

MEASURES AGAINST AGE FRAUD IN SPORTS
EXTRACT FROM MINUTES OF MEETING OF ETHICS COMMITTEE OF AITA

Govt of India (MYAS) vide letter No. F.32-18/2009-SP.III dated 25th Nov 2009 has laid down certain broad principles to be adopted by National Sports Federations to ensure that overage players are not allowed to participate in Nationals and other Championships and are not included in national teams participating in International Sports Competitions.

These principles and their implementation by AITA is stated herebelow:-

IDENTITY CARD

Government Guidelines

National Sports Federations should introduce a system of issuing identity cards to national athletes, which should, inter-alia, contain name, photograph, signature and date of birth of the player, date of issue of the identity card and its validity period.

Implementation by AITA

AITA started the procedure of registration and issued registration/ identity cards to all players playing tournaments about eight years back. This has been a very successful measure as a player is registered immediately on his entering the 1st AITA ranking tournament. In fact most children are registered at the age of under 12 and there is little room for manipulation at that age.

SUBMISSION OF DOCUMENTS

Government Guidelines

Federation should lay down a clear policy with regard to submission of documents for the purpose of age verification such as birth certificate, passport, school certificate, etc. The identity card containing the date of birth of the player should be issued only after the Federation has fully satisfied itself about the age of the player.

Implementation by AITA

AITA had laid down a clear policy regarding submission of two documents issued by the Government agencies for the purpose of age verification such as Municipal Corporation Certificate of birth & Passport. The identity card / registration card is then issued to the players.

RECORD

Government Guidelines

Federation should maintain an exhaustive and diligent record of the age along with proof of age of athletes who have participated in the annual national championships and other tournaments conducted by it. Each Federation shall be required to maintain a national register of athletes with state-wise details, which will be a public document.

Implementation by AITA

AITA is maintaining an exhaustive and diligent record of age along with proof of age of all players playing tournaments in India.

RANDOM AGE VERIFICATION

Govt Guidelines

The Federation should conduct random age verification at regular intervals, on the basis of the records maintained by it.

Implementation by AITA

AITA is doing random age verification of players based on the records available.

MEDICAL TESTS

Government Guidelines

- a) The Federation should resort to medical examination of an athlete whenever any doubt arises with regard the age of an athlete on account of his or her physical appearance, receipt of any complaint or any other valid ground, which should duly communicated to the athlete.
- b) The medical tests relating to age verification and medical procedures adopted for this purpose should be duly notified by the Federation and made known to all athletes.
- c) The Federation should ensure that the medical tests include physical examination, dental examination and radiological examination.
- d) The Federation should notify in advance the list of empanelled hospitals for conduct of age related medical tests. The hospitals should be chosen on the basis of highest standards and credibility. Preference should be given to Government Hospitals meeting these requirements.
- e) If an athlete contests the findings of the medical test in question, it would be incumbent upon the Federation to arrange for a re-examination, preferably at a reputed Government hospital.

The concerned Committee of AITA has decided that players participating in all NATIONALS in the Main Draw may be subjected to medical age verification before / during the tournament in the following circumstances:-

1. Complaint supported by documentary evidence contradictory to age mentioned in AITA Registration card subject to approval of Secretary State Association and Executive Director, AITA
2. Suo-moto by Tournament director subject to approval of Secretary State Association and Executive Director, AITA.

It was decided that this aspect be clearly mentioned on the tournament fact sheet which is displayed on the AITA website. The process should begin with Nationals U/12, U/16 at Mumbai.

No Selective harassment of any particular player on pretext of medical examination for age verification at any tournament is permitted. To avoid such selective harassment the medical age verification at the tournament can be done only after obtaining written complaint with evidence and subject to approval of Secretary State Association and Executive Director, AITA.

The Committee further observed that comments should be invited from parents and other stake holders like coaches, and medical experts directly involved in sports like Dr PSM Chandran from SAI, Dr Vece Paes etc with regard to the matter of medical examination for age determination. Based on the comments received from parents/stakeholders, the committee could take a view on what further is required to be done.

Members raised various issues relating to medical tests as a means to determine exact age of a player:-

1. What will be the basis for subjecting a junior player to a medical examination? Can a mere complaint from a parent/guardian be the basis, as there will be counter complaint from the parent/guardian of the affected child which will lead to prejudicial interest being involved in age verification by medical tests?
2. Can mere physical appearance be the basis for subjecting the child to medical examination when there is contrary documentary evidence in the form of passport / municipal certificate supporting the player's contention?
3. International Tennis Federation relies on documentary evidence in the nature of passport for age verification and allows a player to play in a particular age category on the basis of the DOB stated in the passport. Will it not lead to a contrary situation where a player is being subjected to medical tests for playing in an AITA tournament but is free to play in an ITF/ATF Tournament on the basis of his DOB appearing in the passport?
4. The Govt rules call for a second medical examination being conducted in the case of a doubt on the basis of the first medical examination. Which decision will be final; the first or the second?
5. Even assuming for a moment on the basis of a medical examination the age is found to be different from the one stated in his documentary records i.e. passport / birth certificate, who will be the final authority to take this decision particularly in view of the fact that he is still free to play ITF/ATF tournaments which are much more important tournaments as compared to AITA Tournaments?
6. What would be AITA's stand in case a player decides to take the matter to court where his case is supported by solid documentary evidence in the form of passport / municipal certificate which is an internationally recognized document vs a medical examination which is subject to a variation of ± 6 months?
7. Who will pay for the legal fees relating to the court case?

In view of the abovestated observations of the members, it was decided that a letter would be written to the Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports (MYAS) seeking the opinion of the Ministry in regard to these.

As stated above, AITA would be pleased to receive comments from parents and other stakeholders like coaches and medical experts directly involved in sports. Comments may be forwarded vide e-mail at feedback@aitatennis.com.