# Sport’s youthful stars shine amid growing control and regulation



In the world of sports, the rise of youthful talent is both exhilarating and perplexing. The landscape is increasingly dominated by prodigies—be it a 14-year-old smashing records in T20 cricket or a 17-year-old football sensation poised to claim the Ballon d’Or. Yet, amid this display of youthful excellence, there’s an unsettling trend towards what some are calling the "infantilisation of sport." This term captures the rising number of regulations aimed at managing behaviour and expectations within the sporting community, often to the detriment of an unscripted and authentic experience.

Recently, the sporting spotlight has shone brightly on 14-year-old Vaibhav Suryavanshi, who made history by becoming the youngest player to score a century in men's T20 cricket while playing for the Rajasthan Royals. His remarkable 101 runs, achieved in just 38 balls against the Gujarat Titans, showcased not only his skill but also the pressures that come with such early acclaim. In stark contrast, his immediate follow-up match saw him dismissed for a mere two-ball duck, illustrating the volatile nature of success at such a young age. Football, too, has its shining star in 17-year-old Lamine Yamal of FC Barcelona, who has recently set multiple records, becoming the youngest goalscorer in both the European Championship and La Liga.

As these young athletes capture headlines, the conversations around their behaviour and public persona have become increasingly monitored. Formula One exemplifies this trend. For decades, the series has maintained a balance of thrills, controversy, and drama. Yet, recent overreactions by the sport's governing body, the Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile (FIA), have highlighted a preoccupation with "acceptable" conduct. This is particularly evident in the case of reigning champion Max Verstappen, who faced penalties for swearing during press conferences. These incidents reflect a worrying shift toward a more controlled, sanitized environment that prioritises image over the raw passion that originally drew fans to motorsport.

The FIA's response to instances of swearing, embodied in exorbitant fines and new restrictions on driver conduct, further emphasises the sport’s troubling conversion into what has been likened to a “lavish swear jar.” Initial fines started at €40,000 for foul language, escalating to even higher amounts, creating an atmosphere of fear rather than freedom among athletes. It garnered strong backlash, prompting a swift retreat as regulations were modified after drivers collectively expressed their discontent. The Grand Prix Drivers’ Association articulated the absurdity of policing language, arguing that adult participants should not require instruction on what constitutes appropriate speech.

Contextually, this regulatory scrutiny aligns with wider shifts seen across different sports, where controlling narratives appear to take precedence over player authenticity. For instance, the Football Association recently decided to move the closing time of the summer transfer window to 7 PM, ostensibly to ensure that club officials do not have to work late into the night. This decision, while seemingly benign, raises questions about an overly soft approach to professional sports, diverting attention away from the competitive essence inherent in the game.

Such dynamics provoke reflections on the historical implications of the term "nanny state," which was first coined by a UK politician in 1965 in a critique of restrictive measures on speed limits. Ironically, these sorts of restrictions were shown to reduce casualties, demonstrating that sometimes control can yield positive outcomes. The current climate, however, suggests a growing desire to shield spectators and participants alike from discomfort, raising questions about who ultimately benefits from such measures.

While it is crucial to protect young athletes and instil a sense of responsibility in them, it is equally important to allow room for genuine expression and personal growth. The balance between nurturing emerging talent and allowing them to navigate the challenges of professional sports without excessive oversight remains a contentious topic. As we witness the exploits of these young stars, it becomes imperative to foster environments that embrace the highs and lows of sports—those unpredictable moments that truly define athletic journeys.

Ultimately, the challenge lies in ensuring that the excitement and unpredictability intrinsic to sports are not suffocated by rules designed to control behaviour, but rather celebrated as part of the rich tapestry that draws fans to stadiums and screens worldwide.

### Reference Map

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2025/may/17/skid-marks-swear-jars-and-an-early-night-welcome-to-the-sporting-nanny-state> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.reuters.com/sports/cricket/after-heroic-century-suryavanshi-gets-ipl-reality-check-with-two-ball-duck-2025-05-01/> - 14-year-old Vaibhav Suryavanshi of Rajasthan Royals made history by becoming the youngest player to score a century in men's T20 cricket, achieving 101 runs off 38 balls against Gujarat Titans. However, in his subsequent match against Mumbai Indians, he was dismissed for a two-ball duck, highlighting the challenges young players face in professional cricket. Rajasthan's coach Rahul Dravid emphasized the importance of managing expectations for young talents. ([reuters.com](https://www.reuters.com/sports/cricket/after-heroic-century-suryavanshi-gets-ipl-reality-check-with-two-ball-duck-2025-05-01/?utm_source=openai))
3. <https://www.reuters.com/sports/soccer/barcas-yamal-rises-to-stardom-in-stellar-year-capped-with-title-triumph-2025-05-15/> - 17-year-old Lamine Yamal has emerged as a standout player for FC Barcelona, contributing significantly to their 28th Spanish league title. A product of Barcelona’s La Masia academy, Yamal has broken numerous records, including becoming the youngest goalscorer in the European Championship and the youngest player to score in LaLiga, the Champions League, and El Clasico. His impressive performance has made him a leading contender for the 2025 Ballon d'Or. ([reuters.com](https://www.reuters.com/sports/soccer/barcas-yamal-rises-stardom-stellar-year-capped-with-title-triumph-2025-05-15/?utm_source=openai))
4. <https://www.reuters.com/sports/cricket/chennais-mhatre-makes-his-mark-amid-ipls-suryavanshi-mania-2025-05-04/> - In the 2025 Indian Premier League season, 14-year-old Vaibhav Suryavanshi of Rajasthan Royals and 17-year-old Ayush Mhatre of Chennai Super Kings have captivated cricket fans with their performances. Suryavanshi became the youngest centurion in men's T20 cricket, while Mhatre scored 94 off 48 balls against Royal Challengers Bengaluru. Both players have been praised for their talent and composure under pressure. ([reuters.com](https://www.reuters.com/sports/cricket/chennais-mhatre-makes-his-mark-amid-ipls-suryavanshi-mania-2025-05-04/?utm_source=openai))
5. <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2025/may/17/skid-marks-swear-jars-and-an-early-night-welcome-to-the-sporting-nanny-state> - The article discusses the increasing infantilization of sports, highlighting instances like Formula One's focus on drivers' attire and language. It critiques the FIA's introduction of strict rules against swearing, likening it to a 'lavish swear jar,' and notes the backlash from drivers and fans. The piece also touches on the Football Association's decision to close the summer transfer window earlier to accommodate officials' schedules.
6. <https://www.fourfourtwo.com/features/ballon-dor-2025-power-rankings> - As the 2024/25 football season nears its end, the Ballon d'Or race intensifies. FC Barcelona's Raphinha leads the power rankings with 50 goal contributions in 47 games, while Mohamed Salah of Liverpool and PSG's Ousmane Dembele are also strong contenders. Seventeen-year-old Lamine Yamal of Barcelona has made headlines with 35 goal involvements, positioning him as a potential winner if Barcelona secures the Champions League title. ([fourfourtwo.com](https://www.fourfourtwo.com/features/ballon-dor-2025-power-rankings?utm_source=openai))
7. <https://apnews.com/article/d574d22838adf4bbd18e3239406f2545> - In a historic performance in the Indian Premier League (IPL), 14-year-old Vaibhav Suryavanshi scored a remarkable century for the Rajasthan Royals, becoming the second-fastest centurion in the tournament's 18-year history. Achieving this feat in just 35 balls, he smashed 94 of his 101 runs in boundaries, including 11 sixes and seven fours. His explosive innings helped Rajasthan chase down Gujarat Titans’ total of 209-4 with ease, reaching 212-2 in just 15.5 overs. ([apnews.com](https://apnews.com/article/d574d22838adf4bbd18e3239406f2545?utm_source=openai))