractive.

Doping theoretically can be interpreted as a logical reaction to the pressure of institutions as opposed to personal deviance (Naughton et al., 2025). The young Kabaddi players can view performance-enhancing substances as a means of fulfilling the growing demands that coaches, selectors, and sponsors place on them. The absence of well-developed anti-doping education at the grassroots level still increases this danger.

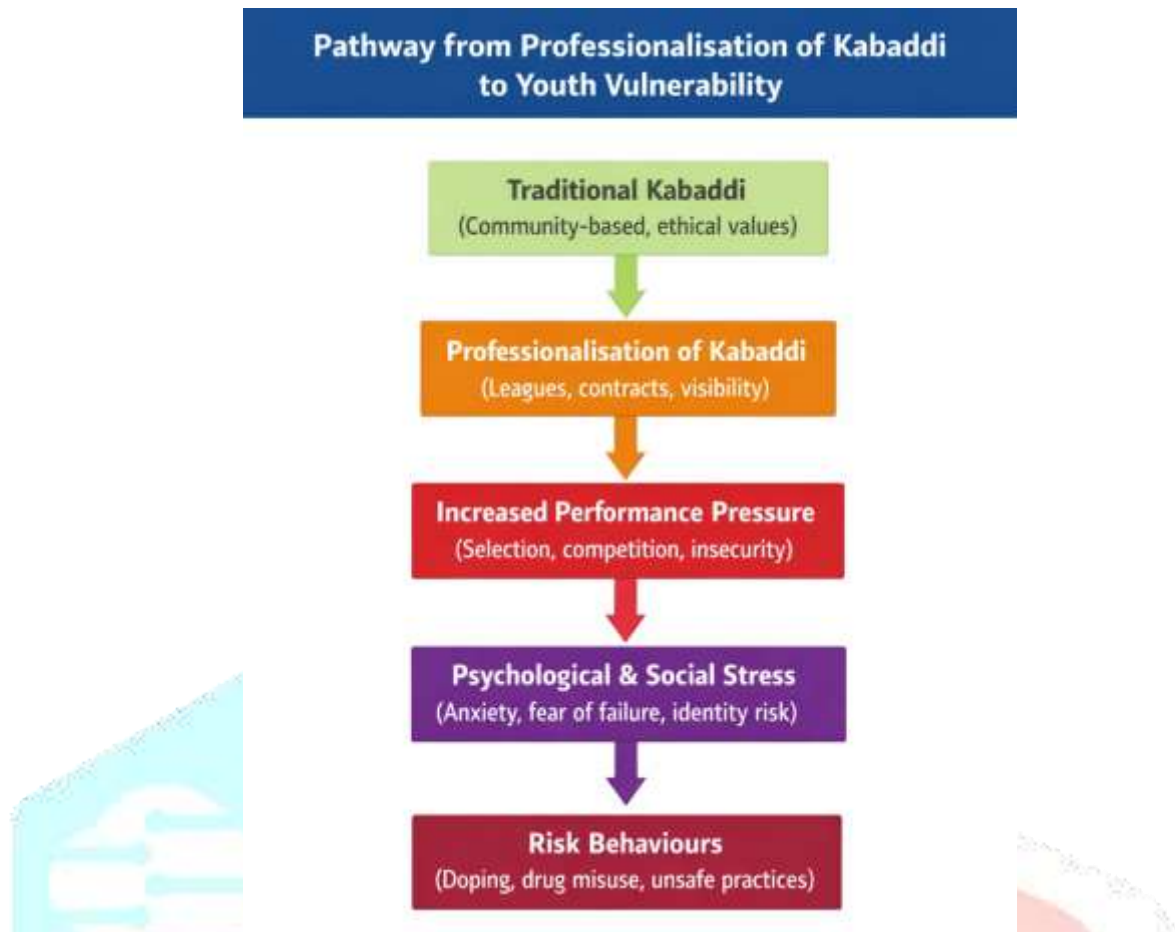


Figure 1: Professionalisation of Kabaddi and Youth Risk Pathway

(Source: Author Himself)

Morally, doping contradicts the principles of Kabaddi as a traditional game that is based on fair and physical play. It also gives unfair playing grounds, a disadvantage to the athlete who practices ethics. According to youth studies, introduction to doping cultures at a young age normalises the unethical culture and corrupts moral development.

Table 2: Youth Vulnerability Factors in Professional Kabaddi

Category	Key Factors	Theoretical Implication
Psychological	Performance anxiety, fear of failure	Increased risk-taking behaviour
Social	Peer influence, family expectations	Normalisation of risky practices
Economic	Dependence on sport for mobility	Pressure to sustain performance
Institutional	Limited welfare oversight	Weak prevention mechanisms
Cultural	Masculinity and toughness norms	Silence around health and ethics

5. Drug Abuse among Youth Athletes: Coping, Stress, and Identity

The issues of drug abuse in youth athletes should be seen in a broader perspective than just the illicit substances. It encompasses the abuse of analgesics, stimulants, and recovery drugs that are usually taken to deal with physical pains, emotional stress, and performance anxiety (Brewer and Chatterton, 2024). In professional Kabaddi, injuries are common, and the urge to play back may result in addiction to the drug. In theory, identity formation is vital to the vulnerability of youth athletes. Kabaddi is not only a sport, but it is a fundamental part of identity to many young players in Haryana. An identity crisis may be brought about by failure, injury, or non-selection and result in psychological distress. The drugs can be taken as coping mechanisms to handle disappointment, fear, or uncertainty.

Risk is further aggravated socially, as there is a silence around mental health in masculine sporting cultures (Vuong et al., 2026).

6. Health Consequences in the Context of Professional Kabaddi

The risk of chronic injuries, hormonal disruptions, and mental disorders is the chronic effects of the performance-enhancing substances taken over a long period. These are dangers to young athletes that are overrated when they possess bodies that are still developing.

Theoretically, the issue of athletic body exploitation is applicable. The sports systems in professional sports usually focus on optimum performance within brief career cycles without caring about the health of the athletes after retirement (Schmid et al., 2024). The agrarian origins of many of the players in Haryana make them more vulnerable to poor access to post-retirement healthcare.

Mental well-being is another result of drug abuse, which leads to anxiety, depression, and addiction. Such health-related impacts interfere with sporting careers, as well as education, family, and social integration, which supports the loops of marginalisation.

7. Ethical and Social Implications of Professionalised Kabaddi

The ethical aspect of doping and drug abuse in Kabaddi has to be considered in the context of the greater conversion of the sport from a community-based activity to a professionalised and market-driven sport. Professionalisation brings competition and the commercial logic in areas where collective values, discipline, and moral training were the ruling classes. Since success is getting more and more personalised, there is an unfair distribution of the responsibility of performance outcomes, whereby young athletes continually bear the brunt. Such failure, injury, or non-selection is usually internalised as being a personal inadequacy as opposed to being a structural pressure in the systems of professional sport. Such an atmosphere creates susceptibility to fraudulent activities, such as doping and substance abuse, because athletes are motivated to remain pertinent and safe.

Professionalisation, socially, changes the manner in which youth athletes are related to families and communities (Howard et al., 2025). The families of Haryana usually spend a lot of emotional and economic capital in sporting careers, and Kabaddi is seen as one of the ways to achieve social mobility and fame. Although such support can be empowering, it can also create an increase in expectation, which will see young athletes striving to succeed at all costs. These societies, which used to value involvement, physical culture, and community pride, may begin to value more medals, contracts, and publicity, furthering outcome-focused stressors.

This development ends up posing significant concerns for the future of native sports such as Kabaddi, which are of an ethical nature. With such similarity between professional Kabaddi and the instances of an ethical crisis in the world elite sports, where the cases of exploitation, the obsession with performance, and myopia towards the health habits are common, the latter is likely to lose both the cultural and moral values. The central point of ethical integrity is therefore what will keep Kabaddi identity intact amid a change to professionalism.

8. Legal and Policy Frameworks: Gaps in Youth Protection

Laws and policies that exist in India, as far as doping and drug abuse are concerned, are largely formed according to elite and international sport contexts. Theoretically speaking, in terms of governance, it introduces an absence of correspondence between the policy desire and the actual experiences of youth athletes in the professionalisation of domestic sports such as Kabaddi. The effective regulatory control does not usually apply to the grassroots and semi-professional athletes, hence limiting their access to anti-doping education and medical monitoring, as well as psychological care. The policies that, at least nationally, may appear comprehensive, may, therefore, not contribute to protecting the poorest groups (Pal, 2025).

The unchecked proliferation of private training schools, as well as the competitive leagues in the state, is what has not been complemented by a sustained line of regulation in Haryana. The variation of the standards of coaching, medical care, and ethics offers unequal terms within which young athletes have to bargain for professional demands. In such environments where institutional responsibility is absent, misinformation, unsafe behaviour, and normalisation of substance use are highly likely.

The policy frameworks should thus be shifted in a shift away from compliance and punishment to the safeguarding of youth and their wellness. Anti-doping education, mental health services, and ethical training should be integrated into sports institutions in the case of sustainable professionalisation. Governance-wise, there can be synergistic involvement of sports leadership, schools, medical practitioners, and government agencies so that the professional Kabaddi grows in an environment that puts the well-being of the youth in the front seat to the competitiveness.

9. Role of Education, Family, and Sporting Institutions

Education is at the centre of the mediation of youth vulnerability in the professionalisation of Kabaddi. Holistic athlete development theoretical models are concerned with the unity of physical training with academic study, moral enlightenment, and life-skills training. In Haryana, when it comes to early talent identification and specialisation in Kabaddi, formal education is always left behind. Athletes that are young could also focus their strategies on rigorous training regimes at the expense of education, making their reliance on sports achievement the main source of social mobility. Such reliance on sport increases their vulnerability, especially when performance deteriorates as a result of injury, non-selection, and career instability (Walton et al., 2024).

Families play a dual role in this process which is complicated. On the one hand, they take care of young athletes emotionally, invest in them, and encourage them. On the other hand, the pressure on the upper mobility through professional Kabaddi might be applied unwillingly due to high expectations of the upper mobility. In most cases, sporting success is perceived by families as an escape from economic precarity, and this could be one of the reasons for the normalisation of excessive training, risk-taking, or silence, in relation to health. It is therefore significant that the families be educated on ethical sport, long-term impact on health, and balanced development.

Academies, federations, and professional clubs of sporting institutions should take more responsibility for the welfare of athletes. Going beyond performance indicators, the institutions are to incorporate ethical mentoring, psychological counselling, and educational support in the training frameworks.

10. Media, Technology, and the Construction of Sporting Aspirations

The media and digital technology have a decisive role in forming the youth's ambitions in professional Kabaddi. In televised leagues, social media postings, and promotional stories tend to idealize physical superiority, winning, and celebrity status. Theoretically speaking, recurrent exposure to idealised sports images may distort the self-image of young athletes and form unrealistic expectations of success, body image, and career paths. In the case of those who want to become players of Kabaddi in Haryana, what the media is saying might be driving them into thinking that, in order to be successful, all they need is to be physically superior, and hence, they are assured of success (Pisaniello et al., 2025).

Although media coverage has led to a positive impact on the popularity and legitimacy of Kabaddi as a professional sport, it also hides the danger of elite sports. Issues of injury, mental health pressure, professional confusion, and post-retirement anxiety are barely brought up. The online media also intensifies the surveillance and competition practices because young athletes are continuously compared to their colleagues and professionals. This environment brings about anxiety, poor performance, and pressure that expose individuals to bad habits, including drug use. Through fostering critical thinking in relation to media

content, the young people can be empowered to pursue professional goals without having to undermine their mental health or moral integrity.

11. Prevention and Ethical Professionalisation Strategies

Professional Kabaddi must use systemic and preventive interventions to prevent doping and drug abuse instead of focusing too much on individual responsibility. Theoretical explanations of youth risk prevention emphasize the relevance of education at an early age, supportive institutional settings, and value-based leadership. At the professionalising Kabaddi set-ups, prevention should be done at the grassroots, whereby the ethical standards, awareness of health, and coping mechanisms are developed in conjunction with the physical training (Hollabaugh et al., 2024).

Ethical professionalisation entails instilling ethics of fair play, protection of health, and human dignity in the institutional structure of Kabaddi. Openness in selecting candidates, competent medical care, and the availability of anti-doping education are the key elements of this strategy. Further, since the career life of an athlete is brief, the institutions should offer post-career guidance, life-long learning, and skills training to mitigate future uncertainty.



Figure 2: Ethical Professionalisation Framework for Youth Protection in Kabaddi

Rehabilitation and counselling services ought to be free of stigmas, accessible, and confidential. The athletic young people should not feel condemned to seek assistance for themselves when having physical or even psychological problems. With the professional development consistent with ethical responsibility

and welfare-governance, Kabaddi can become a modern sport without repeating the negative trends that are being followed in sporting activities that are highly commercialised across the world.

Table 3: Ethical Professionalisation Strategies for Kabaddi

Domain	Strategic Focus	Intended Outcome
Education	Ethics, anti-doping awareness	Informed decision-making
Governance	Transparent selection and monitoring	Reduced unethical practices
Health Support	Counselling and medical supervision	Improved physical and mental well-being
Family Engagement	Awareness of long-term risks	Balanced expectations
Post-Career Planning	Skill development and education	Reduced dependency on sport

12. Conclusion

The Haryana case of national Kabaddi being converted into professionalism has been accompanied by opportunities as well as increasing threats to the youth sportsmen. On the one hand, the degree of visibility, the legitimacy, and economic possibilities of the sport have been raised and made accessible through the influence of professionalisation, and have offered new opportunities to social mobility and recognition. On the other hand, it has increased performance pressures, competition, and uncertainties that have resulted in the use of doping and drug abuse by young players.

In this paper, the vulnerability of the youth to professional Kabaddi structural, cultural, and institutional processes has been hypothetically related. Arguing that the issue of doping and drug abuse cannot be regarded as an individual and one-sided issue, it has been argued that it can be a systemic outcome of performance-oriented sport cultures that are not oriented towards overall development but only towards achievements. As it is, professionalisation of Kabaddi will share the same threats of reproducing the moral, physical, and administrative challenges experienced in the highly commercialised international sports.

To address these problems, it is necessary to unite efforts in education, health, policy, media, and sports governance. To protect the future of Kabaddi, it needs to be led ethically, have policies that are youth-oriented, and promote the culture and professionalisation of the sport. In cases where health protection, social responsibility, and ethical values are considered as its professional growth, Kabaddi can still be a source of pride, empowerment, and sustainable development to the young generation in Haryana.

References

1. Bjørndal, C.T., Hausken-Sutter, S., Møller, M., Myklebust, G. and Grindem, H., 2024. Exploring the interplay of interpersonal and contextual dynamics in youth sports injuries: a comprehensive narrative review. *BMJ Open Sport & Exercise Medicine*, 10(3). <https://bmjopenem.bmj.com/content/10/3/e001964>
2. Brewer, B.W. and Chatterton, H.A., 2024. Athletic identity and sport injury processes and outcomes in young athletes: A supplemental narrative review. *Journal of Functional Morphology and Kinesiology*, 9(4), p.191. <https://doi.org/10.3390/jfmk9040191>
3. Clausen, J., Bayle, E., Nagel, S., and Lang, G., 2025. Understanding sport federation professionalization: evolution, challenges, and opportunities. *Sport Management in Europe*, pp.43-59. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781035333141.00015>
4. Hollabaugh, W.L., Jeckell, A.S., and Diamond, A.B., 2024. Name, image, and likeness and the health of the young athlete: a call to action for sports medicine providers and the athletic healthcare network. *Sports Health*, 16(2), pp.209-212. <https://doi.org/10.1177/19417381231212645>
5. Howard, D., Jeftic, I., Goods, P., Jackson, B., Fox-Harding, C., and Rosenberg, M., 2025. Aspiring athletes managing sport, education, social, and family life: A scoping review. *Journal of science and medicine in sport*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsams.2025.09.015>
6. Naughton, M., Salmon, P.M., Kerherve, H.A., and McLean, S., 2025. Applying a systems thinking lens to anti-doping: A systematic review identifying the contributory factors to doping in sport. *Journal of Sports Sciences*, 43(1), pp.8-22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02640414.2024.2306056>
7. Pal, A., 2025. A Review of Doping in Sports: India and the World. *Sports Law, Policy & Diplomacy Journal*, 3(1), pp.71-88. <https://doi.org/10.30925/slpdj.3.1.5>
8. Pisaniello, A., Figus, A., Digennaro, S., and Spulber, D., 2025. The impact of digital technologies on youth sports dropout: challenges and opportunities for educational environments. *Giornale italiano di educazione alla salute, sport e didattica inclusiva*, 9(1). <https://doi.org/10.32043/gsd.v9i1.1393>
9. Schmid, M.J., Küttel, A., Charbonnet, B., Rivero, T., Schmid, J., Ronkainen, N. and Conzelmann, A., 2024, Juli. A Scoping Review on the Theoretical and Methodological Advances in the Study of Retirement From Elite Sport. In the *European Congress of Sport and Exercise Psychology*. <https://portal.findresearcher.sdu.dk/en/publications/a-scoping-review-on-the-theoretical-and-methodological-advances-i/>
10. Schubring, A., Bergentoft, H., Caspers, A., Jaczina, K., Lundvall, S., Jacobsson, J., Barker-Rucht, N., Gojanovic, B., Lindsey, I., Loland, S., and Pill, S., 2025. Sustainable elite youth sports: a systematic scoping review of the social dimensions. *Sustainable development*, 33(5), pp.7575-7590. <https://doi.org/10.1002/sd.3526>

11. Thomas, J., 2025. Nursing interventions for stress and burnout among professional athletes: A narrative review. *Journal of Sports and Rehabilitation Sciences*, 3(1), pp.20-25.
<https://doi.org/10.32598/JSRS.2505.1101>
12. Vuong, A.T., Opie, J.E., Kuntsche, S., Hameed, M., Khalil, H., Pearce, N., Martindale, R., Cuff, R., Marchionda, S., Davidson, S. and Gor, D., 2026. Young people with caring responsibilities for persons with mental illness or substance use concerns: a rapid systematic review of best practice evidence for identification, engagement, support, and referral. *Advances in Mental Health*, pp.1-35.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/18387357.2025.2609689>
13. Walton, C.C., Purcell, R., Henderson, J.L., Kim, J., Kerr, G., Frost, J., Gwyther, K., Pilkington, V., Rice, S., and Tamminen, K.A., 2024. Mental health among elite youth athletes: a narrative overview to advance research and practice. *Sports Health*, 16(2), pp.166-176.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/19417381231219230>

