

Fields of Play, Fields of Purpose



In the life of a large scientific system, routine can quietly create distance. Laboratories, research stations, universities, and administrative centres function with precision, yet often in parallel streams. The **ICAR South Zone Sports Tournament at Hyderabad**, graciously hosted by the National Academy of Agricultural Research Management (NAARM), emerges in this context not merely as a sporting event but as a living celebration of institutional unity. For a few luminous days, designations soften, distances disappear, and the diverse community of agricultural science gathers on one shared field of play.

Such gatherings hold deep meaning within the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) family. The South Zone represents an extraordinary spectrum of agro-ecologies, languages, cultures, and scientific specialisations—from coastal fisheries to dryland farming, from plantation crops to cutting-edge biotechnology. When scientists, students, technical staff, and administrators from these varied institutions assemble in Hyderabad, they bring not only competitive energy but also the quiet pride of their respective landscapes and communities. The tournament, therefore, becomes a confluence of regions, disciplines, and generations—mirroring the diversity of Indian agriculture itself.

At the human level, the transformation is immediate and profound. On the sports ground, a senior director may pass the baton to a young research scholar in a relay race; a laboratory technician may score the winning point in volleyball while colleagues from different institutes cheer as one team. Jerseys replace formal attire, and encouragement replaces hierarchy. These moments cultivate trust that no official meeting can manufacture. Later, when collaborative research proposals are discussed

or field challenges must be solved collectively, the memory of shared effort on the sports field quietly strengthens cooperation.

Professional life in scientific institutions is intellectually demanding and often sedentary. Long hours of analysis, documentation, and digital engagement can gradually erode physical vitality and mental freshness. Sports tournaments restore this balance. Physical activity improves circulation, sharpens concentration, reduces stress, and enhances emotional resilience—qualities essential for researchers and administrators working in complex, rapidly changing environments. In this sense, the tournament is not a pause in productivity but an investment in sharper thinking and healthier minds.

The psychological value of collective play is equally significant. Large organisations frequently struggle with institutional silos, where excellent work occurs in isolation. Informal conversations during warm-ups, shared laughter after a missed catch, or quiet discussions while walking around the ground often lead to new friendships and unexpected collaborations. Many enduring professional relationships within ICAR have begun not in conference halls but on playing fields during zonal tournaments. The Hyderabad gathering continues this cherished tradition, renewing the invisible threads that bind the national agricultural research system.

For the agricultural community, the symbolism of sport carries special resonance. Agriculture is unlike most other scientific fields: it unfolds in open skies, uncertain climates, living soils, and real human relationships. Agricultural professionals must walk through fields, listen to farmers, observe seasons, and respond to nature's variability. Their work demands the stamina of the body, the clarity of the mind, and the empathy of the heart. Outdoor sports reflect this rhythm—movement under the sun, teamwork shaped by changing conditions, and perseverance despite unpredictability. The sports ground thus becomes an echo of the farmer's field, reminding participants of the physical and collective nature of their mission.

Hosting the tournament at NAARM adds another layer of meaning. As a premier institution dedicated to capacity building, leadership development, and management excellence in agricultural research, NAARM represents the intellectual nerve centre of institutional transformation. When such a place becomes the venue for sport, it symbolically affirms that leadership is not only about strategy and policy but also about well-being, camaraderie, and shared human experience. True management, after all, harmonises performance with purpose and achievement with joy.

Intergenerational bonding is another quiet gift of the tournament. Young students and early-career scientists bring speed, enthusiasm, and aspiration. Senior colleagues contribute endurance, discipline, and lived wisdom. Watching a veteran complete a long-distance walk with calm determination can inspire youth more deeply than any lecture on perseverance. Conversely, the energy of younger participants renews hope in seniors who have devoted decades to agricultural service. Such exchanges ensure continuity—not only of knowledge but of spirit—within the ICAR family.

Leadership presence during the event sends an equally powerful message. When senior administrators and directors participate in, cheer for, or simply walk alongside their teams, they demonstrate that institutional culture values people beyond

performance metrics. Morale rises, belonging deepens, and the organisation begins to feel less like a structure and more like a community. In times when scientific systems face increasing pressure—from climate change to food security challenges—this sense of shared purpose becomes indispensable.

The Hyderabad tournament also underscores the irreplaceable value of in-person gatherings in the digital age. Virtual meetings enable efficiency, yet they cannot reproduce the warmth of shared applause, the rhythm of footsteps on a track, or the collective silence before a final whistle. Human connection requires presence. By bringing together participants from across the South Zone, the tournament restores this essential dimension of institutional life.

For Indian agriculture, the implications extend far beyond sport. A physically fit, mentally alert, and socially cohesive scientific community is better equipped to serve farmers, respond to crises, and innovate for sustainability. Whether addressing drought resilience, nutritional security, or climate-smart farming, solutions are most effectively developed by teams that trust one another. In this way, the energy generated on the sports field ultimately flows outward—toward villages, landscapes, and livelihoods across the nation.

The deeper meaning of such a gathering may be captured in a timeless reflection from Paul “Bear” Bryant, the legendary American college football coach renowned for his discipline, leadership, and ability to build winning teams through character as much as strategy:

“It is not the will to win that matters—everyone has that. It is the will to prepare to win that matters.”

Preparation, discipline, teamwork, and resilience—these are virtues shared equally by sport and agriculture. Seeds must prepare before they sprout; farmers must prepare before the rains; scientists must prepare before discovery. The ICAR South Zone Sports Tournament celebrates this spirit of preparation in its most joyful form.

As the final events conclude and participants return to their respective institutes, they carry more than medals or certificates. They carry renewed health, revived friendships, and a strengthened sense of belonging to a national mission larger than any single laboratory or campus. The memory of Hyderabad—of NAARM’s hospitality, of collective cheers under the open sky, of unity across ranks and regions—continues to inspire long after the grounds fall silent.

Thus, the tournament stands not merely as an annual fixture but as a living affirmation of what the agricultural research community truly is: **a fellowship of minds, bodies, and hearts working together for the nourishment of India’s land and people.**

—Dr Gopal Lal, Prof. Arun Tiwari