



2026:DHC:834



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* IN THE HIGH COURT OF DELHI AT NEW DELHI

% Judgment pronounced on: 02.02.2026+ W.P.(C) 5736/2025 and CM APPLs.26168/2025, 31973/2025

ALL INDIA PICKLEBALL ASSOCIATION Petitioner
Through: Mr. Dayan Krishnan, Sr. Advocate
along with Mr. Gautam Narayan,
Mr. Hemant Phalpher, Mr. R. A. Iyer,
Ms. Disha Joshi and Mr. Sukrit Seth,
Advocates.

versus

UNION OF INDIA & ANR. Respondents
Through: Mr. Jayant Mehta, Sr. Advocate along
with Ms. Arunima Dwivedi, CGSC,
Mr. Aakash Pathak, GP, Ms. Pinky
Pawar, Mr. Sainyam Bhardwaj,
Advocates and Mr. Mohd. Zeeshan,
Consultant for UOI.
Mr. Rajshekhar Rao, Sr. Advocate
along with Mr. Ashish Verma,
Mr. Saksham Thareja, Mr. Nikhil
Thakur and Mr. Kartikey Bhargava,
Advocates for R-2.
Mr. D. N. Goburdhan, Sr. Advocate
along with Mr. Kunal Kohli,
Ms. Shreyha Kohli, Advocates for
proposed Respondent no.3.

CORAM:
HON'BLE MR. JUSTICE SACHIN DATTA

JUDGMENT

1. The petitioner is an association incorporated on 12.12.2008 for the purpose of promoting and developing the sport of Pickleball. The petitioner claims entitlement to recognition as the National Sports Federation (NSF)



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for the sport of Pickleball in India.

2. For this purpose, the petitioner submitted an application dated 18.10.2024 to the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports (MYAS). However, instead of recognising the petitioner, the MYAS issued an order dated 25.04.2025 recognising the respondent no.2, i.e., the Indian Pickleball Association (IPA), as the NSF for promotion and development of the sport of Pickleball in the country. The said order dated 25.04.2025 reads as under:-

*“No. 10-2/2025/SP-I
Government of India
Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports
Department of Sports*

*Hall No. 101, Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium,
Lodhi Road, New Delhi
Date: 25.04.2025*

To,

*The President/ Secretary General,
Indian Pickleball Association,
2nd Floor, Rituraj chambers,
Swastik Society, Off C.G . Road,
Ahmedabad - 380009
Email: indianpickleballofficial@gmail.com*

Subject: Recognition of Indian Pickleball Association(IPA) as the National Sports Federation for promotion and development of sport of Pickleball in the country - reg.

Sir,

I am directed to refer to Indian Pickleball Association's request on the subject mentioned above and to say that the Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports agrees to recognize the Indian Pickleball Association (IPA) as a National Sports Federation (NSF).

2. This recognition to IPA means granting a major role to the Indian Pickleball Association for promotion and development of the Pickleball sport in India. The recognition has been granted after relaxation of following provisions of the National Sports Development. Code of India,



2011:

- (i) Requirement of three year existence of the federation/ association (para 3.3 of Annexure-11 of the Sports Code 2011);
- (ii) Requirement of affiliation of a State/UT unit with at least 50% district level associations affiliated to it (para 3.10 and 3.19 of Annexure-11 of the Sports Code 2011);

3. The IPA will be under observation with respect to compliance with Sports Code and for a period of two years will not be eligible for funding under the Scheme of Assistance to National Sports Federations.

4. The recognition of Government is subject to continued observance of the following terms and conditions:

- a) The Office bearers of the Association shall invariably be appointed by election as per the Model Election Guidelines issued by the Ministry. The various instructions issued by the Ministry, from time to time, including the age and tenure criteria, for holding the elective offices of the Association shall be scrupulously followed.
- b) The Association shall give at least two months' advance notice to the Government for any change in its Constitution. The copy of the proposed changes should invariably be sent along with the notice.
- c) The Association must maintain its accounts as per the Mercantile System of accounting. The Accounting year should be from 1st April to 31st March. The books of accounts shall always be open to Inspection by authorized representatives of the Government.
- d) The accounts of the Association must be audited by a practicing Chartered Accountant. Audited Statement of account should be sent to the Union Government within six months from the date of expiry of the accounting year.
- e) The Association must scrupulously abide by the guidelines of the Government issued from time to time, for the conduct of National Championships, drawing of advance calendar for holding National Championships, players' grievance system in the management of the Association, etc.
- f) The Association shall have corresponding State/UT bodies affiliated to it in all the State/UTs in conformity with the provisions of the Sports Code.
- g) The Association should also abide by the directions of the Government issued, if any, in the interest of promotion of pickleball sports among its players or Public in general.
- h) The recognition can be reviewed by the Government in case



Memorandum of Association (MOA) of the Association or its practices come into conflict with the Govt. Guidelines issued from time to time.

i) The Ministry's guidelines for selection procedure shall be followed by IPA. The tournaments shall be held for Men & Women at all levels in National, State, District level for Senior, Junior and Sub-Junior.

j) The Association shall scrupulously follow the Ministry's guidelines on RTI applicability and suo-moto disclosure of information on its website and appointment of a Public Information Officer and an Appellate Authority.

k) The Association shall ensure strict compliance of the Government guidelines relating to age fraud, prevention of sexual harassment of women in sports, formation of Internal Complaint Committee in accordance with the provisions of the POSH Act, 2013, Anti-doping, issuance of identity cards to sportspersons etc.

5. The recognition may be withdrawn if:

a) any of the terms and conditions of the recognition are violated;

b) its own Constitution is violated;

c) directions issued by the Union Government are not complied with as required;

d) in the opinion of the Union Government, the Association is not functioning properly;

e) the recognition has been obtained by submitting false information or by mis-representation of facts;

f) the concerned international Federation cancels affiliation or derecognizes or disaffiliates the Association.

This issues with the approval of competent authority.

Yours sincerely,

Sd/-

(Surendra Yadav)

Under Secretary to the Government of India "

3. In the above conspectus, the present petition has been filed by the petitioner assailing the inaction of the respondent no.1 (MYAS) in considering the petitioner's application for recognition as the NSF for the sport of Pickleball, as well as the action of the MYAS in allowing the application for recognition filed by the respondent no.2 (IPA).



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4. It is the case of the petitioner that it has been in existence since the year 2008, i.e., for about 18 years, and has been actively promoting and developing the sport of Pickleball in India.
5. It is submitted that the petitioner obtained recognition from the International Pickleball Federation in 2010, when it was known as the International Federation of Pickleball. The petitioner also claims to be a founding member of the Asia Federation of Pickleball.
6. The petitioner asserts that it has 24 State Associations and about 10,000 players affiliated with it. It is contended that since 2013, the petitioner has organised eight annual national championships for Pickleball in the country, in addition to two Indian Open Tournaments in 2017 and 2018. It is further contended that the petitioner managed to secure the rights to host the Bainbridge Cup in India at Mumbai in 2022, with Team India winning against Pickleball United, a team formed with players from around the world.
7. The petitioner claims to be in compliance with the National Sports Development Code of India, 2011 ('Sports Code'). The petitioner submits that the respondent no.2 (IPA) is an entity registered on 11.11.2024.
8. It is alleged that the said Association is in violation of at least 13 provisions of the Sports Code and is even in violation of the bare minimum requirements of being in existence for three years and having a written constitution. The petitioner submits that the rampant violations of the provisions of the Sports Code by the respondent no. 2 have been wholly disregarded by the respondent no.1 while granting recognition.
9. Further, it is submitted that the exemption granted to the respondent no.2 for two infractions of the Sports Code is without any basis or rationale



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whatsoever.

10. It is alleged that the IPA has set up bogus entities, claiming them to be International Federations and Asian Federations, but in reality, these entities exist only on paper and have no relation to the sport of Pickleball, nor have they conducted any events.

11. It is submitted that the IPA is essentially attempting to fraudulently usurping the position of an NSF for the sport of Pickleball, having done nothing to support, develop, or grow the sport in India.

12. It is submitted that the inaction of the Ministry in considering the application for recognition of the petitioner, and in granting recognition to the IPA, smacks of arbitrariness and *mala fide*. Neither have reasons been supplied, nor has any material been produced to support the recognition or the exemption granted to the IPA.

13. In the counter-affidavit filed on behalf of the respondent no.2, it has been contended that the Sports Code provides for the recognition of National Sports Federations and the observance of best practices by recognised Federations, as stipulated in the Sports Code, along with support and assistance to Federations recognized by the respondent no.1 under the said Code. The Sports Code is stated to be an amalgamation of guidelines issued by the respondent no.1 from time to time.

14. *Vide* Notification dated 01.02.2021, a relaxation provision was introduced in the Sports Code. The said notification reads as follows:-

“No. 12-2/2021-SP-III
Government of India
Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports
Department of Sports

Shastri Bhawan, New Delhi



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1st February, 2021

Sub: National Sports Development Code of India, 2011- inclusion of relaxation provision – regarding

The National Sports Development Code of India, 2011 (Sports Code) has been in force since 31.01.2011. The Government has also, from time to time, issued certain other guidelines and instructions with **regard** to governance and management of Indian Olympic Association (IOA) and National Sports Federations (NSFs). It has been decided to add the following relaxation clause provision at No. 16 under the Heading of Relaxation Clause of the Sports Code 2011 at page 32:

Relaxation clause:

"Government shall have the power to relax any of the provisions of the National Sports Development Code of India, 2011 and other instructions issued with regard to recognition of National Sports Federations (NSFs), renewal of recognition of NSFs on annual basis and governance and management of Indian Olympic Association (IOA) and NSFs, as a special exemption where considered necessary and expedient for the promotion of sports, sportspersons or to remove difficulties in giving true effect to that particular provision of the Sports Code, always being guided by and not inconsistent with the overarching spirit of good governance and ethical conduct enshrined in the Sports Code 2011. The reasons for such relaxation shall be recorded in writing. Power to relax the provisions will vest with Minister In-charge of the Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports."

2. This issues with the approval of Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Youth Affairs & Sports.

Sd/-

(L. Siddhartha Singh)

Joint Secretary to the Government of India"

15. It is submitted that the inclusion of the aforesaid relaxation clause was guided by the practical need to address situations where the rigid application of the provisions of the Sports Code could lead to unfair or unintended outcomes. The relaxation clause gives MYAS limited and considered flexibility to relax specific provisions in deserving or extraordinary cases where strict adherence to the Sports Code would create more problems than



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solutions. Reliance is placed on the judgment of a Co-ordinate Bench of this Court in ***Rajasthan Equestrian Association v. Union of India & Ors.***, 2025 SCC OnLine Del 14, which has upheld the validity of the said relaxation clause.

16. As such, it is contended that there is nothing untoward about the exemption granted to the respondent no.2 *vide* the impugned order dated 25.04.2025.

17. It is submitted that the respondent no.2 is a not-for-profit company duly incorporated under Section 8 of the Companies Act, 2013, by the members of the State Pickleball Association, a trust registered under the Bombay Public Trusts Act, 1950, on 22.08.2019 in the State of Gujarat. The said incorporation was undertaken with the specific object of promoting, regulating, and advancing the sport of Pickleball in India at the national level.

18. It is asserted that the decision to incorporate a separate legal entity under Section 8 was taken in compliance with the Sports Code and other applicable policies and statutory requirements stipulated by the MYAS.

19. It is contended that the State Pickleball Association, prior to such transition and the creation of the respondent no.2 (IPA), had already established a strong operational legacy through the organization of a series of successful state and national tournaments, including but not limited to:

- (i) 1st Gujarat Open Pickleball Tournament (March 2020),
- (ii) Asia Flex League India – Gujarat (December 2020),
- (iii) Gujarat Open Pickleball Tournament (August 2021),
- (iv) 1st Pickleball National Championship (March 2022),
- (v) Gujarat State Pickleball Ranking Tournament – Road to Nationals



(July 2023),

(vi) 3rd National Pickleball Championship (December 2023),

(vii) Dinkers Pickleball Open (March 2024), and

(viii) Gujarat Pickleball Premier League (GPPL) (June 2024).

20. It is submitted that the State Pickleball Association, then formally resolved to transition its functions, responsibilities, experience, and institutional legacy to the respondent no.2. Thereafter, an application for recognition as an NSF was made in the name of the respondent no.2. It is further contended that the respondent no.2 was incorporated at the behest of players, athletes and sportspersons of repute. It is contended that:

- The Memorandum of Association (MOA) and Articles of Association (AOA) conform to the provisions of the Sports Code.
- The Executive Board has been constituted as per the Sports Code, comprising eminent players, technical experts, and individuals actively involved in sports and allied activities.
- Representation of women on the Board meets the standards prescribed by the Government.
- The individuals associated with the organization are distinguished by their merit and have demonstrated excellence in the fields of sports and public life.
- State associations under the organization are led by notable personalities, including accomplished sportsmen and sportswomen, which is a key feature deserving emphasis.

21. It is further submitted that the respondent no.2 has established robust international relations with recognized global bodies and has fulfilled the technical requirements essential for the promotion and development of



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Pickleball in India.

22. It is emphasized that the respondent no.2 is recognized by the Global Pickleball Federation (GPF), which is a premier international federation for the sports of Pickleball worldwide. It was started by the USA Pickleball (USAP). It is asserted that the GPF is the most influential international governing body for pickleball. It was formed in 2023 by USA Pickleball in collaboration with national federations from 28 countries. The GPF is headquartered in Colorado Springs, Colorado. The GPF currently comprises over 70 member countries and operates in coordination with various continental federations, including the Pickleball Federation of the Americas, the Confederation of African Pickleball, the Oceania Pickleball Federation, the Asian Pickleball Association, and several European member nations. It is submitted that the USA Pickleball is the oldest governing body for the sport and continues to remain the recognized rule-making authority and that the GPF was not established by the Asian Pickleball Association or the Indian Pickleball Association.

23. It is further submitted that while there is presently no unified global governing body for the sport of Pickleball that has been formally recognized by the International Olympic Committee (IOC), the GPF is the most prominent and credible contender for such recognition. The GPF is composed of a representative board consisting of national federations and governing entities from leading Pickleball-playing nations, which are acknowledged as pioneers and key stakeholders in the global development of the sport. It is submitted that the GPF also functions as the rule-making authority for the sport, having framed the official rules that are universally followed in international competitions.



24. The respondent no.2 has emphasized its track record, credentials and the activities being undertaken by it at the national level to justify the grant of recognition to it as an NSF. The respondent no.2 further asserts that the petitioner lacks the locus to raise any objections in this regard. It is submitted that the petitioner's functioning is marked by a lack of transparency, fairness and inclusivity.

25. It is further contended that the petitioner is non-compliant with the Government Guidelines on Good Governance, in the context of 'Basic Universal Principles of Good Governance of Olympic and Sports Movement, which is an essential part of the Sports Code. As per the Olympic Charter, a person holding the post of president of an international federation cannot simultaneously hold any post in a domestic federation. It is emphasized that contrary to the said guideline, Mr. Arvind Prabhoo, President of the petitioner, simultaneously holds the post of President of the International Pickleball Federation, leading to a direct conflict of interest and a breach of the good governance norms under the Sports Code, Annexure XIV Clause 5 of which stipulates "Adequate procedural regulations must exist to ensure there is no conflict of Interests".

26. It is further contended that the petitioner has further tried to mislead this Court by asserting that it has been recognized by the Indian Olympic Association (IOA) and hence should have been considered for being recognized as NSF.

27. It is submitted that upon a bare perusal of the communications exchanged between the President of the IOA and the petitioner, it is evident that the petitioner had misled the IOA. The petitioner had incorrectly represented to the IOA that it had been recognized by the international body



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regulating the sport of pickleball.

28. Furthermore, it is submitted that the communication issued by the IOA is only provisional and is subject to being voted upon in its next Annual General Body Meeting. It is emphasized that the pre-requisite for membership of IOA as per Clause 3.1 (Rules and Regulation of the IOA Constitution) is that only an NSF can apply for its membership. It is submitted that despite not satisfying the said prerequisite, the petitioner applied to the IOA.

29. It is submitted that post recognition of the respondent no.2 as NSF, it has applied to the IOA for recognition.

30. In the circumstances, it is asserted that the respondent no.1 has rightly issued the order dated 25.04.2025, whereby recognition has been accorded to the respondent no.2 as the NSF for the sport of pickleball in the country. It is emphasized that such recognition is subject to the continued observance of the terms and conditions stipulated therein and is susceptible to be withdrawn if:

“a) any of the terms and conditions of the recognition are violated;

b) its own Constitution is violated;

c) directions issued by the Union Government are not complied with as required;

d) in the opinion of the Union Government, the Association is not functioning properly;

e) the recognition has been obtained by submitting false information or by mis-representation of facts;

f) the concerned international Federation cancels affiliation or derecognizes or disaffiliates the Association.”

31. Before adverting to the counter-affidavit filed on behalf of the Union



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of India / MYAS, it is important to take note of CM APPL. 31973/2025, filed by an entity called “New Indian Pickleball Association”. The said applicant has sought to strongly refute the assertion of the respondent no.2 that it is the successor-in-interest of the “State Pickleball Association” and / or that it has organized the following championships:

- (i) 1st Pickleball National Championship (March 2022),
- (ii) 3rd National Pickleball Championship (December 2023)

32. It is submitted that the predecessor in interest of the respondent no.2, viz., the State Pickleball Association, was a constituent state member of the applicant from January 2022 to 2024. In support of this assertion, reliance is sought to be placed on certain documents.

33. It is contended that the respondent no.2 is indulging in fraud by claiming to have conducted two national championships in Pickleball, despite the fact that the same were conducted under the aegis and supervision of the applicant. Specific reliance is placed on certain letters addressed by the “State Pickleball Association” of Gujarat to contend that from a perusal of the letterheads on which the said communications were addressed, it is evident that the said State body was affiliated with the applicant and an international body, namely, World Pickleball Association (WPF).

34. It is contended that in 2024, some individuals sought to usurp control of the Applicant and accordingly a complaint dated 15.07.2024 was filed by the General Secretary of the Applicant before the office of the District Registrar of Co-operative Societies, Bengaluru, Karnataka. Vide order dated 23.12.2024, which was issued against seven persons, including three persons claiming to be Executive Members of the Respondent No. 2 herein,



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including the person who filed the Counter Affidavit on behalf of Respondent No.2 after duly hearing them, held that the documents set up by the said persons claiming to be in control of the Applicant were rejected, and the said persons were directed to not conduct any events or business in the name of the Applicant in CM APPL. 31973/2025. The relevant portion of the order 15.07.2024 is as under:

*“Furthermore, directions are issued to **Mr. Surya Veer Singh Bhullar, Mr. Prabhat Mani Vats, Mr. Alap Sharma, Mr. Manu D, Mr. Kishore Nippadkar, Mr. K. Kumar, and Ms. Nazneen Rahman**, instructing them not to use the name and address of New India Pickleball Association, No.289, 7th Main, 9th Cross, Nrupathunga Nagar, Nagarabhavi, Bengaluru– 560072 (Registration No.: DRB-1/SOR/223/2021-22) for any correspondence, events, or sports activities with any authorities. Failing to adhere to this, the affected parties are at liberty to take appropriate legal action before the competent authority.”*

35. It is vehemently urged that the respondent No.2 is trying to take benefit of National Events conducted under the aegis, guidance and supervision of the Applicant in CM APPL. 31973/2025, the credentials of which, for the grant of recognition as an NSF, can only be given to the National Body. It is averred that having failed in their attempt to usurp the Applicant Association by the order of the District Registrar of Co-operative Societies, Bengaluru, Karnataka, the Respondent No.2 is now trying to usurp the credentials of National events conducted by the Applicant. The recognition given by the Respondent No.1 to the Respondent No.2, based on the misrepresentation of having held the said National Events would impliedly accord an accreditation to the Respondent No.2 for the same, thereby causing the Applicant to suffer civil consequences without being given a hearing.

36. The respondent no.2 has refuted the allegations sought to be made in



the aforesaid CM APPL.31973/2025. It is contended that the application has been filed by the Mr. Rajath Kankar, erstwhile Secretary General of the New Indian Pickleball Association. However, the same is unsupported by any Resolution authorizing him to institute these proceedings. It is submitted that to the best of the knowledge of Respondent No. 2, Rajath Kankar has been removed as the Secretary General of New Indian Pickleball by the President of the New Indian Pickleball Association, i.e., Ashok Mohanani for disciplinary reasons for making unilateral announcement of merger with the Petitioner (AIPA). It is further contended that the said application, having been filed by a person without any locus standi, does not warrant consideration and is liable to be dismissed at the outset.

37. It is further submitted that the factual assertions made in CM APPL. 31973/2025 are demonstrably incorrect. Contrary to the claim that the National Tournament was conducted by the Applicant, it is submitted that the said event was organized by the State Pickleball Association, and the Applicant was only a participating member in the event.

38. The counter-affidavit has been filed on behalf of the Union of India, wherein, it has been sought as under:

“9) That without prejudice to the aforesaid, it is submitted that the petitioner's grievance regarding non-consideration of his application dated 18.10.2024 is wholly misconceived and devoid of merit. It is submitted that the Ministry duly considered the Petitioner's application dated 18.10.2024 along with that of Respondent No.2. After a detailed comparative assessment in accordance with the Sports Code, and in the interest of developing a structured governance mechanism for the sport of Pickleball, recognition was granted to Respondent No. 2. The claim that the Petitioner's application was not considered is factually incorrect and legally untenable.

10) That the Sports Code in Clause 3.10 clearly stipulates that the at the National Level there will only be one recognised federation for each



discipline of the sport.

11) That vide order dated 25.04.2025, the Ministry has granted recognition to the Indian Pickleball Association (IP A) as the NSF for Pickleball in India. The recognition was accorded after following due process, including the grant of necessary relaxation of certain provisions of the National Sports Code, wherever considered necessary and expedient. Since recognition has been granted, the application of the Petitioner does not survive. Hence, the petitioner's claim stands considered, and no further cause of action survives.”

39. It has been averred as under:

“16) It is submitted that the Ministry's decision to grant recognition to Respondent No. 2 viz., IPA was taken after examining its adherence to the applicable provisions of the Sports Code, particularly those concerning institutional governance, athlete representation, and national outreach. The decision was informed by comparative merit and the larger objective of strengthening India's presence in emerging international sports disciplines.

17) It is submitted that the Indian Pickleball Association (IPA) was duly considered and examined by the Ministry based on the information as provided by the organisation and as per the information available on their website. Upon such consideration it was found that the IP A was in compliance with the following essential provisions of the Sports Code:

- i) Age & tenure guideline
- ii) 25% Sportsperson representation in Executive Committee
- iii) Tenure Restriction on Civil Servant in Executive Committee
- iv) Election procedure as contained in Model Election guideline under the Sports Code
- v) One state/UT- One member association
- vi) Athlete Commission and Ethics Commission
- vii) Provisions for Anti-Doping, age fraud and prevention of sexual harassment of women

18) It is submitted that it was further found that the IP A has 26 affiliated State/UT units, thereby meeting the requirement for representation in at least two-thirds of India's States/UTs as enshrined in Clause 3.4 of the Annexure-II of the Sports Code.

19) It is submitted that so far as condition requiring affiliation with an International Federation is concerned, it is pertinent to mention that presently there is no IOC-recognised International Federation. As per the information available with the Ministry as well as in the public domain, at international levels, Pickleball governance is currently fragmented among



three major organizations: the International Pickleball Federation (IPF), the World Pickleball Federation (WPF), and the Global Pickleball Federation (GPF).

20) It is respectfully submitted that, in the absence of an IOC-recognised international federation for Pickleball, the affiliations of competing entities were evaluated. The affiliation of IP A with the Global Pickleball Federation (GPF), which has a wider international footprint than the Petitioner's affiliating body, was considered a significant factor in favour of IPA, given the need for effective international representation. The Global Pickleball Federation (GPF) with 63 member nations holds more substantial international presence compared to the International Pickleball Federation (IPF), which has only 14 full member countries and 65 provisional member countries.

21) That analogous to the power of laying out certain guidelines for grant of recognition to the NSFs are the powers of the Ministry to grant certain exemptions/relaxations to the guidelines. It is submitted that that the Respondent No.1/Uol is conscious of the fact that such grant of relaxation to the NSFs must be non-arbitrary and reasonable and it should be purely in the interest of sports and sportspersons. The relaxation clause, which is an integral part of the Sports Code included therein vide letter dated 01.02.2021, reads as under:-

Clause No.16 Relaxation Clause:

"Government shall have the power to relax any of the provisions of the National Sports Development Code of India, 2011 and other instructions issued with regard to recognition of National Sports Federations (NSFs), renewal of recognition of NSFs on annual basis and governance and management of Indian Olympic Association (IOA) and NSFs, as a special exemption where considered necessary and expedient for the promotion of sports, sportspersons or to remove difficulties in giving true effect to that particular provision of the Sports Code, always being guided by and not inconsistent with the overarching spirit of good governance and ethical conduct enshrined in the Sports Code 2011. The reasons for such relaxation shall be recorded in writing. Power to relax the provisions will vest with Minister In-charge of the Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports."

22) It is submitted that IP A in its application requested for a temporary exemption from the requirement that its State/UT affiliates must have at least 50% district-level bodies. Considering IPA's higher compliance with the Sports Code, stronger global affiliations, wider national reach, and the growing popularity of pickle ball worldwide, the relaxation of these conditions' merits consideration, and as such in exercise of the Powers laid down under Clause 16 of the Sports Code, the Answering Respondent



considered it necessary and appropriate to limited exemptions/relaxations in terms of two clauses of the Code. Relaxations were granted to:

- (i) Requirement of three year existence of the federation / association (para 3.3 of Annexure-II of the Sports Code, 2011);
- (ii) Requirement of affiliation of a State/UT unit with at least 50% district level associations affiliated to it (para 3.10 and 3.19 of Annexure-II of the Sports Code, 2011);

These relaxations were granted in furtherance of the objective of promoting an emerging sport and in view of IPA's otherwise substantial compliance with the Code.

23) That it is submitted that the power to grant recognition and to grant the aforesaid two exemptions were policy decisions of the Answering Ministry which were under taken after due consideration of the emerging but nascent nature of the sport as well as the need and desire for promoting and developing the sport of Pickleball in the Country.

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25) It is submitted that this Ministry received applications from two organisations namely, All India Pickleball Association (AIPA) and Indian Pickleball Association (IPA) requesting for grant of recognition as NSFs for the Sports of Pickleball. Both the applications/proposals were considered and examined by this Ministry based on the information as provided by the above Sports organisation, information as available on their website and in light of provisions and guidelines as contained under the Sports Code, and the following was observed:

- a) The Constitution of the IPA was found to be broadly aligned with the key provisions of the National Sports Code, whereas the Constitution of the AIPA lacked several mandatory provisions required under the Sports Code, rendering it non-compliant.
- b) During examination it was noted that the IPA has 26 affiliated State/UT units, thereby meeting the requirement for representation in at least two-thirds of India's States/UTs, whereas AIPA has 21 State/UT units, making it noncompliant with the condition of affiliation of 21 or more State/UT associations as enshrined in Clause 3.4 of the Annexure-II of the Sports Code.
- c) Further, it was observed that the IPA is affiliated with the Global Pickleball Federation (GPF), which comprises 63 member nations, demonstrating a more extensive international presence compared to affiliation of the AIPA with the International Pickleball Federation (IPF), which has only 14 full member



countries and 65 provisional member countries.

26) That it is submitted that, in view of the foregoing paras and factual position as enumerated above, it is clear that the Ministry order dated 25.04.2025 is the outcome of a well-considered and reasoned decision taken upon examination of the proposals received from AIPA (Petitioner) and IPA (Respondent No. 2) based on their compliance status, membership strength and International affiliations for promoting and developing the sport of Pickleball in India. This decision was taken in accordance with the applicable provisions of the National Sports Development Code of India, 2011, after due consideration of the proposals received by this Ministry, including that of the Petitioner.

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29) In light of above facts and circumstances, it is respectfully submitted that the recognition granted to the Indian Pickleball Association vide Ministry order dated 25.04.2025, was done in full compliance with the relevant provisions and guidelines. Further, considering IP A's higher compliance with the Sports Code; stronger global affiliations; affiliation of members in 2/3rd States/UTs of the country, giving IPA a wider national reach; the growing popularity of pickleball worldwide, and the need to develop a robust Pickleball sporting ecosystem in the Country, the relaxations granted to IPA were not only justified but also expedient. Further, as stated above, the petitioner's application has already been considered by this Ministry, and in view of the extreme non-compliance with the provisions of the Sports Code, the same was deemed rejected. In view of the foregoing, it is respectfully submitted that the impugned order dated 25.04.2025 was passed after due consideration and in accordance with the Sports Code. The Petitioner's claims are unfounded and unsupported by any enforceable legal right. The Petition, therefore, deserves to be dismissed in limine."

CASE LAW CITED BY RESPECTIVE COUNSEL:-

40. Learned senior counsel for the petitioner has sought to contend that grant of exemptions to the respondent no.2 results in a violation of the order dated 26.05.2022 passed by a Division Bench of this Court in **Rahul Mehra v. Union of India**, [W.P.(C) 8691/2020]. Reliance is placed on the following observations therein:

"7. Various judgments have held that compliance with the Sports Code is a must. It is the sine qua non for grant of recognition as a NSF and for



access to the corollary benefits that flow from such status. The benefits are in various forms: tax benefits, travel concessions, accommodation and hospitality accorded to players and officials of NSFs, use of government-owned stadia and sports facilities, etc. All this expense is made from public funds. The beneficiary of such funds and facilities must qualify in law, to access it. Unless a NSF/sports entity/registered society/Association strictly adheres to and fully complies with the Sports Code and the court orders, it would disentitle itself from any such benefit. There can be no let-up or latitude in this regard, as relaxation would be arbitrary, illegal and lend to dilution of the Sports Code. No NSF or Sports Entity should be seen to be receiving benefits which are unjust. Fairness and legitimacy need to imbue all governmental affairs. Therefore, it is prudent, indeed imperative that no further exemptions be granted to or lenience be shown to noncompliant NSFs. There comes a stage in the affairs of governance when the recalcitrant have to be called-out and there has to be cessation of their unlawfully enjoying government largesse, a privilege for which they do not qualify. Nor can they be allowed with their faulty NSF status to generate revenues from other sources. Twelve years is a long time to enable sports bodies to conform to the Sports Code. The time to stop is now.”

41. It is sought to be emphasized that the aforesaid observations were made in light of the fact that the said Division Bench was seized of the challenge to the notification dated 01.02.2021, in the context of CM APPL.5435/2021 filed in W.P.(C) 8691/2020.

42. It is submitted that the observations in the said order dated 26.05.2022 were reiterated by this Court in an order dated 09.09.2022 passed in W.P.(C) 8691/2020.

43. It is submitted that the judgment dated 16.08.2022 in **Rahul Mehra v. Union of India and Others**, 2022 SCC Online Del 2438, squarely applies to all NSFs and in terms thereof, the full rigor of the Sports Code is to be made applicable to every constituent of every NSF. It is urged that the respondent no.1 / MYAS is not entitled to grant recognition or any facility to any NSF and / or any affiliated association if it is not compliant with the Sports Code.

44. It is submitted that the judgment relied upon by the MYAS,



Rajasthan Equestrian Association vs UOI, 2025 SCC OnLine Del 14, pertains to an exemption/ relaxation given to the Equestrian Federation of India on 9.11.2021, i.e., prior to the passing of the Division Bench's order dated 26.05.2022. Hence, it would have no applicability in the present matter, as the exemption/ relaxation given by the MYAS is subsequent to the Division Bench's order dated 26.05.2022. Even otherwise the impugned order is in violation to this particular judgment, as this Court has noted that the relaxation given in this particular case of Equestrian Federation is without any rationale, with no evidence provided, no fact-finding exercise to verify the averments of the EFI etc.

45. Thus, it is urged that the respondent no.2 is not even remotely eligible, under the Sports Code, to be recognized as an NSF.

46. Learned counsel for the respondent nos.1 and 2 placed strong reliance on the observations of a Coordinate Bench of this Court in **Rajasthan Equestrian Association v. Union of India & Ors.** (supra), and particularly Paragraphs 10 to 13 thereof, which reads as under:

“10. The Petitioner has argued that the introduction of the Relaxation Clause is arbitrary and unreasonable. However, the Court finds no infirmity in the executive authority to introduce such a provision. It is well-established that the executive, in the absence of legislative prohibition, has the power to frame policies and guidelines to achieve the objectives of national development. The Courts refrain from interfering with policy decisions unless they are arbitrary, manifestly unreasonable, or violate statutory or constitutional mandates. The Supreme Court in various judgments has held that policy decisions are within the domain of the executive and are not ordinarily subject to judicial review unless they are shown to be in violation of constitutional or legal provisions.

11. The Clause, is a policy decision aimed at addressing practical difficulties in the implementation of the Sports Code. It provides a framework for granting exemptions in exceptional circumstances where it is deemed “necessary and expedient” for the promotion of sports, sportspersons, or for resolving specific challenges faced by NSFs. This



exercise must be guided by the spirit of good governance enshrined in the Sports Code. The Relaxation Clause serves as a mechanism to address unforeseen difficulties, contingencies or operational challenges that may arise in the implementation of the Sports Code. It enables MYAS to exercise discretion only in limited, exceptional and justified cases. Pertinently, the clause itself incorporates safeguards by requiring that such exemptions be consistent with the overarching principles of the Sports Code, thereby preventing misuse.

12. Indeed, the Relaxation Clause vests the power to grant exemptions in the Minister-in-Charge of the MYAS, as highlighted and stressed by the Petitioner. However, this does not imply unfettered discretion with the Minister. The Clause itself stipulates that the reasons for granting relaxation, by exercise of powers under the said Clause, has to be recorded in writing, thereby making it mandatory that it must be a reasoned decision. Furthermore, even though the power to relax provisions is vested only with the Minister-in-Charge, it must be noted that the Minister is only the highest Office-bearer of the MYAS who is to be guided by the aid and advice of the ministry and its officers, thus ensuring that such a power to relax is exercised judiciously and not arbitrarily. In Shiv Sagar Tiwari v. Union of India⁷, the Supreme Court in the opening lines observed that “the administrative law has of late seen vast increase in discretionary powers. But then, the discretion conferred has to be exercised to advance the purpose to subserve which the power exists. Even the minister, if he/she be the repository of discretionary power, cannot claim that either there is no discretion in the matter or unfettered discretion”. Therefore, while the power is conferred on the Minister-in-Charge, its exercise is not unregulated but rather, is bound by the principles of accountability, transparency, and adherence to the objectives of the Sports Code.

13. In light of the above, Relaxation Clause itself is neither arbitrary nor unreasonable. Accordingly, the challenge to the validity of the said Relaxation Clause is found to be unsustainable and is rejected. However, the question of whether the exemptions granted to EFI under this Clause meets the criteria of being “necessary and expedient” and is supported by cogent reasons remains open to scrutiny.”

47. In light of the aforesaid, it is submitted that there was no legal impediment in granting the exemption, as set out in the impugned order dated 25.4.2025. Learned counsel for the UOI has emphasized that the petitioner does not have any legally enforceable rights, inasmuch as granting



recognition is within the policy domain of the MYAS in terms of the Sports Code itself.

48. Learned counsel for the applicant in CM APPL.31973/2025, apart from emphasizing the factual assertions made in the said application, has relied upon Clause 3.8 of Annexure-II of the Sports Code, which is in the following terms:-

“3.8: The Federation should have held, unless exempted for technical reasons, annual National Championships for specified age-group at the Senior, Junior and Sub-Junior levels, consecutively for the three years preceding the year in which recognition is sought. These competitions should be organised through Inter-District Competitions in each State/UT.”

49. It is submitted that in terms of the impugned Order dated 25.04.2025 of the Respondent No.1, no relaxation *qua* the said Clause-3.8 of Annexure-II of the National Sports Code, 2011, has been extended to the respondent no.2.

50. It is submitted that the exemptions granted to the respondent no.2 from the requirement of being in existence for at least 3 years are predicated upon the alleged experience of the respondent no.2 in organizing two national events. It is again emphasized that the said national events have been conducted under the aegis of the applicant in CM APPL.31973/2025 and no credit for the same could have been claimed by the respondent no.2.

51. It is urged that grant of exemption is vitiated on account of non-consideration of this vital aspect.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

52. Essentially, it has been contended on behalf of the petitioner that the grant of exemption to the respondent no.2 is neither legally nor factually justified. It is further contended that grant of exemption is also precluded on



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account of the orders dated 26.05.2022, 09.09.2022, 01.09.2023, 01.02.2024 in W.P.(C) 8691/2020, the judgment in **Rahul Mehra v. Union of India**, 2022 SCC OnLine Del 2438 and the judgment in **K. P. Rao v. Union of India**, 2023 SCC OnLine Del 779.

53. It is further contended by the petitioner that it is more suited / qualified as compared to the respondent no.2, for the purpose of being recognized as NSF for the sport of Pickleball in the country and therefore, the impugned order dated 25.04.2025 granting recognition to the respondent no.2 be quashed.

54. After careful consideration of the submissions of the parties and on perusal of the material / case laws on record, this Court does not find any merit in the aforesaid submissions.

55. It is rightly contended on behalf of the UOI/MYAS and the respondent no.2 that the validity of Clause 16 of the Notification dated 01.02.2021 (whereby the power to grant relaxation in appropriate cases was introduced) was not pronounced upon in judgment / order dated 26.05.2022 in W.P.(C) 8691/2020. No specific finding was rendered in the said judgment in respect of the aforesaid relaxation clause introduced in 2021.

56. Likewise, in orders dated 09.09.2022, 01.09.2023 and 01.02.2024 passed in W.P.(C) 8691/2020, the Court rightly emphasized strict compliance with the provisions of the Sports Code in the peculiar factual conspectus. Again, the validity of the Notification dated 01.02.2021, which introduced Clause 16, was not considered at all.

57. The same came to be specifically considered by a single Judge of this Court in **Rajasthan Equestrian Association v. Union of India & Ors.** (supra), wherein, this Court expressly rejected the challenge to the validity



of the aforesaid relaxation clause. While so rejecting, the Court noted that the same is in the nature of a policy decision aimed at addressing practical difficulties in the implementation of the Sports Code. It provides a framework for granting exemptions in exceptional circumstances, where it is deemed “necessary and expedient” for the promotion of sports or sportspersons, or for resolving specific challenges faced by the NSFs. The relaxation clause serves as a mechanism to address unforeseen difficulties, contingencies, or operational challenges that may arise in the implementation of the Sports Code.

58. The Court also noticed the dicta of the Supreme Court in ***Shiv Sagar Tiwari v. Union of India***, (1997) 1 SCC 444, in terms of which the discretion to grant relaxation is not unfettered but is bound by the principles of accountability, transparency and adherence to the objectives of the Sports Code.

59. Thus, in terms of the dicta laid down in ***Rajasthan Equestrian*** (supra) no fault can be found with the policy relaxation provision/s as brought about vide Notification dated 01.02.2021.

60. This Court has also extensively perused the provisions of the Sports Code. It is evident therefrom that the Sports Code is a consolidated compendium of executive instructions issued by the MYAS / UOI, exercising executive powers under Article 73 of the Constitution of India. The Sports Code consolidates: (i) the earlier prevalent NSF recognition guidelines; (ii) government instructions on agent and tenure limits, electoral processes, transparency norms, and dispute resolution; and (iii) sports governance best practices drawn from international norms.

61. Given that the Code itself is policy driven and non-statutory in nature,



it cannot be construed to be immutable or rigid, or incapable of incorporating exemptions. Further, by its very nature, the Sports Code cannot be applied mechanically. It has to be interpreted and applied in a manner that adheres to the principles of reasonableness and proportionality and avoids absurd and counter-productive outcomes.

62. It is also a fact that a large number of executive instructions incorporated in the Sports Code were framed in the context of legacy sports, which have longstanding existence as also deep District and State level penetration.

63. Inherently, nascent/ emerging sports such as pickleball cannot be treated at par with legacy / established sports.

64. Unlike established sports, nascent sports such as pickleball: (i) have been recently introduced; (ii) have limited geographical spread; and (iii) are emerging and evolving.

65. To insist that the provisions of the Sports Code be applied mechanically to all sports, including nascent sports, would be fundamentally flawed and tantamount to treating un-equals as equals.

66. The most rigorous provisions in the Sports Code are those which prescribe the requirements of District-level units¹, the mandatory affiliation

¹ 3.10 At the National level, there will be only one recognised federation for each discipline of sport. Only the duly recognised National Sports Federation would be entitled to financial grants as admissible. Only one State/UT Association from each State/UT shall be admitted as a member of the Federation, provided it has a minimum of 50% of the District level Associations affiliated to it. Any organisation of an all India standing and connected with the Sport may be given the status as that of a State or that of a U.T. and admitted as affiliated Member. Other categories of membership may also be given, but while each affiliated State/UT Unit shall have a right to cast vote in the General Body Meetings, no other class of Member(s) shall have any right to vote, in the Federation's meetings. While granting recognition/affiliation to a State /UT Association, the National Federation should take into consideration the representative character of the State/UT Association so as to ensure that only truly representative body of the game gets the recognition/affiliation.



of all such units to the State Federation², and prior existence of the infrastructure³ as a condition precedent to recognition. It would be incongruous to insist that all provisions of the Sports Code be made *ipso facto* applicable to the nascent and emerging sports. Inherently, certain provisions of the Sports Code can only be organically generated.

67. As such, insisting on a pedantic and mechanical application of the Sports Code, irrespective of the context, can create difficulties in certain situations. Thus, the power of relaxation sought to be introduced has a very useful role to play and serves a salutary purpose.

68. As noticed in ***Rajasthan Equestrian Association v. Union of India & Ors.*** (supra), the exercise of such power is not unregulated, but is bound by the principles of accountability, transparency, and adherence to the objectives of the Sports Code.

69. Further, the power has to be exercised to avoid a situation where volunteers and pioneers are discouraged from driving / introducing / instituting / promoting new sports and / or to avoid a situation where Sports Federation / Association resort to mere paper compliances. The Sports Code should be applied in a manner so as to encourage compliance in substance, not merely in form. Insistence on strict and immediate compliance with

² 3.4 At the time of applying for recognition, the Federation/Association should have affiliated Units in atleast 2/3rd of total States/UTs of India.

3.19 The State level associations which are affiliated to the National Federation should in turn have a minimum number of affiliated district-level associations (say 50% of the districts in the State).

³ 8.4 For determining the eligibility for recognition of NSFs dealing with disciplines which are not included in Olympics, Commonwealth Games or Asian Games, the Government has further notified additional conditions. Now while considering the proposal of such disciplines following criteria will be taken into consideration:-

i. Popular Indigenous Games with All India spread

ii. Popular School, College and University Sports

iii. Likelihood of inclusion in major international games like Olympics, Commonwealth Games, Asian Games, etc.

iv. Availability of required infrastructure

v. Affordability of the game

vi. Availability of coaches



structural and quantitative norms, particularly when applied to nascent sports, can result in incongruity and frustrates, rather than advances, the objective of developing the concerned sport.

70. No doubt, some of the core provisions of the Sports Code, which are basic to good governance such as provisions related to holding of elections, transparency of accounts, age or tenure restrictions, are necessarily mandatory and uniformly binding on all associations. Yet, it cannot be lost sight of the fact that there are many other provisions of the Sports Code which are required to be applied in the context of a particular sport and with due sensitivity to the developmental stage of the sport concerned.

71. It is also a fact that the grant of recognition under the Sports Code is not permanent; it is inherently conditional and subject to annual renewal. Review of recognition is automatically built into the architecture of the Sports Code. Some relevant provisions of the Sports Code in this regard are reproduced hereunder:

“1.6. In the recent past Government has taken various steps to further improve the management of NSFs and sports in the country such as notification of the Anti-Doping Code; introduction of annual recognition of NSFs to ensure transparency and accountability of NSFs; enforcement of age and tenure limit in respect of office bearers of NSFs, including the Indian Olympic Association; bringing NSFs under the purview of Right to Information Act; measures to ensure free, fair and transparent elections by the NSFs; and measures to combat age fraud in sports; and guidelines for the prevention of sexual harassment of women in sports.

xxx

xxx

xxx

8.2 From the year December, 2009, a new system of annual recognition was notified under which NSFs are required to submit detailed documentation for grant of recognition, which would get automatically renewed in the subsequent years subject to submission of prescribed documents such as annual report, audited accounts, details of national championships held, utilization certificate in respect of Government grants. Copies of relevant circulars issued vide No.F.9- 69/2009-SP-I



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dated 12.11.2009, 02.12.2009 & 29.11.2010 are placed at Annexure-XV. Federations not availing of grants from the Government will receive permanent recognition instead of annual recognition.

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8.5 The Ministry reserves the right to suspend or withdraw the recognition of NSF, in the event of serious irregularities being detected in their internal functioning. The procedure and consequences of suspension and de-recognition are indicated at Annexure III.

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9. Conditions of eligibility

9.1 For NSFs to be eligible for financial assistance and sponsorship, organizations must maintain their recognized status with the Department and should obtain the Annual recognition on year-to-year basis.”

72. As noticed, the Sports Code not only contemplates annual renewal, but also vests power in the MYAS / UOI to withdraw or suspend recognition. As such, it is inherent in the scheme of the Sports Code that neither the grant of recognition nor the grant of any relaxation, is ‘permanent’ or in the nature of a ‘one time event’. The system of granting annual recognition ensures that any exemption that may have been granted can be revisited, and recognition can be declined, suspended or withdrawn if milestones are not met or if sufficient progress is not achieved by the concerned federation.

73. For the above reasons, this Court finds nothing remiss in the provisions of the Sports Code which enable the MYAS/UOI to grant relaxation in certain situations. The same is consistent not only with the spirit and purport of the Sports Code, but is also in line with the dicta laid down in ***Rajasthan Equestrian Association v. Union of India & Ors.*** (supra). On the contrary, the adoption of a “one size fits all” approach



would be an anathema to the objective and purport of the Sports Code, particularly in the context of nascent and emerging sports.

74. Insofar as the exemptions granted to the respondent no.2 are concerned, it has been brought out that such exemptions were granted to the respondent no.2 from the condition(s) of :

- a) prior existence of 3 years at the time of applying for recognition as an NSF; (Clause 3.3)
- b) 50% District units affiliated with the State/UT units. (Clause 3.10).

75. Grant of the aforesaid exemption/s was a policy decision of the respondent no.1/Ministry, after due consideration of the emerging and nascent nature of the sport as well as the need and desire for promoting and developing the sport of pickleball in the country.

76. In these proceedings under Article 226 of the Constitution of India, this Court is not inclined to interfere with the same, especially considering that the MYAS is presumed to have domain expertise in these matters.

77. As regards the circumstances which impelled the MYAS/UOI to grant recognition to the respondent no.2, it has been brought out in the counter-affidavit filed on behalf of the UOI/MYAS that the same was based on the following considerations:

- i. that the respondent no.2 has 26 affiliated States / UT units, thereby meeting the requirement of representation in at least 2/3rd of the States / UTs of India, as enshrined in Clause 3.4 of Annexure II of the Sports Code;
- ii. there is presently no IOC recognized international federation and in absence thereof, the affiliation of the respondent no.2 with the Global Pickleball Federation (GPF) was found to have a wider international



footprint than that of the petitioner's affiliating body, which was considered a significant factor in favour of the respondent no.2, given the need for effective international representation;

- iii. The compliance status of the respondent no.2 was assessed, as also its membership strength;
- iv. It was noticed that the constitution of the respondent no.2 was broadly aligned with the key provisions of the Sports Code, whereas the constitution of the petitioner lacks adherence to the several mandatory provisions.

78. It is not within the province of this Court to second guess / sit in appeal over the comparative merits / de-merits of the respondent no.2 vis-à-vis the petitioner association or any other association functioning in the sport of pickleball in the country.

79. Necessarily, the requisite exercise has to be conducted by the MYAS. Given the justification offered by the MYAS/UOI in the counter-affidavit, it cannot be said that grant of the recognition to the respondent no.2 is *ex-facie* arbitrary or suffers from manifest unreasonableness, warranting interference in these proceedings.

80. Also, as noted, given the scheme of the Sports Code, the grant of recognition is not something that is "permanent". The same is inherently subject to renewal upon considerations of all relevant factors. It would be well within the domain of the UOI/MYAS to reconsider the matter (based on any representation that may be made by the petitioner or any other body), and / or re-appraise the comparative strengths / suitability of the respondent no.2 and the petitioner and to take a suitable decision in the future. At this stage, however, in the totality of the circumstances, particularly considering



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the nascent nature of the sport, this Court is not inclined to interfere with the decision taken by the UOI/MYAS.

81. Likewise, as regards the objections raised by the applicant in CM APPL.31973/2025 seeking to assail the credential and antecedents of the respondent no.2, this Court is unable to embark upon an elaborate fact-finding inquiry with regard thereto. Suffice it to say, that it would be open to the said applicant to make a representation to the UOI/MYAS, which shall be duly considered at the time of annual renewal of the recognition granted vide order dated 25.04.2025.

82. In the circumstances, this Court finds no merit in the present petition; the same is, accordingly, dismissed. Pending applications also stand disposed of.

SACHIN DATTA, J

FEBRUARY 2, 2026/r, sv