



The Evolution of Pro Kabaddi League in India

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Abstract: The ancient Indian sport of Kabaddi found a new lease of life with the birth of the Pro Kabaddi League (PKL). Being a game pioneered and dominated by India since its inception, the overwhelmingly positive reception of the League by the Indian audience has given an opportunity to the promoters to bring the league back for a second season. Appreciated and followed by millions of people around the country, the PKL was a major hit for both the game and the promoters.

For long period of time Kabaddi was thought to be a game played in the rural areas of our country, with not much interest shown in the game by those living in cities. Not even fit to be a part of the Olympics, India had to fight hard to keep it alive in the Asian Games, right since it was introduced in 1990.

The all-conquering Indian team has won seven gold medals in the sport on the trot. After the idea to start a league based on Kabaddi was made, it caught the attention and attracted not only the Indian audience, but also film stars and corporate franchises who enthusiastically took part in the bidding process of the teams and players.

Keywords: Pro Kabaddi League, Infrastructure, Performance

1. GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Kabaddi is an indigenous game of India. Therefore, Indian player are played better than others country. In Asian games India got gold medal from very first and India was unbitten by any country. But in pro-Kabaddi Indian and foreign player are played together in a team and 25 players and featured in a squad.

Since its inception in 2014, the Pro Kabaddi League has essayed its role as a feeder for Indian Kabaddi and has laid out a platform for some of the best talent all across the country to showcase their talent and even carve out a career for them.

A game that finds its roots in the wide domain of India's history, Kabaddi as a sport has certainly been rekindled with the institutionalizing of the PKL, which currently sits in second place in the standings of India's most watched sports league, behind the Indian Premier League.

Going by the recent statistical studies, the Pro Kabaddi League was viewed by a record 312 million viewers, only 100 million viewers less than the count taken for the Indian Premier League.

What makes the 312 million a staggering figure is that fact that the league was watched by almost three times the number of people who watched the FIFA World Cup, one of the most followed tournaments on a global level.

Big names from all across the country from various fields such as cinema, politics have all played their part in contributing to the Pro Kabaddi League's growth, adding to the glitz and glamour of the Pro Kabaddi League.

1.1. Significance of the Study

The study will provide information to the teachers of physical education, coaches, trainees, official's sports organizations of the country, regarding some of hindrances which impede the progress of Kabaddi in India. The study will bring the light outstanding performance of the Kabaddi players and

the teams to the past. So that due reorganization and honours may be given to them. The study will help in comparing the existing standards of the game with the performance of the previous years and it may, in turn, help in determine the future of the game. The information presented in the study will act as a source of reference for teachers of physical education, coaches and professional students in the field of physical education.

2. METHODOLOGY

The present chapter deals with the design of the, collection of data and the statistical techniques used for the treatment to the obtained data.

Methodology of this project work are discussed below –

- Design of the study
- Secondary source

2.1. Design of the Study

As per the requirement and nature of the study, a case study was designed to explore the Pro Kabaddi, the development of Indian Kabaddi through Pro Kabaddi league.

A case study was considered appropriate to explore in depth information on various aspects of the case which is the subject matter of the study, designed in which historical, analytical and interpretive methods were utilized to collect the relevant data.

2.2. Secondary Source

In addition to the above, the data was also collected from secondary sources. Brief information of Indian Kabaddi was got by secondary source, like as – internet, newspaper, TV channels, Wikipedia, magazine etc.

3. HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE GAME KABADDI IN INDIA

Kabaddi is one of the most popular games in India, played mainly among people in village. It is regarded as a team contact sports as a recreational form of combat training. The word Kabaddi might have been derived from the Tamilnadu word “KAI-PIDI meaning to hold hands. There are four forms of Kabaddi played in India are 1) Amar 2) Suranjeevi 3) Huttuttoo 4) Gaminee. Suranjeevi is the form used in international matches generally and played in Asian games.

Kabaddi received international exposure during the 1936 Berlin Olympics. The game was included for the first time in Asian games in Beijing in 1990 and won the gold medal and has also won gold at the following six Asian games in Hiroshima 1994, Bangkok 1998 Busan 2002, Doha in 2006 and Guangzhou in 2010. India won the Kabaddi world championship in 2007 beating Iran 29-19.

3.1. Kabaddi Federations in India

The Kabaddi Federation of India (KFI) was founded in 1950, and it compiled a standard set of rules. The Amateur Kabaddi Federation of India (AKFI) was founded in 1973. The AKFI has given new shape to the rules and it has also the rights of modification in the rules. The Asian Kabaddi Federation was founded under the chairmanship of Sharad Pawar.

The Governing body of Kabaddi in Asia is Asian Kabaddi Federation (AKF) headed by Mr. Janardan Singh Gehlot. AKF is affiliated to Olympic Council of Asia. Parent body to regulate the game at international level is International Kabaddi Federation (IKF). India won the world cup in December 2013 by defeating Pakistan in finals at Punjab.

In 1979, a return test between Bangladesh and India was held at different places of India including Mumbai, Hyderabad, and Punjab. The Asian Kabaddi Championship was successfully arranged in 1980 and India emerged as the champion and Bangladesh as the runners-up. Bangladesh became runners-up again in 1985 in Asian Kabaddi Championship held in Jaipur, India. The other teams included in the tournament were Nepal, Malaysia and Japan. Kabaddi was played as a demonstration sport at the 1936 Summer Olympics in Berlin. The game was included for the first time in Asian Games held in Beijing in 1990. Eight countries took part including India, China, Japan, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Bangladesh. India won the gold medal and has since won gold at the following three Asian Games in Hiroshima in 1994, Bangkok in 1998, Bussan in 2002, and in Doha 2006.

In 2014, India introduced the Pro Kabaddi League, an eight-city league with games to be played on a caravan basis with each team playing each other twice in July and August, 2014. In a significant value addition to Kabaddi, these were carried live on prime-time TV by the international broadcaster, Star Sports for millions to view across India and the world.

3.2. History of Pro-Kabaddi League

The Pro Kabaddi League was first held in 2014; its founder, Charu Sharma, was influenced by the popularity of the Kabaddi tournament at the 2006 Asian Games, which utilized an indoor version of the game played on a court. Sharma cited the Indian Premier League as an influence on the overall formatting of the competition, noting that "mere sport works well [in India], but if you package it better, it works better." The PKL uses a franchise-based model; the league began with eight teams, each of which having paid fees of up to US\$250,000 to join.

There were doubts over whether the PKL would be successful, noting that there were many leagues attempting to emulate the IPL's business model and success, and that unlike cricket, there were relatively fewer well-known players in Kabaddi. However, it was also noted that Kabaddi was widely played in grassroots community settings, and could thus attract a wide variety of rural and metropolitan viewers for advertisers to target if the league gained significant traction.

The inaugural season was seen by a total of 435 million viewers, placing it just behind the total-season viewership of the 2014 Indian Premier League season, while the inaugural championship was seen by 86.4 million viewers. Star Sports, the PKL's broadcaster, subsequently announced in 2015 that it would acquire a 74% stake in the league's parent company Marshal Sports. For the 2017 season, the PKL added four new teams, and changed its format to split the teams into two divisions known as "zones".

SEASON -1: The first signing and auction of players for the 8 teams was held on 20 May 2014 in Mumbai. India's national Kabaddi captain Rakesh Kumar was the priciest among the players bought for ₹12.80 lakh by the Pirates. Sports Authority of India's Deepak Nivas was bought by Telugu Titans franchise for ₹12.60 lakh. Tae DeokEom was the highest paid overseas player bought for ₹7 lakhs by Patna franchise.

The duration of the season was from 26 July 2014 to 31 August 2014. There were double round robin matches along with two semi-finals, third place and final games. 56 games were to be played in first round and 4 in play off stage making total of 60 games. 8 teams took part in first edition. First game was played on July 26 between U Mumbai and Jaipur Pink Panthers and the final was played on August 31 at Mumbai. Jaipur Pink Panthers beat U Mumbai by 35-24 to win the inaugural Pro Kabaddi League.

SEASON – 2: Star Sports Pro Kabaddi season 2 was from July 18 to 23 August 2015. They were a total of 60 matches played this season with two semi-finals, a third-place play-off and a final. First game was played on July 18 between U Mumbai and Jaipur Pink Panthers and the final was played on August 23 at Mumbai between U Mumbai and Bengaluru Bulls. Mumbai beat Bengaluru Bulls by 36-30 to win the 2015 season of Pro Kabaddi League stood first, Bengaluru Bulls stood second and Telugu Titans stood on third position in the league.

SEASON – 3: Star Sports Pro Kabaddi Season 3 will have two editions. The COO of Star India, Mr. Sanjay Gupta confirmed that Star Sports Pro Kabaddi wants to make Pro Kabaddi, a 5-week event, happen 10 weeks a year by having two editions a year. The idea is to play the tournament once in January–February 2016 and once in June–July 2016. It also had 8 teams. Patna Pirates beat U Mumbai by 3 Points in the final in Delhi to take home the trophy. PuneriPaltan came third this season.

SEASON – 4: The fourth season took place from June 25 to July 31, with the existing eight teams participating. Patna Pirates beat Jaipur Pink Panthers in the men's final. Season 4 also saw the launch of first professional woman Kabaddi league, Women's Kabaddi Challenge (WKC). First season saw 3 teams namely Ice Divas, Fire Birds and Storm Queens battle it out to be the first ever WKC champions. The final, scheduled along with the men's final in Hyderabad, saw the Storm Queens defeat the Fire Birds.

SEASON – 5: The 2017 season will be the fifth edition of the Pro Kabaddi League, and it will feature a total of 12 teams, including the new teams from Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Tamil Nadu, and Gujarat.

The team Haryana is known as Haryana Steelers owned by JSW Sports. Sachin Tendulkar co-owns the Tamil Nadu team named Tamil Thalaivas. The Uttar Pradesh team is named as UP Yoddha owned by GMR group and Gujarat team is named Gujarat Fortune Giants owned by Gautam Adani.

SEASON – 6: The Pro Kabaddi League is back better and bigger as the twelve teams in the fray are set to battle it out on the mat for more than three weeks, starting from the 7th of October 2018 at the Jawaharlal Indoor Stadium in Chennai in the sixth edition of the lucrative league. The sixth edition of the league is fast approaching and with that, a whole lot of excitement as some of the best kabaddi players will be contesting across twelve teams, which will certainly prove to be a feast for the eyes for the kabaddi fans, old and new.

In the upcoming edition, Iranian Fazel Athrachi, one of the most popular figures for his prowess in the defensive unit will be leading U Mumba and will also be one of the better-known faces from the international quota, which will see players from across nine countries taking part in the league.

3.3. The Monetary Growth Continues

Once Star Sports' contract as the main sponsors of the Pro Kabaddi League came to a close, the battle for the sponsorship eventually began ahead of the fifth season and in the end, Chinese handset maker Vivo Electronics Corporation bagged the deal for a record sum of Rs. 300 crore for a period of five years, sending social media into a tizzy.



Back in season one of the Pro Kabaddi League; Rakesh Kumar emerged as the costliest player, bought for a sum of 12 lakh rupees. Now, close to four years down the line and five seasons later, the highest bid from the auctions ahead of the sixth season went for more than twelve-times that amount, highlighting the meteoric rise of the league.

Monu Goyat hogged the limelight at the end of the auctions as he pocketed a record 1.51 crore rupees, the highest-ever pay for a non-cricket athlete, breaking the previously held record of 1.50 crore rupees that Bengaluru FC paid to sign the services of Sunil Chhetri.

Not only has the money gone up, the influx of the players looking to participate in the cash-rich league also skyrocketed to a total of 181 players in this season, underlining the constant development of the league with each passing season.

3.4. India's Performance in Kabaddi after Pro Kabaddi League in World Cup (Standard Style)

India has won all six Kabaddi world cups played till now. Iran is the three times runner-up of world cups. All the world cups were held in India.

Year	India's Position	Last Match played by India
2016	Winner	 India vs.  Iran (Final match) India won by 38-29

In Asian Games

Year	Host	Final	
		Winner	Runner-up
2014	Incheon	India	Iran
2018	Jakarta–Palembang	Iran	South Korea

3.5. Impact of PKL on Mass Media

The new season of Kabaddi is even giving the national cricket team a run for its money. By some audience analysis it earned three times as many viewers as the recent Indian/Sri Lanka series. Kabaddi audience growth has been nothing short of phenomenal. In the opening match of its 138-fixture season it attracted a viewership which was a 10th of its audience for the entire 2014 season.

The Sri Lanka series may have ended but filling each of India's top five sports programme slots in a week, as PKL 5 has, is nevertheless impressive. Our data (see chart) shows that the most recent iteration of the PKL has already attracted a cumulative audience which outstrips the whole of season four. The competition's format of high-intensity 40-minute matches lends itself to a strong viewer proposition, so much so that the league has been extended to take in extra matches and teams this season.



Statistics from the Pro Kabaddi League, 2018

PKL can point to a growth in the length of time people are watching too. Viewing duration is up 26% from 19 minutes per match last season, to 24 minutes per match. For sponsors, including mobile phone manufacturer Vivo, the PKL is turning into a gold rush.

Because broadcaster STAR, owned by 21st Century Fox, is also the league's major shareholder, sponsors are offered enviable opportunities to intertwine in-venue and in-broadcast spots. That permits a level of impact that cannot easily be replicated in other sports where there can often be clashes between TV advertisers and title, team and venue sponsors.

PKL's ability to offer sponsors synchronicity across these mediums is driving a return on investment that other sports will struggle to match. Similarly, broadcaster STAR, with its shareholding in soccer's Indian Super League (ISL), will be able to offer the same supercharged sponsorship opportunities in football as PKL provides to partners.

That has seen 10-second advertising slots increase in price to 160,000INR (€2,100/\$2,500) this season (compared to 612,000 for IPL), a reflection of the fact that despite its rustic roots, kabaddi's audience is now split almost 50/50 between urban and rural areas. STAR has now shown with PKL and ISL a unique model can offer unique acceleration.

4. CONCLUSION

The format of the competition and the evening schedule has managed to raise the profile of the game to a whole new level. The sky is the limit from here with an increasing interest in schools and colleges across both urban and rural markets.

One of the unintended benefits of the PKL is also the increasing possibility of showcasing the sport for an Olympic entry in the years to come. An inclusion in the demonstrative schedule for Tokyo in 2020 could be a good short-term goal for the administrators of the sport.

The backing of the Indian and Continental federations running Kabaddi augurs well both for the league and the sport overall. But a lot remains to be done in terms of widening and deepening the sport across the country.

Despite the immense success of the league, the sport remains a shallow pursuit limited to small sections of the country. PKL presents a transformational opportunity for the sport in terms of arousing interest and drawing more children to the sport.

The key to capitalize this wave of interest is in building an eco system of facilities and personnel to identify and nurture talent across states. Considering the minimalist nature of the sport, it aligns well with the socio-economic background of the Indian population.

Eventually, Star and Mashal could also work towards building a larger multi-tiered league that could achieve great success on the lines of the Premier League in England and the NFL in the USA.

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