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National Sports Day 2026: Dhyan Chand at 121, and the Year the Khel Ratna Was Not Given

29 August 2026 ·

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CURATED & WRITTEN BY

**Bharat Choudhary**

UPSC Educator & Content Creator

[in linkedin.com/in/epicbharat](https://www.linkedin.com/in/epicbharat)

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National Sports Day 2026: Dhyan Chand at 121, and the Year the Khel Ratna Was Not Given

29 August 2026 · 9 min read ·

✓ Every fact web-verified against primary sources

*India observed **National Sports Day** on **August 29, 2026**, marking the **121st birth anniversary** of **Major Dhyan Chand**, born on **August 29, 1905**. The central event was held at the **Major Dhyan Chand National Stadium** near India Gate, led by Sports Minister **Dr. Mansukh Mandaviya**, under the continuing '**Ek Ghanta Khel Ke Maidan Mein**' campaign, first run on National Sports Day 2025, under which the Sports Minister urged citizens to spend **one hour on the playing field every week**.*

THE DAY AND THE MAN

National Sports Day was instituted in **2012** by the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, fixed on Dhyan Chand's birth anniversary.

Dhyan Chand remains the central figure in Indian hockey's founding mythology, and the record supports the mythology. He won **Olympic gold in hockey at Amsterdam in 1928, Los Angeles in 1932 and Berlin in 1936**, the run during which India established the dominance that produced **eight Olympic golds** in men's hockey overall. He was awarded the **Padma Bhushan in 1956**.

In **August 2021**, the **Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna Award**, India's highest sporting honour, was **renamed** the **Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna Award**.

A CORRECTION TO THE STANDARD TEMPLATE

*It is widely stated that the . For 2026 that is **not** what happened. The **National Sports Awards for 2025 were announced on August 18, 2026**, eleven days before Sports Day, and **no conferment ceremony at Rashtrapati Bhavan appears in the official record for the August 26 to 29 window.***

*The 2025 list carried **no recipient for the Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna**. It is the first year the country's highest sporting honour has gone unawarded since **2014**. Seventeen sportspersons received the **Arjuna Award**, with one **Arjuna (Lifetime)** to **I. Arumainayagam**, and five **Dronacharya** awards were made. The selection committee was chaired by **Justice (Retd.) Arun Kumar Mishra**, former Judge of the Supreme Court. **No conferment ceremony had been announced as of the date of this edition.** Do not write that the awards were announced or conferred on National Sports Day.*

Awards are conferred by the **President of India**. The recurring possibility that **no Khel Ratna is awarded in a given year** is itself analytically interesting: it indicates a selection committee applying a performance **threshold** rather than distributing an honour annually by default, which is a defensible position and an unpopular one.

THE SPORTING CONTEXT: A 52-YEAR BEST IN HOCKEY

Two days before Sports Day, on **August 27, 2026**, the **Indian women's hockey team finished fifth at the FIH Women's World Cup**, beating **Germany 3-1** in the classification match at **Wagener Stadium, Amstelveen, in the Netherlands**.

DETAIL	FACT
Result	India 3 , Germany 1
Scorers	Navneet Kaur (2) , Ishika Chaudhary (1) , who opened the scoring in the 43rd minute
Germany's goal	Lynn Krings
Germany's ranking	World No. 5
Captain	Salima Tete
Reward announced August 28	Rs 50 lakh in total, announced by Hockey India

*This is India's **best finish in 52 years**, not its best ever. India finished **fourth in 1974**, at the inaugural edition of the tournament. Several reports blur this, and an answer that says "best ever" is wrong.*

The campaign context matters as much as the result: India lost only once, to the Netherlands, and drew with China, England and Australia. That follows a difficult four-year stretch in which the team failed to qualify for the Paris Olympics and lost its Pro League status.

THE POLICY FRAME

On August 27, 2026, the Prime Minister addressed the **Khelo India Samvaad** by video conference, with participants connecting from institutes across the country, and used the occasion to **launch a national talent hunt**. Two framings from that address are worth carrying into an answer.

The first situates sport within the national development narrative: sport is described not merely as medal-winning but as a campaign to integrate India's sporting capacity and youth energy into the **Viksit Bharat** project.

The second is sharper and more usable: the observation that **other countries win medals in sports in which India does not even participate**, and that India must therefore master those disciplines as well. This is a **portfolio argument**. India's Olympic medal profile has historically concentrated in a narrow set of disciplines, while a large share of the total medals available sits in events, particularly in aquatics, gymnastics, rowing, cycling and winter sport, where India has negligible presence. **A country cannot win medals in events it does not enter**, and closing that gap is an infrastructure and pathway question rather than a talent question.

CRITICAL ANALYSIS

The structural argument in Indian sports policy concerns the ratio of reward to pathway. Cash awards for successful teams are visible, popular and immediate. Grassroots infrastructure, coaching qualification systems and competition calendars are none of these things, and they are what determine whether a result is repeatable. **Rs 50 lakh distributed after a fifth-place finish is a recognition, not an investment**, and the honest question about any such announcement is what the same sum would have purchased upstream.

The institutional context has changed materially. The **National Sports Governance Act, 2025** addresses the long-running problems of national sports federations: contested elections, prolonged litigation, absent athlete representation and weak grievance redress. Federations control selection, and selection controls careers, which is why federation governance is an athlete-welfare issue rather than an administrative one.

On funding architecture, the two principal instruments are **Khelo India**, which addresses grassroots identification and infrastructure, and the **Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS)**, which supports elite athletes with individualised funding for training, equipment and international exposure. The design logic is a pipeline: Khelo India widens the base, TOPS sharpens the **apex**. The persistent weakness is the **middle**, the transition from junior identification to senior international competition, where athletes typically leave the sport.

On women's hockey specifically, the fifth-place finish is a useful case study in sustained institutional backing. Corporate and State sponsorship of national hockey, most visibly by Odisha, provided continuity through a period of poor results. That continuity is precisely what most Indian sporting programmes lack: funding tends to follow results, which makes recovery from a bad cycle structurally difficult.

UPSC RELEVANCE

GS Paper 2: Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation; welfare schemes; institutions and bodies.

GS Paper 1: Society, and the role of sport in social mobility and national identity.

Prelims angle: Dhyan Chand's birth year and Olympic golds, the 2021 renaming of the Khel Ratna, the institution years of the Arjuna, Dronacharya and Dhyan Chand awards, and India's best-ever Women's World Cup finish are all directly examinable.

Mains angle: *"India's sporting deficit is not a talent deficit but a participation deficit."* Build the answer around the portfolio argument, that a large share of available medals sits in disciplines India does not contest, and connect it to infrastructure, coaching and school sport.

Interview angle: cash rewards for winning teams are announced within a day. Coaching appointments take years. What does that **asymmetry** tell you about how sports administration is actually incentivised?

★ FACTS CORNER — KNOWLEDGE PEDIA

NATIONAL SPORTS DAY:

Observed on 29 August, the birth anniversary of Major Dhyan Chand, born 29 August 1905 at Allahabad.

Instituted in 2012 by the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports. 2026 marks his 121st birth anniversary.

Central event at the Major Dhyan Chand National Stadium, New Delhi, led by Sports Minister Dr. Mansukh Mandaviya.

Campaign: 'Ek Ghanta Khel Ke Maidan Mein', running since National Sports Day 2025. The 2026 appeal was for one hour on the playing field every week.

Khelo India Samvaad addressed by the Prime Minister on 27 August 2026, with participation from over 5,000 institutes.

MAJOR DHYAN CHAND:

Olympic hockey gold in 1928 (Amsterdam), 1932 (Los Angeles) and 1936 (Berlin).

Awarded the Padma Bhushan in 1956.

India's men's hockey team has eight Olympic golds in total.

NATIONAL SPORTS AWARDS:

Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna Award: India's highest sporting honour, renamed in August 2021 from the Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna Award.

Arjuna Award, instituted 1961: outstanding performance over four years.

Dronacharya Award, instituted 1985: for coaches.

Dhyan Chand Award, instituted 2002: lifetime achievement.

Rashtriya Khel Protsahan Puraskar: for corporate and institutional promotion of sport.

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad (MAKA) Trophy: for the best-performing university.

Conferred by the President of India.

For 2025, the awards were announced on 18 August 2026, not on National Sports Day. No Khel Ratna was awarded, the first vacancy since 2014. 17 Arjuna awards, 1 Arjuna (Lifetime) to I. Arumainayagam, and 5 Dronacharya awards. Selection committee chaired by Justice (Retd.) Arun Kumar Mishra. No conferment ceremony had been announced as of 29 August 2026.

FIH WOMEN'S WORLD CUP 2026:

India finished fifth, beating Germany 3-1 on 27 August 2026 at Wagener Stadium, Amstelveen, Netherlands.

Scorers: Navneet Kaur (2) and Ishika Chaudhary (1); Germany's goal by Lynn Krings.

Captain: Salima Tete. Hockey India President: Dilip Tirkey.

Reward announced by Hockey India on 28 August: Rs 50 lakh in total. The per-player and per-support-staff split reported alongside it (Rs 2 lakh and Rs 1 lakh) could not be confirmed from a primary source.

India's best-ever finish remains fourth, at the inaugural 1974 edition. Fifth in 2026 is the best in 52 years.

Governing body: FIH, the International Hockey Federation, founded 1924, headquartered at Lausanne.

The first FIH Women's World Cup was held in 1974.

SPORTS POLICY ARCHITECTURE:

Khelo India: grassroots talent identification, infrastructure and the Khelo India Games.

Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS): individualised elite athlete support.

Fit India Movement: mass participation and fitness.

Sports Authority of India (SAI): the implementing body under the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports.

National Anti-Doping Agency (NADA) and the National Dope Testing Laboratory; the National Anti-Doping Act, 2022 provides the statutory framework.

The National Sports Governance Act, 2025 governs national sports federations, their elections, athlete representation and grievance redress.

Sport is a State subject under the Seventh Schedule; the Union role runs through funding, national federations and international representation.

WATCH THE TRAP:

The National Sports Awards were not announced on National Sports Day in 2026. They were announced on 18 August.

India's best-ever Women's Hockey World Cup finish is fourth (1974), not fifth (2026).

Khel Ratna was renamed in 2021; the earlier name was Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna.

The Dhyan Chand Award (2002) for lifetime achievement is distinct from the Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna Award. Both carry his name; they are different honours.

Sport is a State subject, which is why national policy operates largely through funding rather than legislation.

Sources: PIB, Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, Sports Authority of India

Source: National Sports Day 2026: Dhyan Chand at 121, and the Year the Khel Ratna Was Not Given — Ujiyari.com

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CURATED & WRITTEN BY

Bharat Choudhary

UPSC Educator & Content Creator

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