

THE TOURNAMENT IN A BALANCED DEBATE PROGRAM

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The ever-raging battle over whether tournaments are to be approved or disapproved shows little sign of abating. From the writer's viewpoint, having worked in an atmosphere where audience debating was supreme; in another where tournaments were the entire bill of fare; and in the present situation, where both are important, several observations are in order. Those will be presented as theses, and protagonists of one side or the other can make of them what they will.

1. *Tournaments do not provide an adequate and well-rounded debating experience.* They take place in what may be called an artificial atmosphere, with speeches to an almost-empty room, for the approval of one man, on a topic which to some extent has gone stale after the first of the season. These aspects most of us admit as debilities. They are, furthermore, difficult to overcome. Even where it is possible to schedule a number of rounds before speech classes, the reward structure still involves securing the vote of a single judge, and there is little fundamental change in motivation or approach.

Where a final championship debate is held before the assembled tournament participants, only two teams benefit directly from the experience, and they are seeking the approval, not of laymen, but of fellow specialists. Other attempts to vary tournament procedure, such as the use of cross-examination, direct clash, and heckling styles, do not alter the basic shortcomings. It is true that tournament debaters develop a peculiar style, which one can hardly imagine as going over well at a Rotary Club, and that they tend to be narrow in outlook, stereotyped in approach. I do not myself regard a speaker as a great debater until he has proved himself in a situation more public than a tournament.

2. *Tournaments do, however, make a major contribution to forensic development.* There is no question in my mind that students who have participated in tournaments have learned something, and they are better off, even if they go no farther, than if they had never debated at all. Tournament competition provides a high degree of motivation, which cannot always be said of less-competitive events; that is to say, students

Reprinted from *The Register*, V (College Calendar Issue 1957), 3-5. Mr. Newman (Ph.D., University of Connecticut) is Professor in Charge, Rhetoric and Public Address at the University of Pittsburgh.

will work in preparation for a tournament—and it would be foolish indeed to say that they gained nothing from the effort, let alone from the final performance.

Tournament debating, after all, does require that the student be reasonably familiar with the subject matter of some important issue; that he be able to sort out some of the issues involved; that he construct a case for or against a certain proposition; that he attempt to use evidence to support a contention; that he learn something about logical reasoning, adaptation to opponents, intelligible delivery, etc. These are educationally-valuable learnings. To say that since they do not produce complete and well-rounded speakers, they are therefore useless, is unconscionable.

Tournaments, furthermore, frequently secure evaluation of a teacher from another school. These critiques are worth the effort alone. No coach or director can single-handedly provide adequate criticism of a speaker's effort; to have his critiques reinforced by those from another teacher, even should the other party provide contradictory analyses on some points, is well worthwhile. And what about the travel, visiting on different campuses, exchange of ideas with students from colleges of a different type—even the viewpoints gained during a long auto ride when classroom formality vanishes? It is hard to believe that the tournament would have reached its present popularity if it provided no educationally-valuable experience.

3. *Tournament experience is the best available preparation for audience debating.* It is difficult to pin down that extra something which a debater needs to be able to hold the attention of an audience, which he does not need to win tournament debates. I am prepared to assert, however, that it is something which can quickly be developed by a speaker who has had tournament experience. In the Pittsburgh program, appearance in public debates is the culmination of a career which *always* begins with intramural experience, and extends through considerable tournament experience. We hold tournament participation open to anyone, no matter how poor; we do not turn anyone loose on a public audience until he has proved himself to be a good tournament debater.

Discussions and practice debates in intramural situations, even single intercollegiate debates, simply cannot be made to provide both the motivation to effort and the depth of experience that tournaments can offer. I have known several students who worked long and hard at a course in discussion and argumentation, never achieving a high degree of competence. In one case, it took two years of tournament competition to develop a boy to the level of proficiency I felt necessary before he was ready for an audience series.

This is not to contend that all successful tournament debaters "have it" as far as audience work is concerned; it is to say that they have something which can be readily converted to audience sense, and that this something was developed in tournament competition.

The basic elements of good technique, after all, are the same. Knowledge of the topic, analytical ability, organization, adaptation, logic, reasoning, and intelligible delivery are necessary in tournaments; they are also necessary before audiences. I have found nothing to excel the tournament as a training device for audience work.

4. *Tournaments can be integrated with audience debating in such a fashion that the burden of operating an audience program is minimized.* If contention No. 1 of this paper is accepted, the average forensic program is inadequate. I am aware, however, that some of my colleagues regard the development of an extensive audience program as an unadulterated nuisance. It takes, they allege, too much time for its worth. They are prepared, in many cases, to offer four or five on-campus "public" debates each year, and if the attendance totals 300 they consider that they have given lip service to the goal of audience experience.

This, however, is not the context in which really vigorous audience programs are to be developed today. No matter how thrilling the speakers, how vital and timely the topic, nor how vigorous the publicity campaign for a campus debate, the most reliable and rewarding audiences are to be had by going off the campus, to the audience. This means taking programs to high school assemblies, Rotary, Lions, and Kiwanis clubs, women's, church, and civic groups of all sorts. Scheduling this sort of activity on a broad basis does take time.

It does not, however, take an inordinate amount of time for the value received; and if the health of the forensic program demands it, as in most cases it does, it is my contention that a college director has the obligation to develop such a program. Consider first the matter of speakers. Accomplished tournament debaters are usually available. With a shortened format, the addition of brief cross-examination periods, and a recognition that high schoolers or Kiwanians have a different referent for the word "need," these men can be trusted to enlighten and perhaps even entertain an audience. In their first effort, a coach or director should be present to evaluate; but after that, or at least after they have successfully dealt with two or three non-academic audiences, they can be sent out on their own.

Secondly, consider the matter of topics. Most recent national topics have been suitable for use with public audiences, even at the high school level. Where a substantial number of accomplished debaters are available, it is obviously desirable to get off the national topic frequently, and to tailor the debate to young interests. But for adult groups, the national topics have

been eminently suitable. Extra topic preparation need not be required for an audience program.

What remains, then, is the mechanics of making contact with "captive" audiences, and arranging details of where and when. Rotary, Lions, and Kiwanis Districts all have presidents or governors who will include letters about your programs with their regular mailings to club secretaries; a forensic director need only see that suitable announcements are prepared, mimeographed, and taken to the proper person. High school mailings need individual attention; but a list of schools and principals is obtainable in any state, and even those schools which do not themselves debate are often willing to have an assembly program. If you can import opposition from a distance for such a series, so much the better.

In summary, tournament-trained speakers are well prepared to staff an audience program; after the initial efforts, the presence of a faculty member is not crucial; and for many programs, the national topic, on which the speakers will be prepared, is acceptable. Off-campus audience programs of considerable vigor can be developed even by overworked directors.

It has been the contention of this paper that tournament and audience debating are not conflicting but compatible, and that they can in fact be integrated to the benefit of the overall program. Neither is adequate by itself, but in coordination they can offer a solid diet of forensic experience.

Robert P. Newman, "The Tournament in a Balanced Debate Program," in James H. McBath, ed., *Essays in Forensics* (Hannibal, MO: Standard Printing Company, 1970): 101-104.