

The Phenomenon of “Ghost Sportspersons” in Sports

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Abstract

Athletic competitions feature false athlete registrations known as “ghost sportspersons” who do not actively participate, primarily through college, university, and municipal sporting platforms, creating substantial ethical dilemmas and legal and governance problems. This study investigates the reasons behind ghost sportspersons, such as financial rewards, institutional demands, and inadequate regulatory oversight systems. It analyses the problems they create for professional athletes and sports teams and the integrity of competitive sports. The study reveals how trust disappeared as competition became misshapen, along with athletes’ mental health due to these actions, which harmed the institutional reputation. To address this problem, this study builds a comprehensive solution combining better verification procedures with regulatory restructuring, training for ethical standards, and technical solutions, including automated identification systems and AI-based tracking technology. Athletic organisations must focus on ghost sportspersons because fixing this issue ensures that competitive environments uphold transparency, fair play, and the foundation of true sportsmanship.

Keywords: Ghost Sportspersons, Sports Ethics, Integrity, Legislative Framework, Athlete Empowerment.

Introduction

The effectiveness of international sports depends on latent goodwill, fair play, amateurism, balanced opportunities, and respect for ethical rules (Ilmarinen, 1984). A phenomenon known as “Ghost Sportspersons” reveals multiple challenges facing sports management because participants who allow their names to be used may fail to actively participate in the sport. This study defines these matters and explores their underlying causes and effects.

Similar to literary ghost writing, ghost sportspersons participate in sporting activities on behalf of others without revealing their identity and may present false identification. The practice violates sports fairness and basic ethical guidelines. Athletic integrity requires strong measures to prevent the occurrence of ghost competitors who have been noticed in various sports tournaments, including intercollegiate and university events and municipal competitions. Their presence breaks down dreams of accomplishment while undermining the essential human capabilities, determination, and dedication principles. The performance authenticity expected by supporters and competitors leads to full awareness of the falsified situations that damage integrity in sports events.

The name “Ghost Sportsperson” comes from the idea of “Ghost Writers”, writers who don’t take any public credit for what they write. Other personae, other nicknames include “Ghost Sportsperson”, someone who participates while using a fake or stolen identity, effectively becoming a hidden or “ghost” participant, usually to defy eligibility rules or penalties. In the same manner as for ghostwriters who invisibly contribute to someone else’s work, ghost sportspersons are invisible performers who compete as athletes who are not in fact competing, which raises relevant problems related to impersonation and identity fraud in sports competitions.

In the “Ghost Sportsperson” realm, professional

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players compete on behalf of other players and receive recognition as medalists for their efforts. Both individuals may work in exchange for nominal fees. These kinds of behaviour often end up violating sports integrity and ethics. These behaviours could encompass several areas of concern, from ethics to manipulating democratic mechanisms within sports organisations (Constantdt et al., 2020; Minikin, 2015).

Ghost sportspersons create doubt in opponents, their coaches, and supporters, so the competitive environment becomes unhealthy. Research shows that double-checking participant integrity fails to produce the expected sense of dismay or reduces enjoyment because teenage athletes lose passion when they feel their work is wasted in untrustworthy environments. Universities, colleges, and municipal sports groups should develop valid systems to verify participant presence. The development of rigorous qualification standards must be accompanied by continuous observation of suspicious performance behaviours and honest self-disclosure from participants. Teaching ethical principles related to ghost sportspersons is vital for promoting genuine competition because it builds up authentic sports practices.

The fight against ghost sportspersons must be treated as a fundamental responsibility for protecting sportsmanship. Sports require the combined forces of competitiveness, respect, and recognition of personal striving to preserve their basic elements. Sporadic ethical violations in sports have the power to damage player dignity and national pride and weaken sports audience appeal, which affects sponsorship contracts and the lasting existence of sports (Agnew, Henderson & Woods, 2017). Failure to take prompt action will cause permanent damage to recreational and competitive sports, creating a historical outline of darkness rather than a triumph (Agnew et al., 2017).

Defining the Concept of Ghost Sportspersons

The expression “ghost sportsperson” refers to sportspersons who provide fraudulent documents and fake admissions to participate in such sporting activities when they do not engage in the event, or sometimes false documents are prepared in their name, and they participate in sports events. Cheating may entail registering fraudulent candidates, manipulating results, acting as a secret person, or competing on behalf of an organisation or university. They damage the authority of athletic activities and tarnish sportsmen’s records and accomplishments. The objectives of this paper are to analyse the causes and motivations behind ghost sports activities, evaluate the impact on sequences of false articulations, and develop detection and prevention

mechanisms to combat this unethical practice and ensure transparency and accountability in sports governance.

Causes and Motivations Behind Ghost Sportspersons

Financial rewards are the leading cause of ghost sports. The substantial financial resources in high-stakes sports significantly increase the likelihood of cheating. The truth about ghost sports becomes most prominent when regulations are weak, along with massive financial rewards. The abundance of financial resources leads to negative ethical actions, which occur most often when major sports competitions are organised (DeSensi & Rosenberg, 2013). According to Shleifer and Vishny (1993), the motivation behind corruption is not limited to financial gain because power abuse functions as a leading incentive. Sports ideals face threats from authority figures, including athletic coaches, administrative staff, and team owners who use their power to assist specific competitors (Anagnostopoulos & Winand, 2019; Chatziefstathiou & Rofe, 2024). Sporting activities maintain cultural and ethical frameworks because they develop from social communication patterns (Liu et al., 2023). According to Arnold (1992), norm violations in sports tend to be caused by a desire to win or fear of humiliation.

A ghost sportsperson’s actions have several damaging effects throughout the sports industry. The unethical nature of ghost sportspersons exists because it damages the purity of sports competitions (Casini, 2021; Eitzen, 1988; Zakhem & Mascio, 2018). Sports require ethical principles for their integrity because, throughout history, people have learned from experience the importance of moral instruction within sports (Matthews, 2012). The core principles of fair play and regulated conduct with opponents define sports as spaces that promote equality and fairness.

The prevalence of ghost sportspersons can be attributed to several factors, including:

Pressure to Meet Quotas: Certain clubs, organisations, educational institutions, and universities deploy ghost athletes to fulfil the quota requirements set by their funding sponsors (Clayton et al., 2015). This approach creates a deceptive picture of members’ success and participation, although the actual levels remain hidden. Any ghost sportsperson can produce fake statistics, enabling them to deceive stakeholders about organisational potential while offering range, outreach, and networking connections. The objective is to attract spectators and financiers to fund the upcoming activities. The integrity of an organisation suffers severe damage when falsified statistics are propagated (DeSensi & Rosenberg, 2013). Organisations often conduct investigative studies after

identifying discrepancies between the stated and actual participant numbers, which have implications for their operations. The initiative fails to include current member stakeholders while straying from organisational objectives and the intended activities created in its design. The quest for false targets creates an unsafe situation because organisations prioritise these targets ahead of developing actual stakeholder support and engagement.

Financial Incentives: Each applicant for grant assistance, sponsorship, or scholarship funding must present achievements that match the specific requirements for obtaining support. Appeals to participate in sports exist in many forms, yet financial benefits create pressure that leads to unethical conduct (Tušak et al., 2022). Willingness to pursue money usually drives unscrupulous conduct, such as falsifying qualifications and achievements to obtain financial support. Organisations aim to achieve financial targets through both the tolerance and pressure of questionable activities that might endanger human beings and sports communities in the future. Marking financial objectives as an essential pursuit leads to the replacement of honesty and fair conduct, ultimately diminishing moral standards in sports.

Several ethical issues emerge when competition principles give way to profitability: athletic competitors operate under financial pretences, as sponsors and governing organisations maintain control over their behaviour (Chen, 2019). A dangerous pattern is created that future athletes must follow, while their genuine sports motivations become difficult to believe. Some aspects related to sponsorships and visibility impact how work teams function alongside recruitment efforts and the visual identity of the institutions involved in this issue.

Furthermore, oversight organisations could have problems controlling disorder in terms of order and rules; the latter may be employed for diverse purposes. 'Money motives' are a leading cause in sports; consequently, significant focus should be given to ensuring that adequate tactics are implemented so everyone 'plays the game right' (Chen, 2019). A great deal of work must be done to ensure that ideals that have inspired incredible effort, dedication, and pure excellence in the sports sector do not fade, and to restore the many essential principles of sports.

The control of disorder presents a challenge for oversight organisations because rules can serve different purposes, and both order and rules become difficult to manage. Sports face primary challenges due to financial factors, which require complete attention to develop proper protocols for maintaining fair competition (Chen, 2019). Many efforts are needed to preserve sports ideals

that inspire exceptional dedication and excellence because they risk disappearing altogether.

Reputation Building: Ghost sportspersons advertise athletic groups together with universities and colleges, as well as organisations and athletic teams. Competitors in ghost participation are most frequently observed during championship matches at the state level, as well as intercollegiate events, zonal tournaments, and all-India tournaments. Athletes representing their states in competitions require more ghost participants to participate in national junior tournaments, senior events, and any other tournament. University competitions have numerous ghost players, yet the MAKA Trophy remains the sole competition area in which this occurs. Universities often compromise their acquired sports ethics while striving to obtain trophies, regardless of what it takes to win. When deceitful practices focus on organisational success, they establish an environment in which minimising the values of ethical conduct becomes a common practice. Ghosting remains part of the activity, so organisations can progress and earn medals even if their integrity is compromised.

To build positive public relationships and acquire monetary advantages, organisations commonly place institutional progress above principles such as transparency, fairness, and ethical standards (Vargas-Mendoza et al., 2018). This practice generates many serious ethical problems regarding verifying individual achievements and determining achievement values. Ethical norms are negatively influenced by celebrity-driven sports (Whysall, 2014). This practice is primarily used to create positive corporate impressions. Teams and institutions should convey greater meaningfulness than opposing clubs, entities, and universities to establish their accomplishments as credible records. These entities may feel obligated to inflate their degree of sports involvement or match participation to enhance community reputation.

These deceptive strategies motivate organisations to exploit false methods by seeking opportunities for more sponsorships, media visibility, and an increased fan base, transforming truthful reputation acquisition into an unethical process. Two specific applications are available for this approach. Early attention gets the point across but eventually becomes unhelpful because it can severely damage the profile. Followers' open and straightforward demeanours prompt them to respond to deteriorating reputation effects when false information is revealed. Supporting a particular sports team requires integrity as its core foundation; thus, authenticity becomes essential.

The respect and faith required by supporters of clubs and players suffer damage when false accreditation is revealed. Stakeholders in the sports arena should validate

genuine investor participation and outcomes when implementing appropriate plans. Transferring one's real involvement in reputation building delivers significant positive effects, establishing robust public reception and creating meaningful audience bonds. The need to keep things genuine serves two essential purposes: it fulfils today's moral standards of information speed and delivers an advantage to those involved in sports.

Competitive Advantage: Higher participation rates enhance league rankings because they provide competition with additional advantages. Legends have higher-ranking positions in competitive sports because they gain enhanced media attention, expanded sponsorship potential, and financial opportunities. Beneficial membership recruitment is driven by academic institutions that maintain active participation rates, as these groups seek members who prefer dynamic learning environments. A marketing initiative based on extreme exposure will mature into subsequent sponsorship options and business partnerships. Once institutions develop active community interests, their sponsorship opportunities increase while partnership development accelerates, generating better financial resources for organisational advancement (Kaloyanchev, 2023).

Such institutions and organisations benefit from increased sports popularity, which creates a more active environment to foster additional participation. Brand image strengthening enhances recruitment by drawing sponsors and qualified applicants (Eskiler et al., 2021). A more dynamic training environment that emerges from members' enthusiasm brings better composition to participation while developing stronger abilities among participants. A winning club culture emerges to attract top talent for the team after achieving growth, which consequently strengthens a club's success. To maintain faithful sporting practices in the long run, enhancing participant engagement and its corresponding benefits requires a parallel and strong dedication to ethical rules and fair competition principles (Blanco, 2017). Enhanced commitment from participants enables them to build shared community bonds that clubs need as their base for expansion. Members devote their time to social gatherings, training activities, and project work, which increases member loyalty and helps keep the membership base growing. In other words, clubs, organisations, institutions, and universities are increasing engagement as their tactical emphasis encourages current and future growth, strengthening overall sustainability.

Weak Oversight: Risk opportunities emerge because regulatory standards do not provide sufficient

protection, and the verification procedure remains inefficient. Organisational deficiencies create situations in which errors occur, leading to decreased public trust in organisations that work to benefit the public. Internal organisational issues prevent decision-making effectiveness in voluntary sports clubs through structural discordance between power centres, competency, and insufficient role definition in task responsibilities. Applying valuable organisational transformations is a struggle when management positions employ internal recruitment procedures (Thiel & Mayer, 2008).

Local sports councils determine community sports programs' successful growth and performance because they rely on public knowledge, resident participation, and financial stability (Misener et al., 2013). Some individuals may act unfavourably in response to the severe lack of detection procedures for wrongdoers. Highly influential factors affect numerous domains, such as economics and sports, where unbalanced industries lead sports to develop unfavourable behaviours because of bonus rewards. Sports clubs function independently while maintaining traditional organisational schemes that prevent sports policy implementation because the state requires stronger policy instruments to execute policies voluntarily (Skille & Säfvenbom, 2011). The implementation of sports development policy demands that authorities examine sports clubs at different operational levels and cultural backgrounds while possibly adjusting their strategies to boost widespread policy execution (Thiel & Mayer, 2008).

Current legislation creates confusion when determining responsibilities and introduces indistinct boundaries that separate those responsible for particular situations. The uncertain nature of these rules allows unethical parties to operate beyond challenges, causing more damage to sports and society. Sustainable sports functioning depends on trustees who select members of their organisations to make decisions that benefit their collective goals. However, this occurrence is not constant (Minikin, 2015). Organisations face difficulties because they perceive any action as acceptable under moral protection that they can use as a legal shield. Existing regulations must receive thorough upgrades from regulators to improve transparency requirements, which will prevent firms from abusing regulatory loopholes for personal gain. Many organisations can enhance their protection against exploitation by government institutions and civil society partners in the business sector. Such groups should build ethical standards to prioritise incentives that benefit societal objectives while distributing organisational ideas and operational methods. Future progress depends on teamwork for enhanced surveillance and opposition to regulatory breakdown.

Consequences of Ghost Participation

The phenomenon of ghost sportspersons has far-reaching implications:

For Athletes: Real athletes may miss out on performance opportunities while their careers face setbacks and inferior placements. Externally imposed factors or injuries, combined with extended competition time, usually result in disconnection from the sports field. These interruptions decrease performance levels and threaten major sponsorships and crucial business partnerships. When removed from action, athletes' psychological focus shifts toward reassessing their skills and potential capabilities. Competitive scenarios evolve between matches; therefore, athletes should maintain persistence while adapting to demonstrate their skills and talents in changing competitive contexts, new training methods, and uneven events. Any defeat becomes an intense and often bitter experience, showing athletes how to achieve victory and success. It provides individuals with a valuable opportunity to learn how to rebuild their careers. Athletes automatically use their past experiences to develop new skills while redirecting themselves toward appropriate environmental conditions to overcome obstacles, which leads them toward consistent and exceptional achievement.

For Organisations: Sports organisations face the erosion of public trust and a serious loss of credibility. Multiple organisational effects stem from different situations, including corruption scandals, inadequate responses to doping concerns, and poor attention to athlete welfare (DeSensi & Rosenberg, 2013). Organisations need to fulfil as many expected obligations as possible because negative public reactions directly affect sponsors, supporters, community trust, and athletes. People who have devoted time and resources to these organisations often believe that sports management has become corrupted due to a lack of dedication to ethical values in sports. A negative incident discovered through social media can easily create public outrage, causing people to quickly lose faith in their organisations. Modern business demands that firms excel in transparency and accountability, as organisational image depends heavily on these two factors. A lack of transparency results in fewer sponsorships, decreased ticket sales, and weakened organisational influence in a competitive market. Once trust is broken, repair efforts often prove impossible, and the consequences are invariably damaging (Crompton, 2015). To maintain ethical standards, organisations must involve stakeholders in collecting information while creating two-way communication channels and ensuring that their operations align with accepted ethical values.

Organisations that retain authenticity and embrace social justice as something beyond mere image preservation will build all the necessary connections to support sustainable sporting success.

For the Institute and Universities: The presence of ghost sportspersons has serious adverse effects on the status and achievements of educational institutions, leading to poor outcomes for colleges involved in such practices. False participation undermines the integrity of admission and scholarship processes, damaging the principle of fair selection for deserving students (Casini, 2021). Students face restricted chances to succeed and perform worse in team sports because of this unethical practice, which harms their prospects of obtaining degrees, college titles, and professional athletic recognition. Financial institutions and corporate sponsors are also likely to withdraw funding partnerships, as unethical conduct in sports activities creates serious reputational and legal risks. When institutions are found complicit, their official affiliations are often terminated, exposing them to legal penalties and permanently damaging their reputation (Eitzen, 1988). Educational institutions must implement robust audits and enforce ethical standards within their sports culture, establishing executive accountability measures to protect their academic and athletic reputation and preserve institutional integrity. Preserving integrity through sports requires proactive initiatives and transparent oversight (Gardiner et al., 2016). Sports maintain their social reputation despite periodic crises, but this stability comes at an increasingly high cost and uncertain future (Manoli et al., 2020). Ethical conduct requires operational policies built on transparency, fairness, and accountability to sustain moral standards and achieve genuine reform (Miller, 1980).

For Sports Integrity: Ghost participation contradicts the very principles of fairness, openness, and competitiveness. Betting and fraudulent activities create doubts about trust among players, teams, and spectators, eventually leading to widespread corruption and dishonesty (Agnew et al., 2017). The decline in integrity indicates that true sportsmanship has been compromised due to systemic ethical collapse. In this case, unethical practices become normalised, making it increasingly difficult to interrupt this harmful cycle. The combination of unfair practices jeopardises genuine talent and team loyalty, causing sports enthusiasts and sponsors to lose confidence in the credibility of competitions. Although fair play guidelines are intended to maintain honesty in sports, they often lack strict enforcement mechanisms. Upholding fair play must therefore remain a central component of professional sporting competence, essential for defeating cheating and restoring credibility. A society focused on

achieving transparency must recognise that rebuilding integrity and trust in sports is essential. This process involves bridge-building between institutions, athletes, and audiences to restore faith in sports as a vehicle of ethical competition, social learning, and cultural pride.

Detection and Prevention Mechanisms

To combat this issue, sports organisations must implement robust systems and policies:

Technological Solutions: The two technology options selected during implementation are biometric participant identification and real-time participation tracking (Sharma et al., 2017). These modifications enhance authentic competition while improving the technological involvement of all participants. Wearable technology enables coaches and organisers to monitor multiple health indicators that affect training therapies by tracking player performance metrics. The mobile app system effectively distributes essential information between participants, coaches, and event organisers to share details about timeframes, rules, safety statistics, and guidelines. Athletes can easily contact their peers using this system, which helps build team camaraderie. Through a simple artificial intelligence (AI) methodology, the evaluation of participation patterns becomes possible, enabling the targeting of potential dropout athletes to avoid team departure and enhance their athletic experience. These technologies allow the analysis of sports event participation strategies and procedural approaches to improve the performance quality experienced by athletic participants (see Table 1 for key technological interventions).

Table 1. Technological Measures for Detecting and Preventing Ghost Participation in Sports

Tool/Technology	Purpose	Implementation Points
Biometric sensors	Identify and authenticate athletes	Event entry, registration, and random checks
Wearable tracking	Confirm real-time presence, prevent proxies	During all official matches
AI-based analytics	Detect suspicious patterns	Event data and registration database
Centralized registry	Share and cross-verify athlete identities	Across federations and events

Regulatory Reforms: The application of stronger crime-prevention measures by an independent supervisory agency should also include audited competitive records. Sports organisations depend on this committee to perform periodic monitoring operations that inspect competition integrity cases while establishing visible stability within sports governance systems. Creating educational materials on ethical values and their consequences for the sports community will help build a reputation for honesty and accountability among individual organisations. Every sports federation should demonstrate a strong commitment to defining cheating-related actions, specifically through examples of doping, and establish clear standards regarding the consequences of such incidents. Athletes should actively participate in law creation to elevate their confidence in sporting integrity. The implementation of information technology systems aims to develop credibility while prohibiting any alterations to competition records. Various sports organisations utilise these secure data blocks to establish tamper-proof result storage, which prevents unauthorised record modifications unless they receive advance notice. Athletes will gain increased confidence, and spectators and sponsors will strengthen their trust in sporting events. To reduce fraudulent activities, regulations from different sports federations must provide decisive countermeasures against doping and other forms of cheating, with well-defined penalties. Individuals must understand the consequences that follow. A collaborative approach between athletes and administrators strengthens sports governance ownership while boosting their capacity to prevent corruption and unethical behaviour. Table 2 highlights the proposed regulatory frameworks.

Education and Awareness: All participants engaged in event organisation, including players, coaches, and officials, should be aware of the ethical implications of fraudulent participation practices. The systematic training of individuals regarding the moral and professional consequences of fake sports activities requires immediate implementation. Organisations running these programs must teach people the importance of sportsmanship concepts, encompassing values of fair play, honour, and justice. Some essential dialogue techniques include informative displays and practical exercises that enable sports personnel and leaders to understand the effects of deceptive participation on human relationships and sports communities. Real-life cases of biological and identity incidents that expose fake participation offer practical value because they allow observation of the impact on professional careers, team member relationships, and the credibility of lessons in sports ethics. Developed

Table 2. Regulatory Reforms and Governance Mechanisms to Strengthen Sports Integrity

Reform/Instrument	Description & Purpose	Key Features/Implementation Points
National Sports Governance Bill, 2025	Overhauls governance of sports bodies with transparency, accountability, and athlete welfare as core objectives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National Sports Board: Central authority for recognition, monitoring, and enforcement Suspension powers for irregularities Athlete representation
National Sports Tribunal	Independent tribunal for dispute resolution in sports.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Handles disputes on elections, selections, and grievances Direct appeals to the Supreme Court for speed
Standardised Election Procedures	Ensures uniform, transparent elections and mandates athlete participation in governance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Age and tenure limits Athlete-only electoral rolls
Enhanced ID and Age Verification	Prevents identity and age fraud using technology.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Biometric checks Digital/QR-coded athlete IDs National Code Against Age Fraud in Sports (NCAAFS)
Athlete Protection and Governance	Prioritises welfare, rights, and active involvement of athletes in policy decisions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Athlete board quotas Transparent resource allocation
Accountability and Oversight	Ensures regular, independent financial and performance audits of National Sports Federations (NSFs).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public, statutory rules Replaces ad-hoc executive oversight
Whistleblower Mechanism and Grievance Redressal	Protects and incentivises reporting of malpractices; swift, fair grievance redressal.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Whistleblower safeguards Accessible reporting channels
Alignment with International Best Practices	Aligns Indian sports regulations with international standards for credibility and global recognition.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Olympic/Paralympic Charter alignment Unified rules for all federations
Athlete-Centric Approach	Focuses on athlete well-being, legal protection, and equitable representation in every aspect of sports governance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gender/diversity quotas Board policies tailored to athlete needs

technologies, including e-learning modules and online forums, effectively and efficiently share knowledge between remote and nearby locations. These tools could serve two purposes: first, to detect and prevent cheating strategies in the procedures, and second, to establish open moral discussions about ethical complications in competitive settings. Players and officials must be free to express concerns about behaviours that they believe harm the competitive spirit so that a protective and ethical sports culture can be developed. Training networks that unite qualified tutors, mainly composed of veterans, alongside tutees and learners as members, can achieve this goal through perception-based training and foster ethical and accountable sports practices. All stakeholders in the sports sector must incorporate comprehensive training and orientation programs regarding the intrinsic qualities of both the general framework and the pedagogical understanding of the ethical consequences of fake sports participation. Focusing on this communicative and participatory method may help produce an honest and ethically grounded sporting environment that remains

true to the principles of fairness, effort, and integrity. (see Table 3 for key educational and awareness initiatives designed to counter ghost participation).

Case Study and Real-Life Instances of Athlete Impersonation and Identity Fraud in Sports

Delhi State Youth Olympics (India, 2025): The under-18 boys' 400m final at the 2025 Delhi State Youth Athletics Championship caught the eye, with authorities doubting whether the second-place finisher used someone else's identity to participate. This led to an official investigation by state athletics authorities to verify the identity. These stories illustrate that impersonation threats exist not only in elite competition but also at the youth and regional levels (Jansatta, 2025).

Russian Athlete Identity Fraud: Kseniya Savina Case: Kseniya Savina, a Russian middle-distance runner, was exposed for competing under a false Ukrainian identity. After being suspended for doping, Savina used

Table 3. Educational and Awareness Strategies for Promoting Ethical Sports Practices

Measure/Activity	Description	Target Audience	Implementation Example
Awareness Workshops	Regular seminars on identity fraud risks, rules, and consequences	Athletes, coaches, officials	Annual workshops at training centres
Training Modules	Integrate anti-fraud and integrity lessons in sports curriculum	Athletes (all levels), teams	E-learning courses; onboarding sessions
Ethics & Integrity Pledge	Written commitment to fair play and authentic participation	All stakeholders	Signing at registration or season start
Visual Campaigns	Posters, infographics, and signage explaining ID protocols	Everyone at venues	“No Ghost Sportspersons” poster at stadiums
Information Booklets	Distribute leaflets/booklets with rules on ID verification	Players, parents, local organisers	Handouts during trials and registrations
Parent/Guardian Seminars	Special sessions on ensuring proper documentation and ID use	Parents/guardians of minors	Meetings at academies; FAQ sessions
Whistleblower Education	Guidance on how to safely report suspected impersonation	Athletes, staff, volunteers	Confidential helpline introduction
Social Media Campaigns	Use platforms to spread awareness and report real incidents	General sports community	Monthly posts and success stories
Code of Conduct Sessions	Explain the code of conduct and anti-fraud protocols	Athletes, officials, administrators	Group discussions at clubs and federations
Periodic Compliance Reminders	Regular reminders of registration norms and fraud penalties	All registered participants	SMS/email alerts; quarterly newsletters

another athlete's identity to enter competitions that would otherwise be inaccessible to her due to sanctions. Authorities discovered the deception, leading to a 12-year ban. This case highlights the ease with which established procedures can sometimes be bypassed, underscoring significant gaps in athlete verification processes (New Indian Express, 2019).

Sports Age Fraud (Global Football, Multiple Years): In football, “age fraud” involves athletes fabricating ages to qualify for youth competitions. Famous cases include the Mexican “Cachirules” scandal (1988), Brazil’s Carlos Alberto de Oliveira Júnior (banned for using a false birthdate), and Ecuador’s Ángel Cheme, who played under another person’s name for years until discovery and suspension. Such age misrepresentation is found globally, affecting integrity at all levels of youth and professional sport (Wikipedia contributors, 2025).

Conclusion

The existence of “ghost sportspersons”, athletes competing under fictitious names or submitting counterfeit documentation, constitutes a significant danger to the integrity and credibility of sports. This phenomenon compromises fair competition, erodes trust among stakeholders, and devalues authentic athletic

accomplishment. Case studies and recent instances demonstrate that established regulatory mechanisms are frequently susceptible to manipulation, causing considerable damage to the sport, genuine athletes, and public confidence. A multifaceted approach is necessary to properly address this situation. This entails utilising technological advancements such as biometric authentication, AI-driven analytics, and centralised athlete registration systems to enhance verification procedures. Recent legislative initiatives, notably the National Sports Governance Bill (2025), have improved identification and age verification methods, as well as established independent tribunals, signifying a transition towards greater transparency, accountability, and athlete welfare as fundamental goals in sports management. Sustained educational and awareness programs aimed at athletes, coaches, parents, and administrators are equally essential. These initiatives cultivate a culture of integrity, vigilance, and ethical awareness against fraud at all levels of sports participation. Harmonising national regulations with international best practices enhances legitimacy and promotes global recognition for Indian athletes. Ultimately, preserving authenticity in sports necessitates coordinated efforts by regulatory authorities, sports organisations, athletes, and the wider community. By prioritising athlete-centric governance, stringent oversight, clear procedures, and a collective

commitment to ethical standards, the occurrence of "ghost sportspersons" can be effectively prevented, thereby preserving the fundamental values of determination, discipline, effort, and fair play that characterise true sporting achievement.

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