

The Emperor Has No Clothes Solidifying Inconsistencies in Judges' Preference

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Abstract

Several leaders representing the forensics world were surveyed to examine the role judges preference plays in the outcomes of forensics tournaments. Similarities and differences concerning the definition of judge's preference emerged as dominant themes. Implications of this study offer new questions concerning definitions of judge's preference and the role tabulation should play in the formation of leaders in forensics.

JP and Forensics

Forensic teams from the first competition have operated as a way of artistic expression in a competitive arena among collegiate peers. As a result, much passion is associated with the activity. Dreibelbis (1989) emphasized the individual satisfaction through forensics, stating they:

Achieve satisfaction from attaining goals, working and socializing with others in an organization, and so one may certainly expect there to be a transfer of this satisfaction to a well-managed forensic program. (p. 69)

Deal and Kennedy list four "features to organizational culture: values, heroes, cultural communication networks, and rites and rituals....An active, functioning, forensic program encompasses each of these features..." (as cited in Swanson, 1992, p. 67-70). With satisfaction and values being listed in the aforementioned citations as tantamount in forensics, ethics and fairness in results therefore play a key supportive role in these values.

Goman (2004) reinforces the idea of surrounding yourself with people you get along with, explaining "we're in a collaborative world, and that's dramatically changed what type of leadership is successful. The boards, shareholders and employees have colluded to agree that leadership has to be steadier, more visionary, more inclusive and more ethical" (p. 2). Ethics are obviously important to forensics as well as other organizations. And Kolb (1996) adds "team leaders appear to do their teams a disservice if they concentrate their energies only on the internal functioning of the team" (p. 173). We therefore must take a step back and examine the means by which we attain results in an activity we are so passionate about. Perhaps Harris (1986) puts it best when he states:

as a community we have done relatively little to explicate the criteria for decision making or even determine the criteria which are operative for most judges in a given event. Indeed, individual events has done very little in terms of developing a bare profile of the attitudes, philosophies, or preferences of individual judges or groups of judges.

Research Questions

This study seeks to answer four research questions with one two-part question:

RQ 1: How often is Judges' Preference used?

RQ 2a: Are the interpretations of Judges' Preference the same throughout the forensic community?

RQ2b: Have they been applied as such?

RQ 3: Do current leaders in forensics believe the system is fair?

RQ 4: What does the NFA and AFA constitution say about Judges' Preference?

The purpose of this paper is to examine the definition and use of Judges' Preference while establishing a pattern of common definitions of Judges' Preference and how they play out throughout the forensic community. We will examine implications of the rule, and assess if Judges' Preference has been stable from year to year.

Method

Data Collection

To discover the general thoughts on the Judges' Preference tie-breaking procedure, surveys of former coaches, professional coaches, Directors of Forensics and graduate assistants were asked to fill out a ten question survey on the matter. Before data was collected, Internal Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained from the Human Investigation Committee at Wayne State University, Detroit, MI. This study was approved as a Behavioral Expedited Review. Data was collected using a purposeful sample utilizing the Individual Events list-serv (IE-L). An email was sent to the IE-L asking for volunteers to answer 10 questions about judges' preference. For the version of this paper, 30 respondents responded over a four-month period. Therefore, 30 current and former coaches in intercollegiate forensics make up the sample for this study. This paper is the first part in a retrospective study examining the consistency of

judges' preference over a 5-year period. It is the intention of this study and its supplement to uncover ways in which judges' preference has been defined and implemented in tab rooms throughout the country.

The questionnaire distributed to the volunteers in this study contains the following questions and took approximately 10-15 minutes to complete:

1. What is your occupation?
2. Have you ever worked in a tabulation room for a forensics tournament?
3. IF YOUR ANSWER TO QUESTION 2 WAS NO, PLEASE SKIP TO QUESTION 4
4. Have you ever been in a situation where you had to break a tie on judge's preference?
5. Please, without any help from anyone else, give your definition of judge's preference. If you don't know exactly what the definition is, please indicate this by saying I don't know.
6. Where did you learn how a tie in forensics is broken?
7. Have you ever taught anyone your definition of judge's preference in forensics?
8. If you answered yes to question 6, approximately how many people have you taught this definition to?
9. 0-5 6-10 11-15 20 or more
10. What percentage of them would you guess have worked in a forensics tabulation room since learning of your definition? (scale the answers).
 - a. 0%-19% 20%-39% 40%-59% 60% or more
11. Would you view a definition of judge's preference in the AFA and NFA by-laws favorably or unfavorably?
12. Do you have any influence on forensics rules or legislation in your state? Nationally?

The questionnaires were emailed back to a secure email address and the responses were promptly printed out and the emails destroyed. This ensured the participants confidentiality. The printed responses were stored and locked in a file only accessible to the principal investigator. A variety of responses came out of the questionnaires, which will be examined in the analysis section.

Additionally, tab sheets were collected from three Michigan Intercollegiate Speech League State (MISL) Tournaments. In Michigan, the state holds three MISL tournaments each year, one in the fall semester and two in the winter semester. The tournaments are Michigan-only tournaments. All tournaments are open to all Michigan schools. The fall tournament is, technically, just an invitational tournament sponsored by MISL at a different location each year. The winter tournament consists of the MISL Novice State Tournament and the Varsity State Championship Tournament, also located at a different location each year (at least usually). Tab

sheets for the 2002 MISL Fall Tournament, the 2003 MISL State Championships, and the 2007 MISL Novice Tournament were analyzed for consistency in how judges' preference was tabulated in all 11 Individual Events for final rounds (as there were no semi-finals in any of the 11 I.E.'s). The reason these tab sheets were chosen was due to the easy accessibility of the tab sheets. One of the authors of this paper, at the time this paper was written, was the current Executive Director of MISL and only had access to these three tab sheets. The results will be discussed in the analysis section.

Analysis

For this smaller study only five of the questions from the questionnaire were analyzed and examined. This was due to the research questions the authors are attempting to answer. The larger, retrospective study will include all questions. Questions 1, 2, 3, 4, and 8 were analyzed. These were the more integral questions that needed to be examined before the rest of the study can continue. Question 1 asked respondents to define their current occupation. Question 2 asked if the respondent had ever worked in a tab room for a forensics tournament before. Question 3 asked if the respondent had ever been in a situation in which he or she had to break a tie on judges' preference. Question 4 asked the respondent to define judges' preference in their own words. Finally, question 8 asked the respondent if breaking a tie based on the way he or she understood judges' preference was adequate and what they would do to change the way the forensic community breaks a tie.

For question 1, the authors simply recorded 10 different occupations for which the respondents identified themselves. These categories were created after an initial examination of the answers. Some respondents belonged to more than one category. Question 2 was a simple "Yes" or "No" question. Therefore, answers were placed into one or the other. The ability of a respondent to answer question 3 was contingent on if they were able to answer question 2. If a respondent had never worked in a tab room before, then they could not have been in a situation to break a tie on judges' preference. Therefore, 3 categories were created from question 3—"Yes," "No," and "Answered No to question 2."

Question 4 dealt with the respondents defining judges' preference. The authors dealt with this question by organizing the question into a 5 part analysis. The first variable the authors analyzed for this question was to look at the responses and decide if each definition discussed if judges' preference utilized an odd-number judging panel. The question for this variable reads "Does the definition incorporate having an odd-numbered judging panel?" The second variable was to decide if each definition consisted of the rank in the response to calculate judges' preference. This variable asks "Does the definition incor-

porate rank?" The third variable examined if the response had both rank and rate as a method to calculate judges' preference. The third variable asks "Does the definition incorporate rank and rate?" The fourth variable asked this question: "Does the definition include a detailed description of judges' preference?" The authors operationally defined "detailed" as a definition consisting of more than just a definition. For example, an inclusion of an example of how to break a tie on judges' preference or the inclusion of a step-by-step process. Variable 4 has a sub-variable, Variable 4.1, that asks "Does the definition include a sufficient description for the reader to properly calculate judges' preference?"

Responses

Question 1: What is your current occupation?

As discussed above, some respondents were part of more than 1 category. Ten different categories/occupations were created from the sample of thirty. The reason for this was the multiple roles that some coaches play and that some respondents were retired and former coaches. Seventeen respondents pronounced themselves as a Director of Forensics, one was a Graduate Assistant, three were former DOF's or coaches, three were Director of Individual Events, ten were faculty at their respective schools, one was an assistant coach (did not indicate if they were graduate assistant or not; therefore, the separate category) who also classified themselves as a Tournament Director (we can suppose that many of the respondents are or have been Tournament Directors' at one point, but that was not indicated nor asked), three were freelance or professional coaches, two were debate coaches, and one of the freelance coaches classified themselves as a member of the tab staff.

Question 2: Have you ever worked in a tabulation room for a forensics tournament?

In regards to question 2, 90% of the respondents (27/30) said they have worked in a tab room for a forensics tournament before.

Question 3: Have you ever been in a situation where you had to break a tie on judges' preference?

The answers for this question indicated that 83% (25/30) of the respondents had been in a situation in which they had to break a tie on judges' preference. Two people indicated they had not been. The remaining three had answered "No" to question 2 and, therefore, were not eligible to answer this question.

Discussion

What we want to do is expand the study to go further. Instead of conducting this study with a relatively small population, we would like to get the tabulation results of all fifty states over the last five years. Furthermore, after establishing the discrepan-

cy in definitions, we would like to apply the data with our newly established criteria in a retrospective study of the entire USA.

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