

Game, Set & Match Monthly

Gaming and Sports Law Newsletter (April 2026)

GAMING NEWS UPDATE

1. MEITY NOTIFIES ONLINE GAMING RULES

The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology has notified the Online Gaming Rules, 2026 under the Promotion and Regulation of Online Gaming (PROG) Act, 2025, and the regime takes effect from May 1, 2026. The rules are meant to operationalize the law by creating a formal regulatory structure for digital gaming, while keeping the core prohibition on online money gaming intact.

A major feature of the framework is the creation of the Online Gaming Authority of India, which will function as the central decision-maker on classification and enforcement. The authority will have quasi-judicial powers akin to a civil court, including the ability to conduct inquiries and summon persons, and the process is expected to be largely digital.

The rules continue to separate the sector into three categories: online social games, e-sports, and online money games. Social games may earn revenue through subscriptions or similar models, but they cannot involve payouts to users; e-sports may involve pre-declared prizes, but only if they are recognized as sporting events; and online money games, where users stake money for winnings, remain banned.

The notification also clarifies that online games that do not involve real money will not require mandatory registration, which points to a lighter compliance burden for non-monetized products. At the same time, the authority will still examine whether a game's actual structure brings it within the money-gaming prohibition, even if it is marketed as something else.

Enforcement is built around cyber-cell policing, with investigations able to be handled by police officers in charge of cyber cells and nodal cyber-cell officers at the state, district, or police-station level.

The article also notes that the law carries stiff penalties: facilitators of online money gaming can face up to three years' imprisonment and fines up to ₹1 crore, while advertising such platforms can attract up to two years' imprisonment and fines up to ₹50 lakh.

In effect, the government is giving the sector a defined compliance pathway for social gaming and e-sports, while preserving a strict prohibition for money gaming and the promotional ecosystem around it.

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SPORTS NEWS UPDATE

1. AFI MANDATES PRIOR APPROVAL FOR ATHLETE SPONSORSHIP DEALS

The Athletics Federation of India (AFI) has introduced a new rule requiring all track and field athletes to obtain prior approval before entering into any sponsorship or commercial agreement with third parties, including private backers such as Reliance, JSW, and OGQ.

The stated objective is to protect the interests of both athletes and sponsors, particularly in light of increasing instances of athletes frequently switching sponsors. Under the new system, sponsors are also expected to verify AFI approval before executing agreements, with the federation committing to respond within a short timeframe.

The move comes against the backdrop of a shift away from centralised training structures, with many elite athletes now training under private organisations rather than national camps, increasing the importance of private sponsorships. However, the rule has drawn criticism from legal experts and stakeholders, who argue that it effectively restricts athletes' commercial freedom and could amount to an unreasonable restraint on trade, potentially raising constitutional concerns under the right to practice a profession.

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2. DELHI HIGH COURT MANDATES FULL COMPLIANCE WITH NEW SPORTS LAW REGIME IN FEDERATION ELECTIONS

The Delhi High Court allowed the results of the All India Tennis Association (AITA) elections held on September 28, 2024, to stand, but directed that the elected body will function only as an interim arrangement under the supervision of a court-appointed Administrator, former Chief Justice Gita Mittal.

In its order, Justice Mini Pushkarna made it clear that while the outcome of the 2024 elections will not be disturbed at this stage, the executive committee will operate in a limited capacity and remain subject to the oversight of Justice (Retd.) Mittal. The Court has tasked Justice Mittal with managing the affairs of AITA and ensuring that its functioning is aligned with the National Sports Code and the amended constitution and by-laws by June 30.

As of now AITA has a 25-member Executive Committee but as per the NSG Act, it needs to be a 15-member panel. Justice (Retd.) Mittal has also been directed to conduct fresh elections within a period of three months after the constitution is aligned with the Sports Act, 2025 and Sports Governance Rules 2026.

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3. FIFA ALLOWS AFGHAN WOMEN'S TEAM IN EXILE TO COMPETE WITHOUT STATE APPROVAL

In a landmark and highly unusual move, FIFA has amended its regulations to allow the Afghan women's national team in exile to compete in official international matches without recognition from the Taliban-controlled Afghanistan Football Federation. The decision applies to "Afghan Women United", a team made up of refugee players dispersed across countries like Australia and Europe, many of whom fled Afghanistan after the Taliban returned to power in 2021 and banned women from participating in sports.

This represents a fundamental departure from FIFA's long-standing rule that national teams must be approved by their country's official football federation. The change was driven by years of advocacy and forms part of FIFA's broader strategy to restore pathways for Afghan women to participate in international football.

The team is now expected to return to international competition, potentially as early as upcoming FIFA windows, although it will miss qualification for the 2027 Women's World Cup but could compete in future events such as Olympic qualifiers.

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4. PALESTINIAN FA ESCALATES FIFA-ISRAEL DISPUTE TO CAS

The Palestinian Football Association has filed an appeal before the Court of Arbitration for Sport challenging FIFA's decision not to sanction Israel over clubs based in West Bank settlements. The dispute centres on the long-standing argument that Israeli clubs operating in contested Palestinian territory should not be allowed to participate in competitions organised by the Israel Football Association, as the territory is claimed for a future Palestinian state.

FIFA declined to take action earlier in 2026, citing the "unresolved and complex" legal status of the West Bank under international law, effectively avoiding a substantive ruling on the merits.

Frustrated after over 15 years of inconclusive proceedings within FIFA, the Palestinian body has now escalated the matter to CAS, arguing that FIFA's inaction is unjust and seeking a binding adjudication. The appeal also comes amid broader tensions, including visa issues affecting Palestinian officials attending FIFA Congress events and ongoing disruptions to football activity in Gaza, where infrastructure and competitions have been severely impacted.

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5. UKRAINE CHALLENGES "NEUTRAL" STATUS OF RUSSIAN ATHLETES AT OLYMPICS

Ukraine has formally asked the International Olympic Committee to review the eligibility of certain Russian athletes competing as "neutral participants," alleging that some may have links to the military or have violated Olympic participation conditions.

Under the IOC's current framework, a limited number of Russian and Belarusian athletes are allowed to compete in events such as the Paris 2024 Olympics and the Milano-Cortina 2026 Winter Games without national flags or anthems, provided they meet strict neutrality criteria, including no support for the Ukraine invasion.

Ukraine claims to have compiled evidence of "systematic violations" of these rules and has urged the IOC to reassess whether such athletes should be permitted to compete at all.

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6. CAS TO ACT AS FINAL APPEAL BODY DURING FIFA WORLD CUP 2026

FIFA has confirmed that the Court of Arbitration for Sport will establish an ad hoc division to function as the final appeal body during the FIFA World Cup 2026, ensuring rapid resolution of disputes arising during the tournament.

The tribunal will operate only for the duration of the tournament (11 June to 19 July 2026) and will handle appeals against FIFA decisions, including

disciplinary actions, eligibility disputes, and other competition-related matters.

A key feature of this mechanism is its expedited process, with decisions required to be issued within 48 hours, ensuring that legal disputes do not disrupt the flow of the competition. Importantly, cases can only be brought before this body after exhausting FIFA's internal legal remedies, and only where an appeal is permitted under FIFA's statutes.

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DSK Legal Knowledge Center

Contact Details for any queries: knowledge.management@dsklegal.com

Mumbai

1701, One World Centre,
Floor 17, Tower 2B,
841, Senapati Bapat Marg,
Mumbai - 400013.
Tel +91 22 6658 8000

Mumbai

C-16, Dhanraj Mahal,
3rd Floor,
Apollo Bunder, Colaba,
Mumbai - 400001.
Tel +91 22 6152 6000

New Delhi

Max House, Level 5,
Okhla Industrial Area, Phase 3,
New Delhi - 110020.
Tel +91 11 4661 6666

Dubai

Bay Square,
Building 12, P 03, Dubai,
United Arab Emirates
T: +971 50 450 4026

Bengaluru

201, 2nd floor, Prestige Loka,
7/1 & 7/7, Brunton Road,
Craig Park Layout, Ashok Nagar,
Bengaluru - 560025.
Tel +91 80 6954 8770

Pune

Ground Floor, 1 Modibaug,
Ganesh Khind Road, Shivajinagar,
Pune - 411016.
Tel +91 20 6684 7600

Abu Dhabi

3112, 31, Tamouh Tower,
ADGM, Abu Dhabi,
Al Reem Island, UAE
T: +971 50 450 4026

✉ contactus@dsklegal.com

 [DSK Legal](#)

 www.dsklegal.com

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