

# The Novice LD Resolution

This will be the formal description of what has become informally known as the Modest Novice. The Modest Novice refers to a regional, recurring LD topic for first-year students, as compared to adapting whatever topic is selected by the NFL. While the value of most NFL topics is strong, they are not all equal as training resolutions, and occasionally some are counterproductive in recruiting and retaining new novices. The goal of the Modest Novice is to provide a rich topic that will engage and educate new students for a reasonable amount of time before setting them off to handle whatever topics come up through the NFL. We will implement Modest Novice as described below in the 2009-10 school year.

The chief benefits of the proposal are:

- The topic is especially chosen for the purpose of introducing students to some standard, core ideas of LD.
- The topic repeats annually, so coaches and teachers need not prepare new introductory materials every year.
- Our judge-training materials will have specific topic guidelines for new parents we are bringing into the activity.
- The topic will be argued for almost half the season, allowing the novices to develop many of the important skills of debating absent the need to write new cases on new topics before they've even figured out which way to look when they're in cross-ex.

The chief negatives of the proposal are mostly logistical:

- Tab rooms would need to keep track of different pools of judges, and in some cases, judges might be listening to two topics in one day.
- Teachers/coaches would need to teach one topic to one group and another topic to the rest of the team.
- It doesn't work unless a critical mass of the region commits to it; if only some schools participated, then those schools would either be cut off from much of the debate in the region, or would actually be adding more rather than fewer burdens to their novices, which is the diametric opposite of the intention of the proposal.

As to the first negative, this is less problematic than it looks. Most novice judging is done by parents and upperclassmen, and is already isolated from varsity judging at most events. In fact, this would ultimately work positively, because once an upperclassman has come through the system and is now judging, that student is sitting with 3 months of their own background on this elemental topic, rather than whatever personal interpretation they may have of the present topic. For that matter, all of these tab rooms (MHL, Bump, Little Lex) are run by the same people. Occasionally, yes, we might be forced to ask someone to switch in the same day, but we would minimize this, and

limit it to the most capable. (And, for that matter, don't we often ask people to judge both LD and PF at the same tournaments? There really is nothing all that unusual to what we're asking here.)

Which leads to the second possible problem, of needing to teach two topics at once. In today's debate world, most of us are already teaching two topics (one for LD and another—monthly!—for PF), and some are teaching three (if they also handle policy). This objection simply doesn't stand. In fact, given that we can over time prepare standard instructional materials for our novices based on the topic that we know will recur, we will be given an advantage in that area. (Which raises the question, if ModNov is successful, whether to apply it similarly to PF at some future date.)

As for the region committing to it, this is true. When this idea was proposed originally a few years ago, one coach objected, and the proposal died. The idea is simply too good to allow that to happen again. The agreement of the MHL and the MFL are enough of a critical mass to proceed. The expressed albeit unofficial concurrence of the NJFL seals the deal.

We will use the Modest Novice topic from September through November. Novices would then follow the normal course of new topics from December on. This would mean in general from 3 to 5 events on the Modest Novice topic from September through November, and 2 or 3 events on the Nov-Dec topic in December. This looks like a good balance (which is inverted under the present system, where debaters get 2 or 3 on Sep-Oct, and 3 to 5 on the Nov-Dec). The ModNov topic will be debated at the MHLs in Oct and November, all MFL novice tournaments, and the Bump Memorial Tournament at Hendrick Hudson, plus any other leagues/regions that wish to take up the idea.

As for the topic to be used, three suggestions have been put forth, all of which are strong classics from the NFL:

- Resolved: An oppressive government is more desirable than no government.
- Resolved: Capital punishment is justified.
- Resolved: Civil disobedience in a democracy is morally justified.

We will decide which topic to use at the Lexington Winter Tournament the weekend of January 16. If you wish to vote on a topic, please reply to this email. If you will be at Lexington and wish to join in the discussion (tentatively set for some point during the break rounds of LD on Saturday afternoon), consider this an invitation; we'll post the time and place as soon as we have one.

We appreciate all the support this proposal has gotten, and hope that it will work as well as we think. We certainly expect to learn a few things as we go along, and remain open to suggestions for improvement.

Thanks.