

SYSTEM PARTNERS INVESTMENT

2026-2031

NGB Programme Information Booklet



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Welcome to the System Partners Investment Information Booklet

The purpose of this booklet is to set out Sport NI's strategic approach to investing into Sport and Physical Activity in Northern Ireland.

Northern Ireland's sport sector has seen significant growth in recent years, with more sports benefiting from strengthened strategies and structures that are driving real progress towards enhancing the sporting system. Sport NI is proud to play a pivotal role in this, alongside our Partners.

As we look to the future, our focus is on continuing to build a system that reflects best practice, strengthens collaboration and fosters strong partnerships across NI, the UK and Ireland. Through co-design with stakeholders, we will continue to shape a sport system that places the people, participants, athletes, coaches, volunteers and leaders at its core.

Sport NI is more committed than ever to removing barriers to sport and physical activity to help increase participation in sport. For some, the pathways into local sports clubs are not always visible or accessible. We want to address these barriers and create opportunities for everyone, especially for those from under-represented groups. Equality and inclusion will continue to be a prominent part of our investments.



Foreword



Sport changes lives and we know of its enduring ability to support health and wellbeing, boost educational attainment, strengthen community cohesion and instill pride in our region.

Sport NI also has a key responsibility to support sports, so that our athletes can achieve at their highest level. For some, they will look to the Glasgow Commonwealth Games 2026, the Olympic and Paralympic Games in LA 2028, as key opportunities to showcase the best of our talent internationally. We recognise that long-term success begins with building a strong foundation. To compete amongst the best in the world, we must invest in developing stronger performance pathways that nurture NI talent and create clearer, more accessible routes to elite sport.

We are conscious of the responsibility we share with others to make the best use of public money. Public sector bodies can no longer afford to work in isolation, therefore, we are focused on working with others to share resources to achieve common outcomes, so that all of society benefits. This means being open to targeting our investment differently.

Together, we can ensure our communities thrive through the Power of Sport.



Gavin Boyd
Chair, Sport NI



Richard Archibald
Interim CEO, Sport NI

Executive summary



As part of our **System Partners Investment**, Sport NI is developing a Portfolio of Programmes to strengthen sport and physical activity in Northern Ireland from 2026–2031. These programmes will enable partners to collaborate in creating opportunities for people of all ages and backgrounds to take part in sport.

Our System Partners Investment will seek to optimise strategic impact under Active Living – The Sport & Physical Activity strategy for Northern Ireland, and pursue the aims and objectives of the NI Executive's Programme for Government.

Proposed Portfolio of Programmes:

- ❖ National Governing Body (NGB) Programme
- ❖ School/Education Programme – An inclusive programme aimed at expanding opportunities for children and young people to engage in sport and physical activity, laying the foundation for lifelong involvement.
- ❖ Low cost/no cost programme – Responding to financial challenges while supporting meaningful interventions that make physical activity accessible and sustainable for every community.
- ❖ Research & Innovation – Empowers organisations to explore bold ideas, test new models, and collaborate across sectors to deliver innovative, scalable solutions.

Our **Portfolio of Programmes** will utilise several strategic and tactical approaches, working with range of partners, as a co-ordinated approach to delivering meaningful societal change through sport and physical activity.

Executive Summary

This information booklet outlines the draft design of our first programme, the **National Governing Body (NGB) Programme**, that is specifically targeted at governing bodies of sport. Sport NI will invest **£40-£45 million** of National Lottery Funding over a 5-year period (2026-2031), into NGB's.

The **NGB Programme** is being shared for public consultation and stakeholder feedback will help ensure that the final programme is accessible, responsive, and fit for purpose.

The NGB Programme comprises of two strands:

Strand 1 – Participation

Strand 2 – Performance

The NGB programme is about more than funding. It is about building a stronger sporting system where everyone, regardless of background, has the chance to participate, progress, and succeed.



Our Strategic Context



Sport NI is the leading public body for the development of sport and physical recreation in Northern Ireland.

Established under the Recreation and Youth Service Order 1986, we distribute funds on behalf of the Exchequer and The National Lottery.

Our Vision and Mission Statements

Active Living - The Sport and Physical Activity Strategy for Northern Ireland, which sets out a vision of:

“Lifelong involvement in sport and physical activity will deliver an active, healthy, resilient and inclusive society which recognises and values both participation and excellence.”

Sport NI’s Mission Statement:

“We are passionate about maximising the power of sport to change lives. By 2026, we want the power of sport to be recognised and valued by all.”

Drivers for Investment

Evidence clearly shows that our society is experiencing increased levels of challenges:



**Community
Deprivation**



Poverty



**Education
Inequalities**



**Health &
Inactivity**



Mental Health

The NI Executive has clear objectives to address each of these areas. Sport NI, in partnership with our stakeholders, has a critical and shared responsibility to identify and understand the needs and barriers that limit participation and performance, particularly among underrepresented groups. By focusing our collective efforts on the design and delivery of targeted, evidence-informed programmes, we can ensure those most in need are supported – creating inclusive, high-quality environments where everyone has equitable access to participate, perform and thrive.

To strengthen our evidence base and ensure accountability, Sport NI will undertake a **Social Return on Investment** study at the inception of the programme in 2026 and again at its conclusion.

Governing Bodies of Sport



Governing Bodies of Sport play a crucial role in sport and physical activity in our communities.

- Governance and administration of sport
- Safeguarding within sport
- Competitions, leagues and games
- Coordination of high performing athletes
- Supporting the development of sporting infrastructure
- Encouraging new entrants to the sport and activity
- Developing the people that support the running of the activity

Due to the central role that governing bodies of sport have in the sector, this investment will be Sport NI's largest at this time among the planned portfolio of programmes.

An opportunity is being presented for governing bodies to demonstrate their reach, value and impact over the next 5 years, and through this, inform future investment priorities.

In particular, this investment programme requires governing bodies to;

- **Consider their sport and activity beyond their members alone**
- **Commit to improving the data and evidence that shows the reach, trajectory and impact of their sport**

Strand 1 Participation

VISION

More people, more active, in a sustainable and inclusive sports system.

AIM

To create inclusive, accessible routes into sport and physical activity that not only attracts more people but keeps them engaged for the long-term.



Objectives

To achieve our goal, we will focus on:

- Tackling health inequalities and inactivity by encouraging sustained participation in sport and physical activity.
- Reducing the impact of poverty by increasing opportunities for those in greatest need to access and engage in sport.
- Addressing inequalities across under-represented groups to make participation more inclusive and reflective of the whole community.
- Improving participant experiences to support retention and ensure that activity is enjoyable, accessible, and sustainable.

Outcomes

The outcomes and success measures we aim to achieve are:

- Growth in participation levels, particularly among those who are inactive or face the greatest barriers.
- Increased access to sport and physical activity for people from disadvantaged areas and those living in poverty.
- Broader representation in sport, with higher participation from under-represented groups.
- Improved retention through better quality and more engaging participant experiences.

Strand 2 Performance

VISION

More NI athletes amongst the best in the world

AIM

To help foster a sustainable athlete-centred performance system that prioritises pathway development, nurtures talent and enables all NI athletes to maximise their potential.



Objectives

To achieve our goal, we will focus on:

- Developing robust NI Performance Pathways by supporting NGB's to deliver effective governance, positive culture and sustainable structures that underpin long-term medal success.
- Developing athletes through a holistic approach, ensuring their experience is positive within and beyond sport.
- Breaking down barriers and creating a more diverse, inclusive and equitable performance system.
- Growing expertise, knowledge and leadership within the sport system.

Outcomes

The outcomes and success measures we aim to achieve are:

- Increase % of NI athletes transitioning on to senior National Programmes (GBR, IRL and NIR teams)
- Strengthened NI Performance Pathway structures and programmes, which provide better supported athletes along their journey.
- Increase medal success within the performance pathway (U23/Junior European and World Championships).

Grant Management Award

Sport NI recognises the role that NGBs play in governing, administration and regulating their sporting activity. As such, we want to provide support to our partners that contribute towards the ‘core’ costs of their operations.

The grant management award is supplementary to ‘Participation’ and ‘Performance’ awards, with a defined purpose of supporting eligible overhead costs. A flat fee will be applied to all awards in acknowledgement of the necessary administration and management of Sport NI awards.

The grant management award level may be adjusted based on several factors:

- Financial need
- Maturity assessment of applicant organisations
- NI-only bodies*

*Sport NI acknowledges that NI-only NGBs have fewer opportunities to draw on UK or All-Island core funding through UK Sport or Sport Ireland, therefore, Sport NI will consider an additional uplift. This ensures a more equitable baseline for organisations delivering solely within NI.



Participation

Previous Approach	New Approach	Why It's Changing
Award amount heavily influenced by recent past investments.	Sports tiered based on their size/reach, with final awards based on comparative analysis across sports.	This allows sports the opportunity to project the impact they can have and the cost of doing so, rather than being constrained by historic funding decisions.
Emphasis on club membership numbers	Organisations will be viewed in terms of the reach of their sport/activity, using data including club membership, Continuous Household Survey and other accessible data.	Club membership is not directly comparable, with active participants only in one sport and volunteers included in another. Governing Bodies have reach and impact far beyond their own members, and this is to incentivise organisations to demonstrate and value the far-reaching impact they can have.
Focus on traditional sports development	More explicit aims to improve population health and use sport and physical activity for community and societal benefit.	Recent governing body engagements confirmed sports are already contributing significantly to wider health and societal outcomes, and there was strong support to continue this approach.

Changes from Previous Investment Programmes

Performance

Previous Approach	New Approach	Why It's Changing
Investment was targeted at High-Performance programmes for senior elite athletes.	Investment will be targeted at strengthening Performance Pathway development.	UK Sport & Sport Ireland already invest significantly in HP Programmes. Focusing on developing pathways will strengthen transitions of NI athletes onto National HP programmes (GBR/IRL/NIR) and enable a pipeline of future elite athletes.
Senior international performance success was prioritised	Measures of success within the programme will include transition rates of athletes onto HP programmes, and performance success within the performance pathway (i.e. Junior/U23). Senior elite performances will remain a tracked outcome over time.	Measures of success need to relate to the area of work. There can be a lag between investment in athlete success and senior performances, therefore it is critical to have measures aligned to the relevant development stage in the athlete's/coach's journey that is being supported.
Historic Performance Programmes Investment has resulted in relatively small sports receiving what appear as disproportionately large awards.	Sports will be given an indicative upper limit of award that could be allocated to their performance programmes, based on the size of their athlete cohort, transition rates to National programmes and success of the National programme.	It is critical that governing bodies choose how they wish to support participation and performance aspects of their sport. This is to ensure that there is an appropriate allocation of performance investment based on the potential impact sports can make.
NI sports considered in the same way as sports nationally aligned to GBR or IRL.	NI only sports will be given the opportunity to avail of performance investment, where appropriate, for senior elite athletes.	This is to recognise these organisations do not receive support from UK Sport or Sport Ireland in ways that most other governing bodies do.

Changes from Previous Investment Programmes

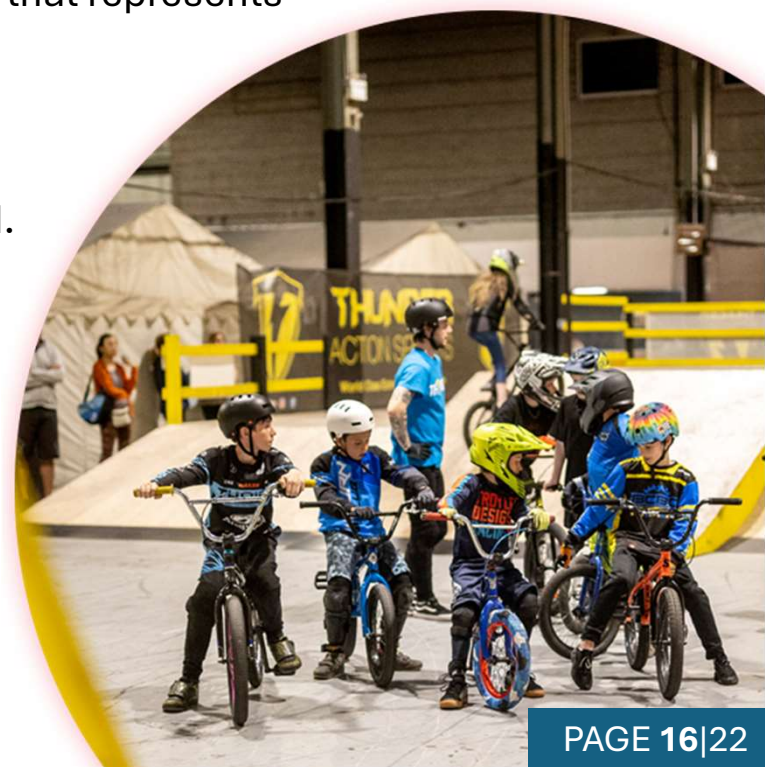
Management

Previous Approach	New Approach	Why It's Changing
Sports sought contributions towards organisational (Core) costs and overheads in different ways and at different rates.	Provide a management allowance relative to award size to all sports in recognition of the administrative and reporting requirements of the award.	To ensure a more equitable contribution to the overhead costs that governing bodies experience.
NI sports considered in the same way as sports nationally aligned to GBR or IRL.	NI only sports will be given the opportunity to avail of additional contributions towards the costs of fulfilling their role as a governing body.	This is to recognise these organisations do not receive support from UK Sport or Sport Ireland for 'Core' costs, nor do they have parent bodies that can provide resources or support in ways that most other governing bodies do.
Inconsistent data capture across organisations, with limited focus on gathering under-represented group data.	Clear requirements for data capture and reporting, using standardised methods to evidence governance and impact.	Improves transparency and accountability through more consistent data collection. For some organisations this will require a modernisation of systems, and the programme will factor in timelines and support to enable this.

Eligibility

Who can apply to this programme?

- Submissions will be welcomed from recognised National Governing Bodies of Sport;
 - this can include regional governing bodies (with relevant NGB endorsement)
 - organisations that are considered “umbrella” body/sports agency that represents the interests of recognised governing bodies of sport
- Must be on the UK Recognition list
- The projects undertaken will benefit the inhabitants of Northern Ireland.
- Organisations must meet standards in governance, safeguarding, and financial management.
- The proposed projects represent additionality to existing resources and to existing or planned investments.



The submission process will be made up of two parts. Eligible organisations will be required to complete:

Part 1 – Expression of Interest

- Register interest to the NGB programme.
- Successful organisations will be allocated an investment tier, based on the scale and reach of their sport, to enable more effective planning prior to Programme Application.

Part 2 - Programme Application

- Strategic project proposal and planning documentation (2026–31) – demonstrating how the organisations will:
 - Grow their sport and contribute to improving population health
 - Improve retention and participant experiences
 - Identify and address under-representation challenges within your sport
 - Improve access to sport and physical activity
 - Develop more robust performance pathways
- Data Projections Workbooks (2026–31)
- *More detailed information/plans will be required for 2026-2028 (i.e. Years 1 and 2)*

Application Assessment

- Submissions will be assessed with feedback provided.
- Comparative analysis will take place across sports' submissions to determine relative value of each project element, with particular emphasis on;
 - Impact of proposed project element (e.g. improving retention of participants)
 - Cost of the relevant project elements
 - Confidence in delivery (based on information provided, alignment to strategic plans, past performance, and available data)
- Alignment to Participation and Performance objectives will be central to the level of award allocated.
- Plans must demonstrate deliverability, sustainability, partnership working, and system-wide impact.
- As part of feedback, revisions may be requested for projects to improve impact based on proposed costs, or lower costs relative to the proposed impact. This is to ensure that Sport NI seeks to invest a limited resource in the most impactful way across the sector and provides opportunity for those sports and activities able to make the greatest impact.

Sport NI will facilitate Information Clinics to eligible organisations during the application period.

Decisions and Monitoring



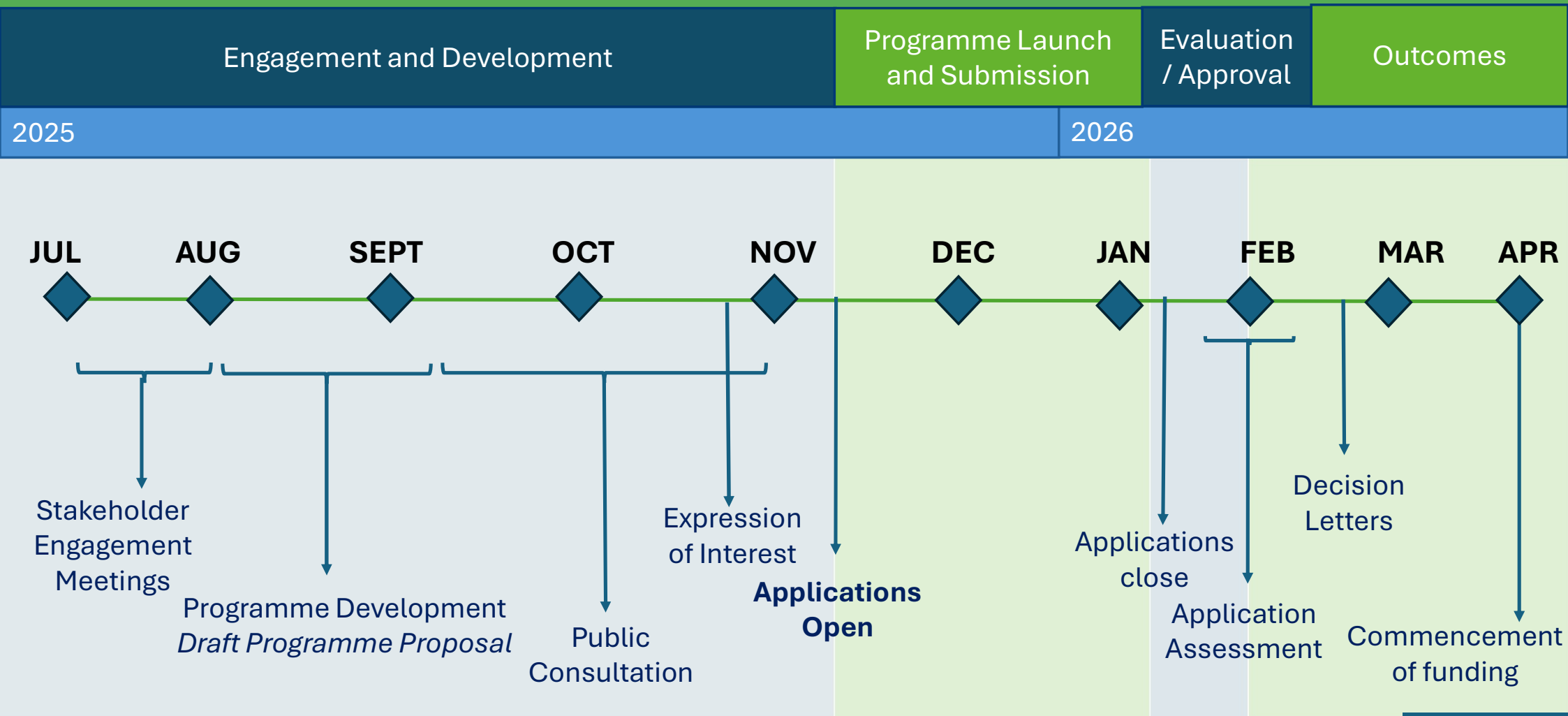
Post Assessment Decisions

- Sport NI will endeavour to provide outcomes at the earliest opportunity to all applicants.
- Where an award is not being proposed, or an award would be lower than recent Sport NI investment levels, Sport NI will work with governing bodies on a case-by-case basis to develop an appropriate level of support as appropriate to minimise negative impact to the organisation and communities it serves.
- Sport NI proposes to make 5-year awards for the period April 2026 to March 2031.
- The awards are planned to be conveyed as a multi-year figure, with successful applicants subsequently agreeing the detailed profiling of awards across the 5 years in conjunction with Sport NI.

Monitoring and Reporting

- There will be an expectation of ongoing monitoring against plans, and Sport NI will work closely with governing bodies to identify and address opportunities and issues.

Timeline



Note: Timelines are indicative and subject to adjustment following consultation feedback and system readiness.

Have Your Say

Sport NI values the views and opinions from everyone across Northern Ireland; sport plays a huge role in the lives of many and impacts across our communities.

To inform the development of the System Partners Investment Programme, specifically the NGB Programme element, we have sought feedback from a range of stakeholders/partners on their needs and expectations.

Survey

Sport NI has developed an online survey to seek further comments and clarity on the draft System Partners Investment Programme to ensure nothing is overlooked and all stakeholders have an opportunity to comment.

Complete the survey [HERE](#).

Public Consultation Sessions

Sport NI welcomes anyone from the general public, from all community backgrounds, with an interest in sport to attend one of our public consultation sessions. Book your place here: [System Partners Investment – NGB Programme Workshops](#)



Thank you for your time and feedback.

This document is available in other accessible formats on request, please contact comms@sportni.net.

Contact us

Sport Northern Ireland
House of Sport
2a Upper Malone Road
Belfast
BT9 5LA

T: 028 9038 1222

E: info@sportni.net

W: sportni.net

