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China's Sports Arbitration System: Institutional Framework, Early Case Practice, and University Physical Education as a Bridge for Interdisciplinary Talent Development

Huijing Liu
Southwest Forestry University
Rou Dong
dongrou@ynau.edu.cn
Yunnan Agricultural University

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Abstract

The 2022 revision of China's Sports Law created a dedicated chapter on sports arbitration, closing a long-standing gap in sport-specific dispute resolution. This article examines China's sports arbitration system emerging from this reform, focusing on its institutional position as a "fourth category of arbitration" in Chinese scholarship, the key procedural rules distinguishing it from general arbitration, and the first six typical cases released by the China Commission of Arbitration for Sport (CCAS) in June 2026. Beyond describing the institutional framework, this article raises a question that has received little attention in the doctrinal literature: who will provide the talent needed to support this system? Sports arbitrators need both professional legal training and what this article terms "the specificity of sport"—a tacit understanding of how different sports operate in practice and the governance rules that shape them. Neither law schools nor programs in sport management or sport economics can provide this combination of expertise. University-based schools of physical education possess embodied knowledge of sport and well-established mechanisms for teacher preparation. They should therefore be understood as a bridge within a multidisciplinary talent ecosystem rather than as competitors to law schools or programs in sport management and sport economics. The argument is grounded in the experience of a provincial university that is using teacher-education accreditation and an application to offer a master's degree program integrating sports arbitration literacy into its curriculum. The system's legitimacy will turn as much on cultivating human capital as on the elegance of its legal framework.

1 Introduction

The professionalization and commercialization of competitive sport in China have led to a substantial increase in disputes concerning eligibility, registration and transfers, athlete representation, disciplinary sanctions, and the confirmation of results (Xu 2023). Before the 2022 revision of the Sports Law, Article 32 of the 1995 Sports Law had left institutional space for sports arbitration, but the relevant institution was never established in practice. The constitutional-level obstacle underlying this situation was that the 2000 Legislation Law limited the authority to enact provisions concerning arbitration and litigation to the national legislature, while Article 32 authorized the State Council to establish arbitral bodies (Xiong 2024). Sport-specific disputes thus fell into a gap: ordinary civil litigation was difficult to apply to highly technical and time-sensitive sport-specific disputes, while internal handling by sports organizations lacked external binding force. Xiong (2024) points out the importance of sports arbitration: sports arbitration fills the gap in resolving disputes between unequal parties with distinct sports-specificity, which commercial arbitration, labor arbitration, and litigation all have difficulty fully addressing.

This long-standing institutional gap began to close on 24 June 2022, when the revised Sports Law created a dedicated Chapter IX, "Sports Arbitration" (Articles 91–101) (Sports Law, 2022). On 22 December 2022, the General Administration of Sport of China issued the Sports Arbitration Rules and the Organizational Rules of the Sports Arbitration Commission, both of which took effect on 1 January 2023 (General Administration of Sport of China 2023; Organizational Rules of the Sports Arbitration Commission 2023). The China Commission of Arbitration for Sport (CCAS) was established in Beijing on

11 February 2023 (Dept of Policy and Law 2022; An and Li 2024). In its first year, CCAS received 24 cases and concluded six; by the end of 2024, it had received 173 applications, accepted 82, and concluded 55 (CCAS 2025). In June 2026, CCAS published its first six typical cases, covering jurisdictional objections, athlete-agent contracts, on-field decisions, athlete registration, result confirmation, and the validity of employment contracts (CCAS 2026). The revision has thus completed a full cycle of "law–rules–institution–cases," and the long-standing institutional gap has gradually been filled.

Current scholarship on sports arbitration has followed two main lines: first, comparative studies of the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) (Guo 2002; Guo 2004); and second, interpretations of specific domestic provisions (Xiong 2024; Zhou 2023). However, few studies have integrated normative design, rule interpretation, and actual case practice, and have further examined who should provide the human capital needed to develop the system, how that human capital should be developed, and how the system can be sustained.

However, establishing an institution does not in itself ensure its effectiveness. The effectiveness of an institution ultimately depends on who operates it. By design, sports arbitration is a hybrid field that combines law and sport. Yet the literature's focus on doctrine has left a more fundamental question unexplored: which disciplines should supply the personnel for sports arbitration, and how should their respective competencies be combined?

The physical education program examined in this article admitted its first cohort of students in 2005, received second-level teacher-education program accreditation in 2026, and is currently preparing an application for a master's degree program. Its teaching and program development therefore provide both an impetus for research on China's new sports arbitration system and a point of leverage for translating research findings into curricular action. Drawing on the teaching practice of the physical education program examined in this article, this article identifies three features of China's new sports arbitration system. First, it outlines the institutional position of Chinese sports arbitration within what Chinese scholars have termed a "fourth category of arbitration" and examines its balance between sporting autonomy and judicial review. Second, it explains the key rules, including the scope of accepted cases, jurisdiction, special procedures, and finality. Third, it interprets the first six typical cases as the system's earliest interpretive signals. On this basis, the article further examines the human-capital conditions required for the new system and the specific but limited role that university physical education can play in this process. Accordingly, the article is organized into three parts. Part I (Sections 2–4) examines the institutional supply, including the normative architecture, key rules, and earliest case practice. Part II (Sections 5–6) turns to institutional demand, focusing on the competency profile required by the system and the position of university physical education within a broader multidisciplinary talent ecosystem. Part III (Sections 7–8) draws out the implications for institutional reform and the international standing of Chinese sports arbitration.

2 Institutional Positioning of Sports Arbitration under the Revised Sports Law

2.1 From Dormant Provisions to a Dedicated Chapter

Chinese sports arbitration can be traced back to Article 32 of the 1995 Sports Law, which authorized the State Council to prescribe the establishment of arbitral institutions and their scope of cases. Because the 2000 Legislation Law excluded arbitration from matters subject to delegated legislation, the normative premise of Article 32 became incompatible with the 2000 Legislation Law, a higher-ranking statute, and the establishment of sports arbitral institutions consequently stalled (Xiong 2024).

The revised *Sports Law* resolved this conflict at the constitutional level. Chapter IX of the revised Sports Law establishes a comprehensive legal foundation for sports arbitration, setting out its institutional structure, scope of cases, the effect of awards, coordination with other mechanisms, and judicial supervision. Xu (2023) argues that China's sports arbitration system has followed a development path distinct from the organically evolving models found in Western countries, characterized by the parallel pursuit of state-led development and independent operation. On the one hand, the state establishes the institution of sports arbitration, with the sports administrative authority responsible for establishing CCAS, whose budget is provided by the state; on the other hand, the independence of the institution is maintained through the principle of independence, protections for arbitrators' rights, and supervisory mechanisms, which together help ensure that administrative interference is limited (Xu, 2023). Taken together, these features aptly illustrate the process through which China's sports arbitration system has developed.

2.2 Sports Arbitration as a Proposed "Fourth Category of Arbitration"

Tian and Zhou (2025) argue that China's sports arbitration system can be understood as a distinct form of arbitration—a "fourth category of arbitration"—alongside commercial arbitration, labor-dispute arbitration, and rural land-contract arbitration. The following three features distinguish the new sports arbitration system as an independent category.

First, a distinctive jurisdictional basis. The arbitration agreement is not limited to a bilateral contract. The Rules extend the scope of jurisdiction to arbitration clauses embedded in the statutes of sports organizations, competition rules, and even entry and registration forms, as well as to implied consent where one party asserts consent and the other does not deny it (SGA 2023b). The practical basis lies in the fact that many disputants are members of the same sports organization, whose dispute-resolution clauses are already embedded in industry management documents and thus binding without the need for a separate contract.

Second, a composite value objective. The limited duration of athletic careers and the rigid periodicity of sporting events make efficiency a priority, yet fairness remains a fundamental requirement (Xu, 2023).

The system incorporates both objectives: the finality of a single arbitral award and flexible expedited procedures promote efficiency, while the principle of voluntariness, the possibility of public hearings, and layered supervision safeguard fairness.

Third, bounded judicial review. People's courts may intervene only on six statutory grounds—errors in the application of law, lack of arbitral jurisdiction, procedural violation, forged evidence, concealment of evidence, or arbitrator misconduct—or where an award is contrary to the public interest (Sports Arbitration Rules, 2023; Xiong & Hu, 2025). This reflects judicial deference to the autonomy of sport (Tian & Zhou, 2025).

2.3 The Balance Between Sporting Autonomy and Judicial Intervention

Article 95 of the revised Sports Law encourages sports organizations to establish internal dispute-resolution mechanisms and to use them as a prerequisite for arbitration, thereby coordinating sectoral autonomy with judicial backstopping (Xu, 2023). Judicial intervention is constrained by Article 98 through a framework combining specific statutory grounds with a general principle (Sports Arbitration Rules, 2023; Xiong & Hu, 2025). Xiong and Hu (2025) classify the grounds for setting aside arbitral awards into seven categories centered on errors in the application of law, building on Xiong's (2014) research on substantive public order; they further advocate drawing on the practice of the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) and adopting a limited-review approach to sports arbitration awards, under which people's courts review awards only on statutory grounds while respecting the professional judgment of arbitral tribunals.

3 Interpretation of the Sports Arbitration Rules

3.1 The systemic positioning of the scope clause

Article 92(1) sets out the scope of cases subject to sports arbitration, covering three categories of disputes. First, disputes arising from challenges to decisions—such as disqualification, annulment of results, or suspension—made by sports social organizations, sports governing bodies, or event organizers under anti-doping or other management rules. Second, disputes arising from athlete registration and transfers. Third, other disputes arising in competitive sports activities, while expressly excluding arbitrable civil and commercial disputes and labor disputes (Xiong, 2024).

Xiong (2024) argues that Article 92 is problem-oriented: in the five years preceding the reform, the existing framework was unable to fully address sport-specific disputes between parties of unequal standing, giving sports arbitration a gap-filling function. She advocates moving the categorization from the statute down to the Rules or a party guidance manual, thereby building a coordinated "law–rules–guidance" framework for determining the admissibility of cases, consistent with Zhu's (2022) integrated reading of the scope clause. Viewed systematically, the catch-all provision covering "other disputes arising in competitive sports activities" leaves room for emerging claims, such as agency disputes and

disputes concerning the validity of employment contracts—a reading supported by Typical Cases 2 and 6 (Zhou, 2023).

3.2 Jurisdiction and Case Acceptance: Multiple Forms of Arbitration Agreements and Kompetenz-Kompetenz

The Rules adopt an expansive interpretation of the forms of arbitration agreements. In addition to a written bilateral agreement, arbitration clauses contained in organizational statutes, competition rules, and registration forms, together with implied consent, all carry jurisdictional effect (SGA 2023b). The Rules further authorize the Sports Arbitration Commission or the arbitral tribunal to determine its own jurisdiction, thereby establishing the principle of *kompetenz-kompetenz* (German for "jurisdiction over jurisdiction," referring to the authority of an arbitral tribunal to determine in the first instance whether it has jurisdiction). Typical Case 2—a dispute between a sports agency and a club over agency fees—is illustrative: the respondent argued that the fee dispute fell within the scope of commercial arbitration; the tribunal held that sports-agency activities are intertwined with athlete registration, transfers, and contracting and have a distinct sectoral character, dismissed the objection, and clarified that a sports arbitration tribunal may determine its own jurisdiction (CCAS, 2026). The ruling supports the orderly regulation of athlete registration and transfers and helps clarify the boundaries of agency activities.

3.3 The special procedure: a timeliness-driven innovation

Article 100 of the *Sports Law* provides that disputes arising in events requiring immediate handling are subject to a special procedure; the Rules elaborate this in Chapter VII (Articles 62–73) through twelve provisions addressing temporary, special, and urgent disputes within major-event cycles (SGA 2023a). Three features are particularly notable in these provisions. First, expedited service—telephone notice first, followed by written documents—reduces the time cost of traditional paper service. Second, rapid panel formation and consolidated arbitration improve the efficiency of multi-party, multi-stage event disputes. Third, a 24-hour award mechanism: while ordinary arbitration is subject to a three-month time limit, the special procedure can render an award within 24 hours.

In the ice hockey qualification round of the 14th National Winter Games, 17 youth athletes were barred from competing due to issues concerning registration and eligibility; CCAS activated the special procedure and, within 24 hours, issued an award supporting their participation—this was the first case concluded by the Commission and a landmark beginning for Chinese sports-arbitration practice (People's Daily, 2025). The design draws on the CAS ad hoc division practice that developed following the 1996 Atlanta Olympics, with adaptations to national conditions (Guo & Liang, 2023).

3.4 Finality and the interface with judicial review

Article 93 of the Sports Law and the Rules establish finality upon a single arbitral award: an award takes effect upon issuance, sparing parties from protracted litigation (Sports Arbitration Rules, 2023; Department of Policy and Law, 2022). For professional athletes, the significance is even greater: the traditional path from labor arbitration through two instances of civil litigation often takes two or three

years, whereas sports arbitration can produce an effective award on matters such as unpaid wages within months (CCAS, 2026).

Finality does not preclude judicial oversight. The setting-aside grounds under Article 98 were first applied by the Beijing Fourth Intermediate People's Court in the 2024 case of Ma v. CCAS, the country's first sports-arbitration judicial-review case: the court conducted a comprehensive review of procedure, evidence, and the application of law, found no ground for setting aside the award, and dismissed the application (Beijing Fourth Intermediate People's Court, 2025). Where the Sports Law provides only principled guidance, the case refined the review standards and demonstrated a supportive judicial approach.

4 Empirical Analysis of the First Six Typical Cases

4.1 A Typology of the First Six Cases

In June 2026, CCAS selected and published the first six typical cases from concluded matters, covering challenges to organizational decisions, registration and transfers, on-field decisions, result confirmation, and employment-contract validity (CCAS, 2026). Although these typical cases do not constitute binding precedents, they provide important interpretive guidance for future sports-arbitration practice in China. The cases can be divided into two groups: procedural-focus cases (Cases 1–3), addressing jurisdictional boundaries, the scope of cases, and the threshold for intervening in on-field decisions; and substantive-focus cases (Cases 4–6), in which the focus extends from procedural issues to substantive disputes, specifically involving the duration of registration priority, result confirmation, and contract validity.

4.2 Procedural focus: jurisdiction versus admissibility Case 1—a jurisdictional objection case involving a club's claim against an athlete and the athlete's counterclaim—established the distinction between jurisdiction and admissibility. The tribunal clarified that jurisdiction is the basis of the tribunal's authority to hear and decide a case, whereas admissibility concerns whether a specific claim meets the conditions for acceptance; a lack of admissibility does not necessarily entail lack of jurisdiction; rather, the two reflect a logical relationship between "authority" and "conditions" (CCAS, 2026). In this case, the athlete's counterclaim fell within the scope of sports arbitration, and the tribunal therefore had jurisdiction over it; however, the counterclaim had not first been submitted through the sports organization's internal dispute-resolution mechanism, and it was filed after the time limit prescribed by Article 20 of the Rules. The tribunal therefore declined to consider the counterclaim on the grounds that the internal precondition had not been satisfied and the claim was time-barred. By strictly applying the "internal precondition" threshold (i.e., requiring certain sports disputes to exhaust internal remedies within the sports organization before arbitration can be initiated), the case prevented procedural circularity and upheld the priority of sporting autonomy; its value lies in translating the abstract principle of *kompetenz-kompetenz* into an operable review sequence.

Case

—a dispute between a sports agency and a club over agency fees—reinforces the principle of *kompetenz-kompetenz* through its interpretation of the scope of cases. The respondent argued that the fee dispute fell within the scope of commercial arbitration. The tribunal held that sports-agency activities encompass athlete registration, transfers, contracting, and representation and are inseparable from competitive sports; accordingly, even where a dispute takes the form of a property-rights dispute, it may still fall within the broad category of "other disputes arising in competitive sports activities," and the objection was therefore dismissed (CCAS, 2026). Zhang argues that the case rejects treating agency services as uniformly commercial in nature and instead incorporates the distinctive characteristics of the sports sector into the analysis of the scope of cases.

4.3 Substantive Focus: field-of-play Decisions and the Boundaries of Athletes' Rights

Case

—an athlete's challenge to an on-field decision made by a provincial sports bureau—applied the internationally recognized field-of-play principle. The tribunal held that on-field technical decisions are made in real time and require professional judgment and should therefore, as a matter of principle, be respected; intervention is warranted only where there is evidence of bias, fraud, or bad-faith rule violations (CCAS, 2026). A valid appeal must satisfy two requirements: a formal requirement that it be submitted in writing and a substantive requirement that the intention to appeal be clearly expressed. In this case, the coach merely stood at the sideline and waved—a gesture that did not constitute an appeal under the applicable rules—and no written submission was filed; the appeal was therefore dismissed.

Case

—an athlete against a provincial sports bureau over registration—delineated the boundary between transitional sectoral arrangements and athletes' rights. The facts were as follows: the athlete had previously competed under the original organization, a sport-specific association overseen by the provincial sports bureau. Based on the athlete's "single participation," the original organization issued a registration notice and claimed registration priority over the athlete; when the athlete later sought to change the registration organization, the original organization relied on the registration notice to claim a permanent and exclusive right to contract with the athlete. The tribunal held that a registration notice issued solely on the basis of a single participation could, at most, constitute a transitional registration-priority arrangement, and that such priority was subject to a reasonable time limit. The original organizations claimed "permanent and exclusive right to contract" exceeded the maximum period established by the higher-level *Registration Management Measures*. Where the registration notice was lower in legal hierarchy than the *Registration Management Measures*, the higher-level *Measures* prevailed (CCAS, 2026). As the registration-priority period had expired, the athlete was free to choose a registration organization. The case demonstrates that historically established sectoral practices cannot override the minimum protections for athletes' rights established by higher-level norms (CCAS, 2026).

Case

—an athlete against a sport-specific management center over result confirmation—focused on the interpretation of competition rules. Six teams competed for places in the final; the applicant ultimately placed fifth and received a certificate, while the respondent relied on Rule 6 of the competition rules ("only the top three of the six teams are awarded") to argue that fifth place did not constitute a valid result and that the certificate should be withdrawn. The tribunal adopted a systematic interpretation: Clause 1 (the number of teams is related to the number of awarded places) is the premise for Clause 2; "other places" in Clause 2 must be limited to those beyond the top three that nevertheless meet the award conditions, rather than to all finishers. The tribunal held that fifth place was a valid result but not an awarded place, that the certificate had resulted from an erroneous application of the rules, and made recommendations to the organizer for improvement (CCAS, 2026).

Case

—an athlete against a club over employment-contract validity—clarified the standard for determining validity: the issue is not merely whether the signature was personally written by the party, but also the party's true intent and the overall performance of the contract; a contract that has been performed for several years despite a formal defect in the signature should be recognized as valid (CCAS, 2026). This protects the reasonable reliance and legitimate investments of both parties and helps maintain the stability of professional legal relationships.

5 The Composite-Competence Bottleneck and the Place of Physical Education

5.1 What Sports Arbitration Requires: A Dual-Competence Profile

The statutory qualifications for arbitrators most directly reveal the competencies that the system expects of its personnel. Article 19 of the Sports Arbitration Rules requires arbitrators either to hold a senior professional title in legal studies or in sports research and teaching, or to possess a legal qualification together with at least eight years of experience in arbitration or related work (Sports Arbitration Rules, 2023). A closer reading shows that this is not a single competence but a conjunctive requirement: the roster must combine legal expertise with "sports-specificity"—a tacit understanding of how sports are actually organized, governed, and disciplined in practice. The 2024 CCAS Annual Report confirms this composite logic: among the 103 arbitrators appointed in the first two cohorts, the roster deliberately combines legal experts and arbitration practitioners with scholars and practitioners from the fields of sport and anti-doping, ensuring that no single disciplinary background predominates (CCAS, 2025). The system presumes that arbitrators are capable of interpreting both contracts and competition rules, and of weighing both legal provisions and sectoral practices.

Legal expertise and sports-specificity are cultivated in different institutional settings and are rarely found in the same individual. A lawyer well versed in contract law and procedure may not readily appreciate why field-of-play decisions are entitled to a presumption of deference; a coach or PE academic fluent in the logic of competition may lack the doctrinal apparatus to articulate a jurisdictional holding. The binding constraint on quality, then, is not the existence of either competence but their combination. The human-capital question is the natural sequel to the institutional one: Chapter IX's elegant design is necessary but not sufficient, because every award must ultimately be rendered by someone who bridges the two competences.

5.2 Why Physical Education Rather Than Law, Management, or Economics

A fair question is why university physical education should have a place in this discussion at all. Sports arbitration is, on its face, a legal institution; one might therefore expect law schools to supply personnel through legal training and professional qualification, or sports management and sports economics programs to contribute expertise in governance, labor relations, and market structures, as well as administrative personnel and expert witnesses. Each of these expectations is partly correct, yet each is also incomplete.

Legal education provides the indispensable legal expertise. Yet law graduates typically enter the field without the embodied sporting knowledge required to handle real sports-arbitration cases. The typical cases provide clear illustrations: Case 3 turned on whether a coach's sideline gesture constituted a valid appeal under the applicable competition rules; Case 5 required a systematic interpretation of the award provisions in the competition rules; and Case 4 hinged on the internal logic of athlete-registration practices. Arbitrators with legal training must acquire sports-specificity through case-by-case experience. Sports management and sports economics provide expertise in governance, transfers, and labor-market dynamics that is essential for employment-contract and agency disputes. However, neither discipline confers legal qualifications or possesses the educational capacity to cultivate a large pool of arbitrators.

Physical education occupies a distinct and complementary niche. Its faculty directly possess a reservoir of "sports-specificity": they teach competition rules, refereeing, training science, and pedagogy, and have an intuitive understanding of on-field decisions and sectoral practices, precisely the half of an arbitrator's competence that law and management do not naturally provide. Physical education is also a discipline capable of transmitting this competence across generations through formal educational mechanisms. Teacher-education accreditation and outcome-based education (OBE) provide physical education programs with an established framework for backward-designing from graduate outcomes such as "understanding sport rules and being able to mediate sports disputes," that is, working backward from the desired graduate outcomes to the curriculum and teaching components. Physical education is not a competitor to or substitute for law, management, and economics; rather, it is the discipline best positioned to supply the "sports-specificity" dimension of the composite need and to train, at scale, the

sport-literate personnel that the system lacks. This claim is deliberately modest: within a multidisciplinary talent ecosystem, physical education is a necessary bridge, not the sole discipline responsible for meeting all of the system's needs.

This analytical framework of "physical education as a bridge" also indicates its limits. Physical education alone cannot confer legal qualifications. The model it implies requires universities to establish joint appointment arrangements—for example, having schools of physical education and law jointly appoint faculty members who also serve as arbitrators—as well as dual-degree pathways and sustained collaboration with law schools and sports-governance programs. "Sports-specificity" is the scarcer half of the composite competence, and physical education is structurally positioned to help close this gap, rather than to replace the legal and administrative disciplines on which the system equally depends.

5.3 Physical education's comparative advantages in sports-specificity

The following four advantages explain why physical education is particularly well positioned to supply the "sports-specificity" dimension of the arbitrator pool.

First, embodied knowledge of rules and refereeing. Physical education faculty typically have backgrounds as coaches or referees; they have stood on the sidelines and applied the very regulations that are later contested in cases. This embodied fluency reduces the translation cost for legally trained arbitrators encountering the technical logic of a sport for the first time.

Second, sports ethics and fair-play education. At its core, physical education teaches fair play, respect for rules, and the appropriate handling of disputes—the dispositional foundation an arbitrator needs when a "Field of Play" question requires a choice between deference and intervention.

Third, experience in mediating youth-sport and campus disputes. Physical education faculty routinely mediate selection, eligibility, and disciplinary disputes among student-athletes. Many sports disputes arise precisely in these developmental and amateur contexts, and the mediation habits developed there can be directly transferred to arbitration.

Fourth, the teacher-education accreditation framework. Having passed second-level teacher-education accreditation, with an expert on-site review in 2025 and formal confirmation in 2026, the physical education program can apply its outcome-based education (OBE) philosophy—centered on student-centeredness, outcome orientation, and continuous improvement—to the development of sports-arbitration personnel. It can treat arbitration literacy as a measurable graduate outcome and backward-design courses and practical training around it.

6. A Cross-Disciplinary Capacity-Building Model: Physical Education as a Bridge

6.1 Mapping the Six Bridge Dimensions

Building on this foundation, physical education programs can integrate sports arbitration across six dimensions, with each dimension conceived as a bridge to complementary disciplines rather than a task undertaken by physical education alone. Table 1 maps each dimension, its lead discipline, and the specific bridging role played by physical education.

Table 1
Mapping the Bridge Dimensions: Physical Education Programs and the Multidisciplinary Talent Ecosystem for Sports Arbitration

Dimension	Lead Discipline	Bridging Role of Physical Education	Bridge Partner / Expected Outcome
Curriculum embedding	PE + Law	Add modules on “Sports Law,” “Sports Arbitration,” and “Competition Rules and Dispute Resolution”; incorporate “understanding sports rules and being able to mediate sports disputes” into the graduate requirements	Co-designed with the law school; makes arbitration literacy a measurable OBE indicator
Practice platform	PE + Sports management	Co-build a sport-dispute mediation training base with the Yunnan Provincial Sports Bureau and single-sport associations; establish an on-campus moot arbitration tribunal	Collaboration with the Sports Bureau and Sports Management; brings real disputes into the classroom
Faculty transformation	PE + Law	Encourage senior-title PE faculty to obtain legal qualifications and apply to become sports arbitrators; cultivate a “dual-qualified” team	Joint appointments with law school; directly replenishes the arbitrator roster with practitioners with sports-specific expertise
Distinctive master’s direction	PE + Law / Economics	Establish “Sports Dispute Resolution and Sports Rule of Law” as an application direction, combined with local case-study research	A differentiated growth area distinct from athletic training and physical education
Local service	PE + Sports Management	Provide rule-drafting and dispute-prevention support for Yunnan’s ethnic traditional-sport events and campus competitions	Integrates into local rule-of-law construction, feeding teaching and research
International perspective	PE + Law	Include CAS case law and comparative sport law in teaching; track the internationalization of sports arbitration	Enhances the international discourse capacity of talent and research

6.2 Operational Sequencing and Institutional Enablers

In practice, curriculum embedding and practice platforms should be initiated first: a Sports Law module can be added to the existing program through minimal adjustments, while on-campus competitions can be used to establish a micro-level dispute-resolution process of appeal, hearing, and mediation, so that students encounter real-world scenarios as part of their learning. Faculty transformation is a medium- to long-term process—encouraging faculty members to pursue law degrees and undergo arbitrator training, and assembling a multidisciplinary "sports + law" team to build a faculty base for the proposed master's program. The distinctive master's direction and local service can be advanced in parallel: the former provides a disciplinary anchor, while the latter provides evidence of social service, together strengthening the case for the application. At the author's institution, these measures are anchored in the recent accreditation and the ongoing application for a master's program, which together create an opportunity to translate the research findings into curricular action.

6.3 Reverse Contribution: How Universities Feed Back into Institutional Development

This linkage is not a one-way arrangement; universities also contribute back to institutional development. First, universities can draw on their neutral and professional research capacity to classify and compare the initial and subsequent representative cases, distilling citable adjudicative rules, providing input for the ongoing updating of rules and guidance for the parties, and advancing the development of a "law–rules–guidance" system. Second, the multidisciplinary arbitration professionals cultivated by universities can help address the current shortage of individuals who combine both sports-specific and legal expertise. Third, well-developed on-campus sports-dispute mechanisms can serve as a model for the internal dispute-resolution mechanisms encouraged by Article 95, testing the bridge between "internal preconditions"—that is, requiring certain disputes to exhaust internal remedies within sports organizations before arbitration may be initiated—and "arbitration as a backstop." The PE program thus finds a new area for development in sports arbitration and contributes to institutional development through intellectual resources.

7 Discussion: Institutional Refinement and International Dialogue

Drawing on normative analysis, rule interpretation, and case evidence, the further development of China's sports arbitration system should proceed along three lines—jurisdictional standards, mechanism bridges, and the accumulation of case-based guidance—with university physical education serving as a social force supporting all three.

First, refine the criteria for applying the scope of cases subject to sports arbitration. The tripartite structure of Article 92 remains operationally ambiguous; Xiong (2024), drawing on case evidence, notes that the catch-all provision covering "other disputes in competitive sports activities" urgently needs to be further classified by dispute type. A "law–rules–guidance" three-tier structure should be established, with specific types of disputes set out in the Rules and the party guidance manual, together with an ongoing updating mechanism for newly emerging disputes; at the same time, the boundaries between

sports arbitration and commercial and labor arbitration should be clarified—particularly for athletes' employment contracts that combine remuneration with industry-management characteristics, for which criteria for identifying "sports-specificity" should be established to reduce uncertainty in the adjudication of similar cases.

Second, streamline the bridge between arbitration and internal dispute resolution. Internal mechanisms within sports organizations serve as a prerequisite for sports arbitration, and the bridge between the two affects the effectiveness of the system (Xu, 2023). On the one hand, Article 95 should be used to encourage individual sports associations to improve their internal mechanisms by clarifying appeal channels, time limits, and procedures; on the other hand, sports arbitration should be strengthened in its role of providing final review of internal decisions, so that decisions arising from sectoral self-governance can acquire external enforceability through arbitral oversight (SGA, 2023b). The strict internal-precondition requirement revealed in Case 1 should be further specified by type in the Rules: operational guidance should clarify which disputes must exhaust internal remedies, the consequences of late applications, and how to handle conflicts between internal decisions and arbitral awards.

Third, build international discourse through the accumulation of case-based guidance—a point Jiang and Zhu (2022) press in the Chinese context. Chinese sports arbitration got a late start, but its internationalisation is accelerating: in July 2025, a CCAS delegation travelled to Switzerland to engage in dialogue with CAS and the Swiss Arbitration Association; in August 2026, it was invited to the Singapore International Sports Law Conference to deliver a thematic presentation in English (CCAS, 2026). Fan notes that CAS's credibility grew from four decades of accumulated cases, and that China must build its foundations steadily: the more stable the rules, the richer the body of case-based guidance, and the more transparent the procedures, the more naturally external recognition will follow (CCAS, 2026). The selection and publication of typical cases should be regularized and standardized to form a predictable, testable, and citable body of adjudicative rules; while upholding international principles such as the "Field of Play" principle, China should address conflicts among sectoral rules through systematic and analogical interpretation, so that its awards remain faithful to sectoral logic while also being readily understandable from a comparative perspective.

These three elements are internally coherent: acceptance standards define the system's entry point, the mechanism bridge opens the system's pathway, and the accumulation of case-based guidance builds institutional standing. University physical education—as a bridge connecting talent, disciplines, research, and service within the multidisciplinary ecosystem (Sections 5–6)—is precisely the key link for translating systemic advantages into grassroots governance capacity.

The comparative framework with CAS is instructive. CAS's independence has repeatedly been questioned: Duval (2016, 2026) argues that CAS performs a key accountability function in transnational sports governance and therefore must be strictly separated from the executive and legislative powers of the governing bodies of the Olympic Movement, yet the European courts have assessed its independence from an arbitral rather than a judicial perspective, leaving a form of structural dependence

that threatens independent accountability. Downie's (2011) governance critique and the literature on CAS reform converge on one point: institutional design must continually earn legitimacy. China's fourth-category" design—established by the state yet independent by law, autonomous yet backed by judicial review—can be read as a civil-law response to the same legitimacy question, while its early case practice, particularly the strict application of the internal-precondition requirement in Case 1, already shows signs of a self-restrained, rule-oriented adjudicative approach worthy of further empirical tracking.

These conclusions remain provisional, given the limited empirical base of six typical cases and a small number of judicial-review decisions. The role of university physical education as a bridge for sporting specificity should therefore be understood as a proposition for further empirical testing rather than a demonstrated result.

8 Conclusion

In less than four years, China's sports arbitration system has evolved from a dormant constitutional provision into a functioning system with its own legal framework, rules, institution, and initial body of case law. Its distinctiveness lies in its "fourth-category" arbitration design—established by the state yet independent by law, autonomous yet backed by judicial review—and in the special procedures designed for the tight schedules of elite competition—the so-called "unforgiving clock." The six typical cases indicate that the tribunal has already shown close attention to the distinction between jurisdiction and admissibility, to the deference owed to "Field of Play" decisions, and to the minimum protection of athletes' rights within sectoral practice.

What the system now lacks is not design but personnel. The arbitrator qualification conjoins legal and sports-specificity, and those two halves are rarely found in one person or one discipline. University physical education is not the system's sole answer, but it is one of the disciplines best positioned to supply the sporting-specificity half of the compound and to train sport-literate arbitrators at scale, inside a multidisciplinary ecosystem that also draws on law, management, and economics. For the institution to convert statutory elegance into everyday legitimacy, cultivating that human capital may matter as much as any further refinement of the rules.

Declarations

Author Contribution

A.B. and C.D. conceived the study and designed the methodology. A.B. conducted the formal analysis of the statutory provisions and the first six typical cases, and wrote the original manuscript. C.D. provided resources, supervised the project, validated the analysis, and revised and edited the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript and accept responsibility for its content.

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