

## “Rise of India’s Indigenous Sports to the Global Stage” — A Call to Celebrate and Globalize India’s Sporting Heritage, at WAVES 2025

Indigenous games are not just physical contests, but an integral part of our communities, traditions and identity: Odisha CM Mohan Charan Majhi

Khelo India initiative is a transformative force in nurturing grassroots talent and shaping the future of Indian sports: Raksha Nikhil Khadse

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In a spirited and insightful panel discussion held yesterday at WAVES, Mumbai, the spotlight was turned on the rich heritage of Indigenous Sports and their growing journey from Indian heartlands to global arenas. The session, titled “*Indigenous Sports: From India to the Global Stage*”, witnessed the convergence of influential policymakers, celebrated athletes, sports entrepreneurs, and thought leaders united in a shared vision: to catapult India’s native games to international recognition and success.



Delivering the keynote address, Shri Mohan Charan Majhi, Chief Minister of Odisha, passionately highlighted the deep cultural roots of indigenous sports in India. “These games are not just physical contests; they are an integral part of our communities, our traditions, and our identity,” he said, expressing gratitude to Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi for his visionary leadership towards making India a global sports powerhouse. Shri Majhi further highlighted that Odisha, home to vibrant tribal communities has preserved these ancient games and is emerging as a sports hub. “We are committed to nurturing rural talents and ensuring every gifted athlete finds a platform to shine”, he stated.



Smt. Raksha Nikhil Khadse, Union Minister of State for Youth Affairs & Sports, expressed her heartfelt gratitude to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the WAVES platform for fostering a meaningful dialogue around this significant movement. “India has already emerged as a global ambassador of Yoga. Now, we are proudly showcasing our traditional games like Kho-Kho and Kabaddi on the international stage. The Khelo India initiative is proving to be a transformative force in nurturing grassroots talent and shaping the future of Indian sports,” she remarked. She further emphasized that sports not only

promote physical well-being but also strengthen relationships and foster unity—reflecting the very essence of India’s rich cultural heritage.

Anupam Goswami, League Commissioner, Pro Kabaddi League, emphasized India's vast potential as a sports market. “We must harness this opportunity by promoting indigenous sports, which hold immense emotional and cultural value”, he added.

Fazel Atrachali, iconic PKL athlete from Iran, shared how Kabaddi has transformed lives. “Thanks to PKL, Kabaddi has become a professional sport, giving players fame and financial security”, flagged an elated Fazel.

Nic Coward, Regulatory Chairperson, English Cricket Board, stressed the importance of globalization and modern distribution channels. “To popularize traditional sports worldwide, we must embrace digital platforms, including e-sports”, he flagged.

Sudhanshu Mittal, President of the Kho-Kho Federation, revealed that Kho-Kho is now played in 55 countries, with a target to reach over 90 nations by year’s end. “Our indigenous games are unique—requiring more strategy, stamina, and spirit. They hold immense global appeal. But they need government backing, branding, and diplomatic support”, he asserted.

Yannick Colaco, Founder of Fancode, pointed to technology as a game-changer. “Access and engagement are key. With the right tech, we can create deeper fan connections and take Indian sports global”, he added.



The session was moderated by Mantra Mugdh, who masterfully navigated the discussion, weaving together diverse insights and forward-looking strategies.

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