

Role of the Pro Kabaddi League in Accelerating Professionalism of Kabaddi in Haryana

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I. INTRODUCTION

In modern societies, sport has continued to develop more as a recreation and community-based pastime into a proficient professional sphere influenced by the market, institutional controls, and media internalization. Known as the professionalisation of sport, this shift has changed not only the career of the athlete, but also the cultural and economic importance of the sporting practices. Although this has been widely researched in terms of sporting activities that dominate globally, there has not been much academic focus on the professionalisation of indigenous and traditional sports, especially in region-specific contexts. Kabaddi is one of the most outstanding examples of the indigenous Indian sport that is rooted in the rural culture, physical traditions, and regional identities. Over the decades, kabaddi operated to a large extent in an amateur system, sponsored by state and local governments, which provided athletes with no more than a sense of economic safety and professional stability. Specifically, Haryana has become a huge talent pool in kabaddi with numerous elite players produced through its powerful culture of akhara, sports hostels, and training systems sponsored by the state. Although this talented pool existed, there was limited potential for any long-term professional activity before a formal professional league came into being.

The start of the Pro Kabaddi League PKL was a turning point in the history of kabaddi in India. PKL restructured kabaddi into a commercially feasible, nationally prominent sport through introducing a franchise-based league system, player auctions, corporate sponsorship, and mass media coverage. The

change was not only transforming the organisational and economic form of kabaddi but also changing the societal views on the validity of kabaddi as a professional career, especially in states like Haryana. It is against this background that the current study aims to discuss how the Pro Kabaddi League has enhanced the process of professionalisation of kabaddi in Haryana. Taking a qualitative approach of a Systematic Literature Review, the paper will synthesise available literature to examine institutional, economic, cultural, and socio-regional aspects of professionalisation. The study, concentrating on a particular regional ecosystem, can contribute to the general discussions concerning sport professionalisation and predict the special processes of indigenous sport in modern India.

II. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: PROFESSIONALISM IN SPORT

This concept of professionalism in sport is generally viewed as the act of turning sporting activity not only into an informal, community-based sporting activity but also into a sporting activity that is highly organized, controlled, and economically viable occupation (Aljassar et al., 2023). The process of transformation goes beyond the monetary compensation of the sportspeople towards money to the setting up of institutional structures, career pathways, as well as the socio-cultural legitimacy. Based on sociological and sports management books, professionalism can best be understood as a multidimensional process, and not an economic shift. This paper uses a multi-faceted approach, which incorporates economic, institutional, athletic, cultural,

and media-commercial aspects to examine professionalism in sport.

The central point of this system is economic professionalism that is defined as the possibility of sport to offer athletes and other stakeholders the opportunity of stable and legitimate income. That comprises player contracts, prize money, sponsorship, endorsements, and performance incentives. Economic security is essential because it helps athletes to make sport a full-time job and not an additional one. In the case of classic sports, the economic professionalisation can be the key driver to more extensive systemic change.

Professional sport is supported at the structural level by institutional professionalism. It involves the establishment of structured leagues, uniform regulations, open-minded systems of governance, and formal regulatory agencies (Seow et al., 2020). Institutionalisation guarantees predictability, accountability, and legitimacy, which are necessary in attracting investment, media concern, and public confidence. In a country without strong institutions, economic and athletic progress is splintered and unsustainable.

Athletic professionalism is the third dimension, which corresponds to the change of training and performance practices. It includes the implementation of scientific coaching approaches, sports medicine, nutrition, injury management, performance analytics, and training year-round. Professionalism in sports not only improves the competition level but also increases the length of the professional career and the well-being of the athletes, which makes the sport a viable occupation.

Cultural professionalism is the expanded social recognition of sport as a worthy career of ambition. Sport has always been considered as leisure in most traditional societies. Cultural legitimacy is achieved when there is the acquisition of social status, family backing, and institutional acknowledgment by the athletes to similar conventional professions. The dimension is more so in indigenous and rural sports (Aljassar et al., 2023).

Lastly, media and commercial professionalism serve as an empowering force, which links sport to the rest of the audiences and markets. Broadcasting, online, branding, merchandising, and fan interaction increase exposure and bring about commercial value. Media representation not only drives revenue but also

reinvents stories concerning sport, identity, and professionalism (Seow et al., 2020).

These interdependent dimensions taken together offer a conceptual framework in totality to discuss the transformation of traditional sports into professional structures like kabaddi and hence become eligible under the qualitative and systematic analysis.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The research design that will be adopted in this study is a qualitative Systematic Literature Review (SLR) because the primary research aims to investigate the extent to which the Pro Kabaddi League has contributed to the rapid professionalisation of kabaddi in Haryana. The qualitative SLR will be particularly appropriate to this study because it provides the possibility to conduct the synthesis of already existing scholarly knowledge in a structured, transparent, and reproducible manner and conduct a deep interpretation of social, institutional, and cultural processes (Mohamed Shaffril et al., 2021). The qualitative SLR method gives priority to conceptual integration, thematic interpretation, and contextual understanding, unlike the quantitative meta-analyses, which focus on statistical aggregation. This also conforms to the aims of the current research, which attempts to investigate professionalism as a multi-dimensional and social feature instead of an economic one.

The qualitative SLR method is also quite suitable, considering the limited representation of large-scale empirical data on indigenous sports like kabaddi. The current research in this field is widely spread across various fields such as sports sociology, management studies, cultural studies, and policy research. Through a structured literature review and synthesis of this piecemeal literature, the research paper is expected to produce a logical, analytical narrative that will describe the way in which professionalisation has occurred in the regional setting of Haryana. Also, the SLR design has guaranteed regulatory rigour through adherence to predetermined inclusion criteria, methodical search plans, and clear analysis processes, which have improved the credibility and scholarly strength of the results.

3.2 Data Sources

In order to guarantee the thoroughness of the coverage of the topical literature, data were gathered through various academic databases that were proven to be the most powerful representatives of the sports studies, social sciences, and management research (Cabrera and Cabrera, 2023). These were Web of Science, Google Scholar, JSTOR, and reliable internet sources. The multiple databases reduced the chances of the occurrence of a publication bias and increased the chances of including interdisciplinary views on kabaddi, professionalism, and sports leagues. Search strings were used to include a combination of keywords to narrow down results, including kabaddi, professionalisation of sport, indigenous sports, sports leagues in India, Haryana sports development, and Pro Kabaddi League, with Boolean operators.

Besides peer-reviewed academic literature, grey literature has also been included in the study to put the scholarly findings in the context of the real-world policy and institutional frameworks. It covered reports and documents issued by sports federations, government departments, and organisers of PKL. These sources were helpful in offering information about the structure of governance, development programs with regard to athletes, and policy interventions that have not been fully represented in the academic journals. These documents added to the contextual validity of the study and enabled a more complicated perception of the process of professionalisation beyond discussions that were only theoretical.

3.3 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The inclusion and exclusion criteria were clear in advance before the search of the literature in order to be transparent and consistent in the review process. The studies were identified in case they were peer-reviewed and published between 2010 and 2025, as this is the time interval that encompasses the pre- and post-emergence phases of the Pro Kabaddi League. This time interval allowed the study to follow the changes in discourse and practice around the process of professionalisation of kabaddi with time. What was found to be relevant to the study was literature on kabaddi, indigenous or traditional sports, professional sports leagues, and the wider notion of professionalism in sport, as long as it covered the Indian context or provided transferable information

that could be applicable to the sport ecosystem in Haryana.

On the other hand, non-academic opinion papers, commentaries in the media, and blog articles were not considered since they lacked methodological rigour and scholarly reliability. Research that did not explicitly define their research design, the source of data, or the way they analyzed the data was also eliminated as a way of preserving academic integrity (Zhaksylyk et al., 2023). Also, the literature that was based on unrelated sports settings or regions that could not be conceptually relevant to kabaddi or the professionalisation of indigenous sports was excluded. These criteria helped to be sure that the final corpus of literature was not only methodologically correct, but it was also directly related to the aims of the study.

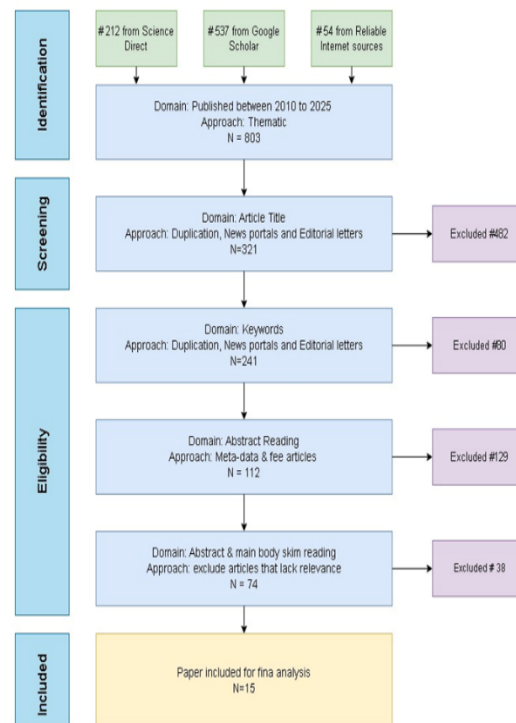


Figure 1: The flow diagram for the database search of publications for systematic reviews (Source: Author, 2026)

3.4 Data Analysis

A qualitative thematic analysis method was used in analysing the selected literature. The reason why this method was selected is that it is appropriate for the identification, analysis, and interpretation of recurring patterns in textual data. The studies were read

thoroughly and thoroughly coded to obtain main concepts, arguments, and findings concerning sport professionalism. The first open coding gave rise to a wide diversity of categories that were narrowed into higher-order themes through an iterative process of comparison and synthesis.

The last thematic construct consisted of a couple of main dimensions of professionalism, such as institutional governance, economic opportunities of athletes, media and commercial visibility, athletic development and welfare, as well as the integration of the grassroots. They did not consider these themes as independent variables, but in terms of how they relate and influence the professionalisation of kabaddi in Haryana. With the help of a reflexive and interpretive analytical perspective, the research transcended the descriptive summarisation of kabaddi to provide critical statements of how the Pro Kabaddi League has transformed the professional landscape of kabaddi. This strategy provided depth of the analysis without losing ground in the evidence that has been reviewed systematically, thus enhancing the validity of the overall study as well as its contribution to the literature in the field of sports research.

Table 1: Summary of Systematic Literature Review Methodology

Methodological Component	Description
Research Approach	Qualitative Systematic Literature Review (SLR)
Time Frame	Studies published between 2010 and 2025
Databases Consulted	Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, JSTOR, SPORTDiscus
Additional Sources	Policy documents, federation reports, league publications
Inclusion Criteria	Peer-reviewed studies on kabaddi, indigenous sports, sports leagues, and professionalism with relevance to India or Haryana
Exclusion Criteria	Non-academic sources, methodologically weak studies, and irrelevant sports contexts
Analytical Technique	Thematic analysis through iterative coding and synthesis
Key Analytical Themes	Governance, economic impact, athlete welfare, media visibility, grassroots development

IV. LITERATURE REVIEW

4.1 Professionalization of Sport: Global Perspectives

Professionalisation in sport has been greatly discussed according to institutional, economic, and governance standards. The consensus among scholars is that contemporary sport is no longer an exercise of voluntary, amateur activities, but rather intricate and market-driven systems. Nonetheless, this transition has been a subject of great controversy concerning its nature, motivating factors, and effects. Professionalisation. In their conceptualisation, Stieger, Nagel, and Lang (2025) consider professionalisation as a process of integrated governance where professionalism is not limited to commercial success. In their analysis, professionalisation comes up via the harmonisation of governance structures, accountability, and organisational capacity, especially in the context of sports organisations that have been faced with mounting commercial demands. They state in their work that professionalism is a systemic change and not adding paid contracts or sponsorship.

Robertson et al. (2021), relying on the institutional theory, anticipate the influence of outside forces that encompass the media, sponsors, governments, and global sport conventions in the development of professional sport systems. Their scoping review indicates that sport organisations tend to professionalise in response to market trends, and assume market-oriented practices to remain legitimate but not as integrated in an internal strategy. This view of governance-based argument of Stieger et al. (2025) will make it more complicated as a possible uneven and symbolic professionalisation, which is based on the necessity to adapt to the institutional prevailing logics instead of enhancing athlete welfare or organisational performance.

Giving another perspective, Wang et al. (2025) in their systematic review on women's football note that the effects of professionalisation are strongly determined by the contextual and structural factors, such as the support of the national policies, the cultural acceptance of this sport, as well as the media visibility. Despite their investigation into the field of female football, the authors claim that the use of professional leagues is not a sufficient intervention to ensure the sustainability of professionalism unless they are accompanied by more extensive interventions on the

ecosystem level. This observation negates market-based assumptions in that the concept of professionalisation can re-create disparities in the event that structural support systems are not yet well-developed.

Collectively, these studies demonstrate one of the primary contradictions in the discourse of global professionalisation: although the promotion of governance reforms and business growth is brought forward as indicators of professionalism, it is the coherence and socio-cultural alignment within the institutions that matter. This discussion offers an important analytical base to study kabaddi, the sport that is moving towards becoming professional in an environment that has significantly different socio-economic and cultural conditions.

4.2 Professionalization of Indigenous and Traditional Sports

The professionalisation of indigenous and traditional sports has its own unique challenges to mainstream global sports. According to McSweeney et al. (2021), the professionalisation within the context of this type of situation is frequently associated with the reformulation of values such that the community-based and developmental goals will be pitted against the occupational and market-driven logic. As they have shown in their analysis of the sport-for-development sector, professionalisation might entail greater accountability and efficiency, but it also can be associated with the problem of dilution of the cultural and ethical core of traditional sport practices.

The same tension is reflected, but in a different disciplinary approach, by Hull et al. (2025), who investigate the reconsideration of the traditional and modern professional values. Even though the given study is located in the sphere of medicine, and not sport, the theoretical conclusions can be transferred. As it is warned by Hull et al. (2025), the primary focus on efficiency and market-based professionalisation may undermine such intrinsic values as community trust, cultural identity, and moral commitment. Transferred to the case of indigenous sports, it implies that professionalisation can lead to the creation of legitimacy at the market level and, at the same time, disrupt the traditional system of meanings.

On the other hand, a more positive perspective is offered by Rich, Spaaij, and Misener (2021), who focus on the influence of community embeddedness in

the development of other ways of professionalisation. They claim that sport organisations grounded in local societies are capable of bargaining professionalisation without entirely losing their cultural genuineness. It is an opinion that contradicts the issue expressed by McSweeney et al. (2021) that professionalisation inevitably causes values to be eroded, and that the results of governance models and stakeholder involvement are important.

The discussion through this research points out that it is not that professionalisation of indigenous sports is good or bad per se. Instead, it is a negotiable process influenced by power struggles, cultural politics, and institutional patterns. The literature is especially applicable in the case of kabaddi, which is in an ambivalent status of being both a cultural activity and a professional one.

4.3 Evolution of Kabaddi in India

The professionalisation of kabaddi cannot be understood without first putting it in the context of its history in India. Sen (2015) offers a background story of Indian sports history, making kabaddi an activity of rural and community life, which is closely connected with physical culture, masculinity, and regional identity. Sen (2015) explains that the initial stage of kabaddi development was marked with informal tournaments, lack of institutional regulation, and a high level of state patronage, as opposed to national organization. It is important to point out here that the sporting legitimacy of kabaddi existed long before the game was commercialised and was based on social practice and not business interest.

Based on this historical context, Nagel et al. (2015) present a multi-level model of analysing the professionalisation of sport federations that would allow elucidating why the national organisation of kabaddi was decades behind. Their model indicates that in the absence of external pressure, resource dependency, or institutional incentive, federations tend to oppose professional reform. In the case of kabaddi, this is the reason why the amateur governance structures retained their own positions even as more people participated in the sport and as it became exposed internationally.

Shukla (2020) makes this story more complex when emphasising the internationalisation of kabaddi at the very beginning, especially joining the Asian Games. Shukla contends that global recognition failed to

convert into local professionalisation because of the poor commercial infrastructure and disintegrated governance. This is unlike the assumption that international exposure inherently speeds up the development of the profession, but rather it is institutional preparedness that gets the professional transitioning.

Combined, such pieces of evidence indicate that the development of kabaddi in India was characterized by a long institutional lag, with cultural legitimacy and global presence, but a lack of professional organization. This stalemate preconditioned the entry of outside force such as a business league, that could initiate change.

4.4 Emergence of the Pro Kabaddi League

The development of the Pro Kabaddi League (PKL) can be seen as a break with the history of kabaddi. According to Sandip, Ghosh, and Sarma (2018), the franchise-based model of PKL brought such structural characteristics to kabaddi as the player auction, specified seasons, standardised gameplay, and promotion by broadcasters. They present PKL as an act of conscious imitation of the commercial logic of the Indian Premier League (IPL) and moulding it to the conventional sport.

Yet, Mishra, Sen, and Pal (2022) put structural design in the background and instead examine how athletes and leagues use social media to pursue public causes, symbolically and politically. According to their study, PKL athletes are not simply the beneficiaries of commercialisation but the participants in the process of creating the discourse of publicity and professional identity. This disputes the economic interpretation by Sandip et al. (2018) since the agency of the athlete is foresighted in professional systems.

Trivedi, Soni, and Kishore (2020) give empirical evidence regarding the media-focused approach of PKL, stating that digital communication and social media interaction played a significant role in the quick popularisation of the league. They explain that the success of PKL cannot be attributed to its league model, but the integration of media strategically changed kabaddi into a product to be consumed in the form of entertainment. This upholds the institutional argument of Robertson et al. (2021) that legitimacy in contemporary sport is becoming mediated through visibility and audience interaction.

However, there are also limitations when it is compared to IPL. In contrast to cricket, kabaddi does not have a well-established global market, so much of the sustainability of PKL is based on the local ecosystems. In PKL-based literature, it is frequently under-investigated, which points to the necessity to conduct region-specific analyses.

4.5 Regional Sports Ecosystems and Haryana

Haryana has a unique status in the sporting arena of India, and it has often been termed as a hub of talent in the contact sports. Oza (2018) critically examines the socio-cultural life of rural Haryana and shows how the structures of caste, gender norms, and neoliberal state policies intersect in a way that determines athletic participation. Haryana's sporting success, according to her work, cannot be explained as a product of infrastructure and policy, but has to be interpreted in larger social structures and practices of culture, especially the tradition of the akhara.

Pal (2026), conversely, uses a descriptive policy-oriented approach, which emphasizes the issue of state efforts, including sport hostels, incentive programs, and institutional assistance. Although Pal introduces the sports culture in Haryana as an enabling ecosystem, the analysis is not critical of the social inequalities recognized by Oza (2018). Such a divergence shows a gap between policy discourses of success and sociological accounts of elimination.

Dhanjal (2025) gives it an empirical angle, whereby he analyses the anthropometric and physiological characteristics of Indian kabaddi players. His results contribute indirectly to the argument, having shown that its training environments generate athletes who have competitive physical characteristics. Nevertheless, these studies frequently do not connect with the livelihood security, governance, and long-term career sustainability debate.

The literature, therefore, feeds the picture of Haryana as an opportunity and contradiction- whereby there are good talent pipelines but mixed professional output.

4.6 Research Gaps Identified

In the literature that has been reviewed, there are three glaring gaps. One, it has a skewed concern on viewership, media strategy, and revenue generation, especially in research on PKL; little consideration has been given to the long-term livelihoods of athletes. Second, the region-specific studies of

professionalisation, in particular, with an emphasis on such a state as Haryana, are not numerous, yet they are at the core of producing talents. Last but not least, conceptual frameworks of professionalisation have been suitably advanced throughout the world; yet little qualitative synthesis can be found analyzing the frameworks in the context of indigenous sports.

The current study fills these gaps and is thus a systematic and region-based qualitative review that seeks to observe professionalisation as not only commercial success, but a transformation of many dimensions that include: athletes, institutions, and local sporting cultures.

V. DISCUSSION

This discussion summarises the results of the systematic literature review by critically evaluating the influences of the Pro Kabaddi League (PKL) as a propelling factor to professionalism with special reference to the regional setting of Haryana. Based on international conceptions of the professionalisation of sport and writing on indigenous sport, the analysis presented in this section examines the effects of PKL not just as a commercial success narrative of its effects but as a multidimensional change in institutions, athletes, culture, and local ecosystems. The discussion is structured based on critical dimensions of professionalism which were identified in the conceptual framework basing on arguments developed in the literature review.

5.1 Pro Kabaddi League as a Catalyst for Professionalism

5.1.1 Institutional and Governance Transformation

The most important contribution of PKL, as can be seen in the literature, is that it helped in formalising the institutional structure of kabaddi. However, before the league, kabaddi in India, though culturally legitimate and international in terms of its presence in the international arena, existed in many atomistic and semi-amateur governance relationships. According to Sen (2015) and Nagel et al. (2015), the historic evolution of kabaddi was full of robust regional culture and governmental support, but low coordination and professionalism on the national level of the game. This institutional latency constrained career predictability among the athletes, especially in the states with high talent like Haryana.

PKL has brought about a more structured model of franchise-driven leagues that have definite seasons, contracts, and uniform rules, and centralised the governance structures. That way, it resolved a lot of the institutional shortcomings mentioned in the sport professionalisation literature. Stieger, Nagel, and Lang (2025) have the argument that governance integration and organisational capacity are closely related to professionalism. In this perspective, PKL was a structural intervention that made kabaddi consistent with contemporary professional sport systems. Such institutional clarity allowed players in Haryana to build consistent professional identities, as opposed to the previously existing confusion that characterized the tournaments and other selection processes that were mostly not regular.

Nevertheless, the issues also manifest through institutional transformation via PKL, which Robertson et al. (2021) warn about and allege that professionals have an external pressure to legitimacy instead of internal change by itself. The model of governance of PKL, which has been overwhelmingly disposed towards commercial broadcasters and sponsors, implies that the institutional change of kabaddi has been shaped equally by market logics as it has been through athlete-based governance. This casts serious doubts on long-term autonomy as well as inclusiveness within the governance structures of kabaddi.

5.1.2 Economic Empowerment of Athletes

The most apparent consequence of the intervention by PKL in kabaddi is probably economic professionalisation. The literature always brings forward the fact that player auctions, contractual payments, match payments, and pay based on performance turned kabaddi into a subsistence or supplementary activity and a source of livelihood. In the case of Haryana athletes, most of whom are also agrarian or lower-middle-income, PKL contracts were an unprecedented economic mobility.

This observation is consistent with the literature on sport professionalisation that has cited financial compensation as a pre-requisite albeit not the only requirement of professionalism. In their overview of the football played by women, Wang et al. (2025) show that professional leagues can enhance income security, but due to unequal access and structural factors, this advantage can be constrained. Likewise,

although PKL has boosted the profits of professional athletes, the literature indicates that these economic benefits are in the hands of a rather small group of players, which is concerning because of inequality in the sport.

However, partial economic professionalisation has transformed, even in the Haryana context. Research and reports have shown PKL earnings to help players invest more in training, family, and sporting careers beyond the normal scope. This is contrary to previous accounts, as found by McSweeney et al. (2021), that the concept of professionalisation in traditional sports poses a threat to the intrinsic motivations. The economic incentives in the kabaddi case seem to have consolidated, instead of substituting, deep cultural commitments towards the sport.

5.1.3 Media Visibility and Cultural Legitimation

The literature introduces media integration as a key element that enabled the professionalisation of kabaddi, as facilitated by PKL. Trivedi et al. (2020) reveal that the strategic application of television broadcasting and online channels was conclusion-based in converting kabaddi into a mass spectator sport. This observation is consistent with the institutional argument presented by Robertson et al. (2021) that the concept of legitimacy in contemporary sport becomes more mediated by visibility and spectators.

In the case of Haryana, the increased publicity of the media was culturally significant. Conventionally, kabaddi was a game that had local acclaim and a lesser national prominence, as compared to other games like cricket. The televised format of PKL, celebrity endorsement, and social media presence reconfigured the perception of the people, making kabaddi appear as modern, aspirational, and professionally rewarding. Consequently, more and more families and communities started to consider kabaddi as a serious career option and not just a village sport.

Simultaneously, Mishra, Sen, and Pal (2022) make this story more complex by emphasizing the aspect of athlete agency in the media arena. Their efforts imply that PKL players are not passive receivers of media exposure but participants in professional identity development and social discourse. This is especially applicable to Haryana, where sportsmen usually have to bargain between the conservative social forces and the new professional identities. Media visibility, then,

does not serve as a commercial means alone but also as a place of cultural bargaining.

5.1.4 Scientific Training and Performance Standards

The other essential aspect of professionalism that is addressed in the literature is athletic preparation transformation. PKL franchises brought the sports science, data analytics, protocols of injury management, nutrition planning, and exposure to the practices of international coaching. This change is consistent with the international definitions of athletic professionalism as one that is focused on systematic training and performance optimisation.

The influence of such transformation is especially important in Haryana. The state has always been known to have an akhara culture and physically challenging training regimens. Although these conventional systems yielded strong athletes, they were not that scientifically supported and could not manage injuries in the long run. Professional training standards integrated via PKL also had an impact on the elite players as well as on the grassroots academies and programmes at the state levels. The transition is indirectly supported in empirical literature, like that of Dhanjal (2025), in which he records the high physical preparedness of kabaddi players who have come up out of well-structured training setups.

Nonetheless, the literature also warns of the homogeneous preparation of professional standards. Nagel et al. (2015) observe that it is common to have unequal levels of professionalisation at the organisational levels. The scientific training in Haryana is still stratified, with more talented athletes of PKL benefiting out of proportion when compared to those who are not in the talent pipeline of the league.

5.1.5 Grassroots and Talent Development Linkages

Another theme that is most evidently repeated through the literature is the trickle-down of professional leagues on grassroots development. The scouting networks, talent discovery camps, and youth leagues established by PKL provided the rural akharas with new avenues of connection to the professional world. Such a connection is especially applicable in Haryana, where the grassroots have been strong in the past but have not been well incorporated into the national outfits.

Rich, Spaaij, and Misener (2021) posit that professionalisation in community-embedded sport

systems is possible without cultural fakery. This statement is partially justified in the case of Haryana. Conservative akharas are still used as a form of training facilities, whereas PKL provides ambitions and status. According to such a hybrid, professionalisation does not imply the elimination of indigenous sporting practices, but rather their re-organisation into new systems.

5.2 Socio-Cultural Impact in Haryana

Along with the institutional and financial performance of kabaddi, the professionalisation of kabaddi by PKL has transformed the socio-cultural sporting identity of Haryana. The important perspective that can shed light on these changes is the critical analysis of caste, gender, and neoliberalism in rural Haryana, offered by Oza (2018). Although PKL has made Haryana a stronger state in sports and participation, it has not completely shattered the established social hierarchies.

Inclusion as per gender, especially, is low. Even though PKL has helped in uplifting the status of kabaddi, the opportunities given to women are still marginal in nature, as it has been observed in other

sports by Wang et al. (2025). However, the professional achievement of kabaddi has also added to the regional pride, intergenerational persistence of sporting culture, and the symbolic revalorisation of indigenous sports in contemporary India.

5.3 Synthesis

In general, this discussion has shown that PKL has served as an effective agent for the professionalization of kabaddi through harmonizing institutional governance, economic incentives, media exposure, athletic norms, and grassroots development. Nevertheless, in line with the literature on global professionalisation, this change is not even all around and is contested. PKL has increased the existing strengths in Haryana, besides replicating some inequalities. This complexity needs to be understood to evaluate the sustainability and inclusivity of professionalisation in indigenous sports.

This synthesis directly fills the research gaps that were identified in the literature with the foregrounding of regional processes, lives of athletes beyond the quantitative aspects of viewership and revenue.

Table 2: Systematic Literature Review Summary of Key Studies

Author(s) & Year	Focus / Context	Key Findings and Arguments
Stieger, Nagel & Lang (2025)	Professionalisation and governance in sport organisations	Professionalism is a multidimensional process driven by integrated governance, organisational capacity, and accountability rather than commercialisation alone.
Robertson et al. (2021)	Institutional theory in sport	Sport organisations professionalise largely due to external legitimacy pressures from media, sponsors, and global sport norms.
Wang et al. (2025)	Professionalisation in women's football	Sustainable professionalism requires ecosystem support; leagues alone cannot ensure long-term professional development.
McSweeney et al. (2021)	Professionalisation of sport-for-development	Occupational professionalism can conflict with community-oriented and cultural values in traditional sport contexts.
Hull et al. (2025)	Traditional vs modern professional values	Market-driven professionalism risks eroding intrinsic and traditional professional values if not carefully balanced.
Rich, Spaaij & Misener (2021)	Community and sport management	Community-embedded sport models can integrate professionalism without losing cultural identity.
Sen (2015)	Historical evolution of sport in India	Kabaddi developed as a rural, culturally embedded sport with limited institutional and professional structures.
Nagel et al. (2015)	Professionalisation of sport federations	Professionalisation depends on institutional pressures, resource availability, and governance incentives.
Shukla (2020)	Kabaddi's internationalisation	International recognition of kabaddi did not automatically lead to domestic professionalisation.
Mishra, Sen & Pal (2022)	Athlete engagement and social media	Athletes actively shape professional identity and public discourse through digital platforms.
Trivedi, Soni & Kishore (2020)	Media strategies in professional leagues	Strategic social media and broadcast integration were central to the success of PKL.

Sandip, Ghosh & Sarma (2018)	Emergence of Pro Kabaddi League	PKL introduced franchise systems, player auctions, and commercial league structures.
Oza (2018)	Sport, caste, and gender in Haryana	Sporting success in Haryana is shaped by caste relations, gender norms, and neoliberal policy contexts.
Pal (2026)	Sports culture and policy in Haryana	State policies, sports hostels, and institutional incentives support Haryana's talent ecosystem.
Dhanjal (2025)	Physical profiles of kabaddi players	Structured training environments produce high physical preparedness among elite kabaddi players.

VI. CONCLUSION

The present study aimed to investigate the impact of the Pro Kabaddi League (PKL) in professionalizing kabaddi in Haryana by using a qualitative Systematic Literature Review. The synthesis of world research studies on the professionalisation of sports with literature on local sports, the history of kabaddi, and local sporting ecosystems form the basis of the study to give a subtle insight into how a commercialised league can remodel a traditional amateur sport. The results indicate that PKL has served as a huge booster in changing the institutional, economic, and cultural face of kabaddi, especially in a state with a lot of talent like Haryana.

On the institutional level, PKL has added to the formalisation of governance structures through the introduction of franchises, competition formats that are predictable and seasonal calendars. This moves countered long-term organisational disintegration in kabaddi and helped an athlete to envision sport as a long-term career as opposed to an uncertain endeavour. PKL provided an unprecedented level of income to players, such as contracts, auctions, sponsorships, and performance bonuses, which were economically viable. Amongst most Haryana-based athletes, particularly rural and agrarian-based, these developments presented themselves as an upward socio-economic movement and a higher sustainability of their occupation.

In addition to institutional and economic aspects, the league has been of great importance in cultural legitimisation. Media attention, online activity, and creation of the athlete's story promoted the social position of kabaddi and altered the mindset. This visibility promoted kabaddi as a valid career choice in Haryana, where there was a larger family and community support of kabaddi. At the same time, the dissemination of sports science, professional coaching, and performance analytics increased the

level of competition and affected the training practice at the elite and grassroots levels.

Nevertheless, the review also states that professionalisation via PKL is still unequal and debated. The gains are concentrated with the few elite athletes, with bigger problems like gender inclusion, post-career security, and long-term autonomy of institutions in place being left unaddressed. Besides, the commercial rationality of PKL makes one question whether professionalism can be sustainable in case market conditions change.

In general, this paper has concluded that the Pro Kabaddi League has brought a major change in the pace of professionalisation of kabaddi in Haryana, but this change should be viewed as a process and not a final result. The article adds to the existing literature in sport management and sociology since it provides a local, indigenous sport interpretation of professionalisation. Empirical fieldwork, athlete stories, and regional comparisons should be part of future research to enhance the current knowledge, and shape more inclusive and sustainable sport development policies.

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