

# North Europe Schools' Symposium 2024: Sport and Society

June 2 - 8, 2024

## The Symposium Challenge

Common to all topics of the North Europe Schools' Symposium is our various societies' approach to a theme with which we all identify. At the inaugural NESS 2023 we examine the topic of international relations; at NESS 2024 we will look at the evolution of sport over time, its importance to individuals and societies, and its particular weight in our modern world and the future. This has particular resonance for NESS 2024: basketball occupies a particular place in Lithuanian history and society; 2024 is an Olympic year with eyes turning towards Paris.

*The challenge of the North Europe Schools' Symposium 2024 is for students, after examining the evolution of sport in our societies and globally, its current and possible future states, to suggest the practical steps they and their societies can take to improve the provision of sport, with particular relevance to the countries of NESS schools.*

NESS 2024 has the central purpose of bringing together intellectually curious students from different schools to consider the topic of sport in society, with particular insight from their own perspectives. As with the Winchester International Symposium, the core elements of NESS will be the intellectual talent and commitment of the students, and the distinct cultural backgrounds that will illuminate their contributions. In other words, a shared scholarship together with a unique cultural perspective will create an extremely fertile forum for discussing ideas. At NESS we aim to look specifically at the role and importance of sport in our different societies, to identify the unique as well as common experiences that have contributed to our different countries' provision of and approach to sport, and to look at the particular challenges our systems and societies face with regard to the provision and place of sport, and to propose practical solutions to those challenges.

Students from the group of Symposium schools will come together in Kaunas in June 2024, after having worked online for six months on the topic areas overleaf. Each school will draft a monthly 750-word response to a particular question set within each topic area; the response will follow a month of discussion of the issues arising from an introductory essay. The response will be posted online in the shared *Google* group, and submitted to TJP. Students will thus have a further week in which they are expected to comment on others' submitted responses.

TJP will send participating students the introductory essay on each topic area, together with required and suggested reading, on the dates overleaf. Intermediate tasks – such as reading relevant articles, watching *YouTube* or TED talks, listening to podcasts – will also be assigned as appropriate. Students will again be encouraged to form their own social media group to become acquainted before the Symposium.

Student pairs will pursue a personal project (PP) which will examine one aspect of sport for their own society. Completed and approved projects will be presented at NESS.

At NESS 2024, students will discuss ideas during Group Work (GW), consisting of daily debates, talks from expert speakers, and responses to prompts that will allow them to use their online work. At the end of the week, students will come together to draft The Symposium Accord, which will be a common response to The Symposium Challenge.

### **Block 1 (Nov 10 – Dec 10): The Evolution of Sport**

Sport in ancient times. Sport as a distraction (“bread and circuses”). Sport as a preparation for war. The increasing importance of sport in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the rise of mass participation, national and international teams, ruling bodies, codification, and mass media. Sports heroes as role models. The Olympics and the increasing politicisation of sport (e.g. the Berlin Olympics of 1936); the moral and political dimensions of sport. The stadium and the emergence of a fan base.

### **Block 2 (Dec 17 – Jan 31): Sport, the Individual and Society**

How far is sport an individual endeavour as opposed to a social or governmentally approved one? Sport as emblematic of society. The idea of a “national” sport (such as basketball in Lithuania). Sport as a projection of political power; how far is hosting the Olympics a matter of national pride and soft power? Sport as a means of fighting for freedom. The question of state-sponsored doping. Sport and health: should governments see sport as a factor in the fight against lifestyle ailments such as obesity? Sport and education. The psychology of crowds and tribalism.

### **Block 3 (Feb 7 – Mar 7): Sport in the Modern World**

The rise of professionalism and its impact today. Doping and its attractions and dangers; the ethics of performance enhancement. Equality and sport: how far is there equality of opportunity and outcome? The freighted issue of gender in sport; should natal males be permitted to transition and compete against natal women? Sportswashing: Saudi Arabia’s move into golf, football, and boxing promotion. The increasing economic importance of sport, and its consequences.

### **Block 4 (Mar 14 – Apr 14): The Future of Sport**

Sport and legal challenges: concussions and lawsuits in rugby, American football. Social change and its effects on sport; how far will social media, atomisation, and changing social habits affect sport? Technology and sport: how far does the increase in technology enhance or reduce sport for the viewer and participant? Can technology increase the diffusion of minority sports? How far is tradition a good thing, and how far must sport itself change to adapt to consumer tastes? (e.g. cricket, football)?

### **Personal projects (April - May, 2024. Deadline May 20, 2024):**

Students must complete an independent and original investigation into an aspect of sport of their choice, but from their home country, concentrating on one of the four themes above. The project must be approved by TJP by **March 31, 2024**. The completed investigation must be uploaded or sent as a video presentation by **May 20, 2024 and take no more than ten minutes to present in total**; this will be the same presentation that the students will give at NESS and will enable TJP to be assured of the content and timing.

Arūnas Bučnys, Principal, LSMU Gimnazija, Kaunas  
Tim Parkinson (TJP), NESS Academic Director  
September, 2023