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Post-Read Notes: Nivia Sports

Building an Indian Sports Brand for the Next Generation

Ask most people who has made the football they played with in school, and almost nobody would know the answer. That gap, between a product millions of Indians have held and a brand almost nobody can name, turned out to be the real subject of this immersion. Not the factory floor itself, though that was impressive in its own right, but the question of why a company this capable is still this quiet about it.

NIVIA is one of India's most established sporting goods manufacturers. Its factories turn out somewhere between 800 and 900 SKUs, sold across roughly 4,000 storefronts across the country, at a scale most consumer brands would consider a significant achievement, and one very few people outside the industry would guess just by looking at the brand.

This post-read pulls together everything we took away from the NIVIA immersion. It covers what we saw on the factory floor, what we heard from the family running the business, and the bigger lessons that connect back to what we study in class. Think of it less as a report and more as a recap you can return to when you want to remember why the visit mattered.

And here is what makes NIVIA worth studying: it has already built the hard part, decades of manufacturing depth, scale and trust, and is now working through the harder question of how a great business becomes a great brand.



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1. Key learnings

Building an Indian brand takes generations, not quarters.

A brand like NIVIA is not built through a few good product launches or a clever marketing quarter. It is built through decades of patience, consistency and a willingness to keep evolving without losing what made the brand trustworthy in the first place. 'Legacy' here is not a marketing word. It is the actual explanation for why the company still exists and still matters.

The scale is bigger than it looks from the outside.

What genuinely surprised most of the group was just how large NIVIA's operation actually is. Somewhere between 800 and 900 SKUs, sold across roughly 4,000 storefronts across India. That is not a small sporting goods manufacturer, that is a distribution and manufacturing machine most consumer brands would envy, and yet very few people outside the industry would guess it from the brand's public visibility.

A sports ball is a lot more engineering than it looks.

Watching the manufacturing process up close changed how a few of us think about what counts as a simple product. There is a genuine amount of planning, testing, quality control and specialised human skill behind something as ordinary looking as a football or a badminton racquet. The gap between a product that looks simple and a product that is simple to make turned out to be enormous.

Making products for other brands teaches you to compete with them.

NIVIA's work as an OEM, manufacturing for global brands, is not just a revenue stream sitting alongside its own label. It is also how the company has absorbed global manufacturing standards, understood international supply chains, and stayed current on innovation happening well outside India. Making someone else's product, in a strange way, turned out to be one of the fastest ways to learn how to build your own better.

Staying affordable while becoming aspirational is a real tension.

A legacy brand like NIVIA carries a genuine balancing act. It has built its base on being accessible and affordable to a huge cross-section of Indian sports players. But the next generation of customers is also looking for brands that feel aspirational, not just functional. Holding both of those at once, without abandoning either, is one of the harder problems a brand this size has to solve.

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2. Most valuable insights

Building a great business is not the same as building a powerful brand.

The insight that stayed with most of us longest was the gap between what NIVIA has already built and how well known it actually is for having built it. The company's capabilities, its manufacturing depth, its scale, its global OEM relationships, arguably deserve a brand recall it does not yet fully have. It was a useful, slightly uncomfortable reminder that a great product and a great business are not automatically the same thing as a great consumer brand. You can be excellent at the first and still be underestimated at the second, and NIVIA is a live example of exactly that gap.

3. Practical applications

Here is where the immersion turns into something you can actually use in coursework, internships and the decisions you will make early in your career.

- Remember that a strong product is the foundation, not the finished building. Customers still need a reason to understand and care about what sits behind it.
- Invest as much thought in storytelling and positioning as you do in the product itself, especially once the product is already good.
- Notice how a company's history and legacy can become a genuine asset, if someone actually tells that story instead of assuming customers already know it.
- Pay attention to gaps between capability and perception in any organisation you study or join. That gap is usually where the biggest opportunity is sitting.
- Treat OEM or B2B work, wherever you encounter it, as a source of standards and learning, not just as a revenue line on a balance sheet.
- Hold affordability and aspiration as two goals to design for at once, rather than treating them as a trade-off you eventually have to pick between.



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4. Speaker/Session highlights

Dhruv Kharbanda tied the entire day together.

The interaction with Dhruv Kharbanda was what made the factory visit click into place. Hearing the next generation of the family speak candidly about NIVIA's history, the challenges the brand is navigating right now, and its ambitions on the global stage gave the session a perspective a factory tour alone could not have offered. It was less a pitch and more an honest look at what it feels like to inherit a business this large and be responsible for deciding what it becomes next, and it gave the group a much clearer sense of where NIVIA is actually heading.

A closing thought

NIVIA is, in many ways, a case study in delayed recognition. The manufacturing discipline, the scale, the global relationships, all of it has been quietly built over generations. What the brand is working on now is making sure the outside world's perception of NIVIA finally catches up to the reality of what NIVIA has already become. Hold on to that gap, between what a company has built and what people know it has built, not as a fact to remember for an exam, but as a lens you can use the next time you study a company, design a product or find yourself running a business of your own.
