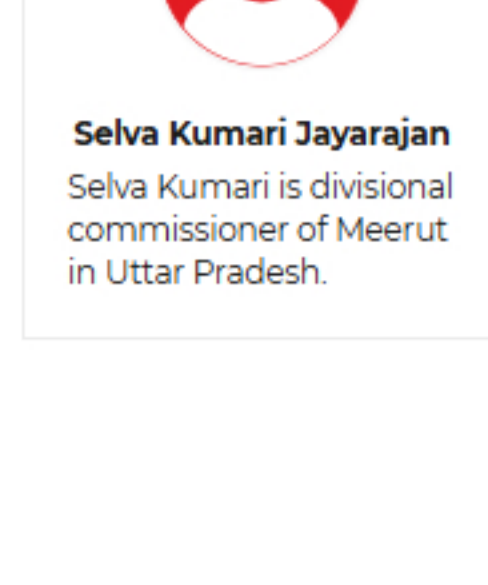
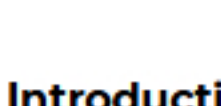


Sports goods industry of Meerut- path ahead

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1. Introduction

The sports goods industry post Covid is facing a consumer-centric future. It is at the crossroads trying to use technology at the same time be a part of human experience like never before. It is being shaped by emerging markets, sustainability initiatives, and a growing demand for personalized products in an era of Social media influence.

New potential markets like India and Africa with their own social, cultural, economic and sports preferences are taking the front stage.

Recycling and sustainability are forcing brands to take environment-related initiatives leading to a circular economy which forces companies making profit at the same time doing something for earth.

So brands are moving towards inclusivity as dictated by new markets and new consumers trying to accommodate regional and personal preferences catering to varied population groups like disabled individuals too. Using technology like AI, VR to enhance sports performance, companies are making huge investments in research and customisation to take the big leap.

2. Sports goods industry in Meerut

Meerut has about 35200 big and small sports goods manufacturing units employing more than 3,15,000 persons both skilled and unskilled. Meerut accounts for 40% of India's Sports goods exports. Of these 9878 are registered Sports manufacturing units, 3781 are MSME and the industry boasts a turnover of 1500 crores. Inflatable balls, Cricket bats, hockey sticks, gym equipment amount to major exports to countries like US, UK, Germany and France. Some advantages of Meerut cluster is the concentration of manufacturers (area in around 10 kms radius) and supportive ecosystem like locational advantages, availability of abundant workforce and a reputation for quality sports products.

3. Way ahead

3.1 Gearing up for trillion dollar economy

Uttar Pradesh trillion dollar economy initiative by Hon'ble CM Shri Yogi Adhityanath will be a milestone in our Nation's Development indicator in turning around a BIMARU state to a Model growth engine State. The components of this achievement will be infrastructure development, value addition to Human Capital, technology and its innovative uses in promoting partnerships, Trade diversification, Easing out Regulatory frameworks and better Governance, Addressing sustainability issues and inclusivity. It will require strategic planning initiatives, multifaceted approaches across sectors and district specific initiatives. It will also require rethinking existing strategies and realigning them to achieve the common goal.

Meerut Sports goods industry needs an upgrade if it can compete and contribute to the visions of Trillion Dollar economy. The issues that require fixing mainly pertain to the industry itself and also the environment. One big issue which requires immediate attention is procurement of raw materials. must develop a mechanism to provide the English and Kashmir Willow wood by quota management system which can help every manufacturing unit to reduce the cost procurement. The industry also needs Facilitation of land acquisition at reasonable prices through revised zoning regulations and incentives for developers to promote logistic hubs and also for expansion of existing units. Some initiatives in this regard have been started by local development authority on a case-to-case basis.

High-quality customised and sophisticated sports equipments like smart wearables, performance enhancers, smart, competitive durable products are the need of the hour which in turn need better research and designing, manufacturing of high quality products with better and newer raw materials at the same time keeping in mind durability, sustainability and environment issues.

Koxtan Sports leading supplier of fitness equipments uses Bat pressing Technique to improve quality, reduce wastage and increase production. Vats sports founded in 1980 in Meerut, manufactures sports apparel, sports equipments and accessories. Vats sports has upgraded themselves from manual cutting to laser cutting and sublimation process in order to keep up with increasing demand. Premier enterprise is manufacturing sensor fitted cricket bats to monitor performance with data collected about speed, angle of bat etc. It greatly helps improve batsman performance. Guider Sports industries, another sports goods Manufacturer from Meerut, manufactures sensor fitted sports products to monitor product performance. The industries thus try to keep up with growing demand for better sports goods. More rigorous testing is needed for meeting safety and quality standards.

Cost issues have to be kept in check at the sometime maintaining competitive and being responsive to the demands of the market. Many domestic products Manufacturers like SG, SS, BDM, Yash industries, Vicky sports, Spartan Sports, Vines Enterprises are trying to keep up with domestic demand of sports equipments across India to States like Karnataka, Tamilnadu, Gujarat etc. Several reasons can be attributed to this like the rising fitness culture, increasing Sports leagues and events across the country, public and private sports infrastructure development etc.

3.3 Develop brands

Absence of strong Indian Brands or Brands from Meerut also fail to justify added costs and Manufacturers investments in better raw materials. Building strong brands will also foster trust and loyalty and attract new customers who can pay for higher costs of quality products. Also recent Competitions like Olympics, Paralympics have raised the need for inclusivity in sports Goods. Disabled, transgender requirements for customisation and special requirements are also demanding that the industry upgrade itself towards gender identity and equality. Product diversification and development centre is need of the hour for researching and dissemination of knowledge and data about upcoming requirements and trends. Agencies like SGEPC, a GOI sponsored organisation, organises trade promotion activities of Indian sports goods and toys through promotional campaigns, ensuring Indian participation in International Trade fairs etc. Process and Product Development Centre (PPDC) for sports goods, another Central Government Organization offers technical support to manual manufacturing processes which is currently prevalent in the Sports Goods industry in Meerut. Market Access Initiative Scheme (MAI) is aimed at promoting and exporting Indian Goods through financial assistance. In order to support Indian Exporters, a scheme for remission of Duties on Exported Products (RODTEP) is implemented. Market Development Assistance (MDA) assists exporters in export promotion activities in International Markets.

3.4 Labour Issues and skilled workforce

Meerut sports industry also is plagued by various labour-related challenges in globalised competitive market. including availability of skilled manpower. Simplified labour laws along with tailor-made support system for MSMEs can help to navigate the situation. they often face challenges related to labour laws, including compliance burdens and limited access to legal support. These issues can hinder operational flexibility, increase costs, and stifle growth. Increase in energy prices and increase in purchasing costs that cannot be fully passed on to the price of goods is also another major issue the industry faces.

Although many reputed institutions are present in Meerut, very little is offered by way of Sports management programs, specialised training for design, manufacturing and marketing of sports goods. There is also notable gap in skill level requirements and competitive standards of International markets. To make a global presence, there is a dire need for up-skilling in traditional degrees by incorporating practical skill sets and a curriculum which integrates technology like AI, VR allowing for virtual real time simulations for gaining field experience in controlled environment. The absence of recognised certifications and credentials in the sports goods sector poses a challenge for hiring and career advancement. This will give credibility and will attract better talent towards the industry. There is a critical shortage of qualified trainers and researchers in the sports industry. This gap hinders the development of training programs and R&D initiatives that could drive innovation. Investing in the education and training of instructors and researchers can strengthen the foundation of the industry and promote continuous improvement. Training needs to be given in health and safety measures due to increase in use of chemicals, machinery and high temperature processes. This also highlights the need to give training in sustainable eco-friendly manufacturing processes as there is growing demand for eco friendly products.

3.5 Find talent who can work remotely

The rise of remote work presents an opportunity to expand the talent pool in the sports goods industry in R&D, Marketing etc. Remote jobs can attract skilled professionals from diverse backgrounds across the country and abroad to increase flexibility in hiring and creating skilled workforce.

3.6 Case of Sisaula Bujurg

Sisaula Bujurg, a village in western Uttar Pradesh with approximately 3,000 families, has established itself as a significant producer of footballs, creating around 11 lakh balls annually. The local football-making industry began about 30 years ago when Hari Prakash, who worked at a sports goods unit in Meerut, introduced villagers to the craft using raw materials he brought home. Villagers earn around 30 per ball stitched, with potential for more based on quality. The work has empowered many women, allowing them to save money and gain respect within their communities. Jahanara, a 48-year-old villager, shared that her daughters are respected for their contributions, illustrating the social empowerment stemming from this industry. Sisaula Bujurg exemplifies how local craftsmanship, combined with government support and community empowerment, can transform a village's economic landscape and identity through the sport of football.

3.7 Go data-savvy

Data Collection about consumer habits, preferences, health data and analysis of such data is becoming a huge employment channel by itself helping industries to customise products and sales approach. So required changes have to be made by sports good industries in Meerut to serve consumers better to their satisfaction. New trends like Winter sports, recreational spending by consumers have opened up new opportunities and highlighted the need for more innovation in Sports goods market.

Attracting Infrastructure investments requires stability in economic environment of the Country to attract both domestic and foreign investors. A strong economic outlook can bolster confidence and encourage investments much needed in infrastructure improvements, training manpower, R&D to compete with market forces. This will help to attract new markets for our country and State in sports Goods industry. New Markets like Africa, Middle East, South America are emerging due to growing fitness awareness. There is Need to form Joint ventures with foreign collaborators with expertise in Technology, investment, advanced manufacturing processes and also diverse skilling of a versatile workforce. That way our local infrastructure can be further equipped to compete with global standards. Encouraging entrepreneurs with different business models through incubators and Funding programs can help in bringing much needed innovation in the industry. PPP models can be encouraged for better investments, shared risks and also make better infrastructure for sports goods industry.

Innovative products can be designed with interdisciplinary collaboration involving science, medicine, innovation, and tourism by such partnerships. Gap funding is the need of the hour in infrastructure and R&D. Sports is primarily a state subject in India, leading to varying guidelines and policies across states. This lack of uniformity can create confusion and hinder collaboration. Developing a cohesive framework for sports infrastructure development is essential to mitigate these challenges. Understanding best practices and learning from successful models in competitor countries can help understand global trends and patterns and interventions needed.

3.8 Better retail stores

Retailing Sports Stores are upgrading themselves with modern day requirements. Most of the stores have started digitising their sales and is mostly remotely operated. Stores like Decathlon, NIKE, Adidas use RFID technology to reach more and more customers. Order preparation teams, order tracking teams, delivery teams are emerging as new trends in Global markets. The sports goods industry have to diversify themselves and capture these upcoming trends in global markets.

4 Conclusion

From its roots from Sialkot, the partition has forced craftsmen to settle across India especially Meerut thus making it a leading centre of Sports goods manufacturing. The industry is still highly labour intensive but promises an upward trend in exports across the world. The Meerut sports industry shows considerable promise, rooted in its strong craftsmanship heritage and expanding market for sports products. With rising investments and an emphasis on innovation, it has the potential to boost its global competitiveness, nurture local talent, and support the broader advancement of sports in India and abroad.