

How is that Helpful? An Analysis of Ballot Helpfulness

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Abstract

The study confronts several issues relating to the helpfulness of ballots from different types of judges. An analysis was performed to analyze 135 ballots from several collegiate forensic tournaments held throughout the United States. Coaches, graduate assistants and hired judges were compared.

Introduction

Every seasoned forensic coach has heard a student complain at one time or another about a ballot that does not appear helpful. Many times, coaches have even encountered ballots that are not only unhelpful, but are insulting and hurtful for competitors to read. Real-life examples include, “The only reason you placed this high is because this was an incredibly weak round,” “I hate your haircut,” and “You should not be doing this piece. You are nowhere near as pretty as Renee Zellweger.”

Although these comments are obviously bad, many other comments are just as unhelpful but are still presented to students because of a judge’s inexperience. The purpose of this study is to analyze three categories of judges: coaches, graduate assistants, and hired. Hypothesis 1 states that coaches provide comments that are more helpful than graduate assistants or hired judges. Hypothesis 2 states that graduate assistants provide comments that are more helpful than hired judges, but are less helpful than coaches. Hence, these two hypotheses lead to the conclusion that hired judges provide the least helpful comments.

Methods

In determining the category to place each individual ballot, the name of the judge was examined. If it was not legible, the ballot was not used. If the name was legible and it was possible to determine their status (coach, graduate assistant, etc.), they were sorted into their corresponding category. In order to determine their status, the authors’ knowledge of individuals and departmental websites were utilized. If the name was legible and it was not possible to determine their status through these means, the judge was considered a hired judge for the purposes of this study. Most of the hired judges were self-selected because they identified themselves as hired by either writing the word “hired” or placing an X for their affiliation on the ballot.

Ballot organization process:

Is the name of the judge legible?

No → Not Used

YES → Can we find the judge’s status?

NO → They are considered hired.

YES → Sort them appropriately.

We collected 45 ballots for each category from several Midwest tournaments along with one state and two national tournaments for a total of 135 ballots. The names and affiliations of the judges were covered along with the competitor’s name, rank, rate, and round. The ballots were then coded based on whether they were coaches, graduate assistants or hired judges. A range of numbers was used for the coding to prevent the coders from subconsciously placing the comments into pre-determined categories.

The categories were borrowed from Scott and Birkholtz; A Content Analysis of Individual Events Judge Decision Justification, (1996) (Delivery, Content, Organization, Characterization, Rules, Topic, and General) with the coders looking for helpful vs. not helpful comments.

For this study, two sets of coders were used. The first set (Group A) was composed of individuals with several years of forensic experience. The second set of coders (Group B) was composed of individuals who had very little forensics background. The purpose of the two sets was to represent the two very different types of forensic judges: those who are familiar with the activity (coaches, competitors, graduate assistants, and some hired judges) and those who are not (many hired judges).

Results

When examining basic statistics of Group A, there were 363 total comments. Hired judges accounted for 126 of these comments, graduate assistants were responsible for 97, and coaches wrote 140 comments. In order to gain a better view of Group B, these coders collectively analyzed 710 total comments. Hired judges accounted for 227 of these comments, graduate assistants were responsible for 239, and coaches wrote 244 comments.

Regarding helpful comments, Group A coders reported that hired judges offered 37 and graduate assistants and coaches offered 35 and 58 respectively. Of the number of comments that were found to be

not helpful, 89 were written by hired judges, 62 written by graduate assistants, and 82 written by coaches. Roughly 29.37% of hired judges' comments were helpful (70.63% were not), 36.08% of graduate assistants' comments were helpful (63.92% were not), and 41.43% of coaches' comments were helpful (58.57% were not).

Regarding helpful comments, Group B coders reported that hired judges offered 143 and graduate assistants and coaches offered 166 and 157 respectively. Of the number of comments that were found to be not helpful, 84 were written by hired judges, 73 written by graduate assistants, and 87 written by coaches. Roughly 63% of hired judges' comments were helpful (37% were not), 69% of graduate assistants' comments were helpful (31% were not), and 64% of coaches' comments were helpful (36% were not).

Delivery

The most common comments were regarding delivery. This category accounted for 108 of the 363 comments, equaling approximately 29.75%. Of the 108 delivery comments, Group A reported that hired judges offered 50, graduate assistants 23, and coaches 35. Of hired judges' delivery comments, 32.00% were found to be helpful. Likewise, 39.13% of graduate assistants' delivery comments were helpful as were 22.86% of coaches' delivery comments. In general, approximately 30.56% of all delivery comments were found to be helpful, as reported in the findings of Group A.

This category accounted for 261 of the 710 comments (36.76%) for Group B. Of the 261 delivery comments, hired judges offered 99, graduate assistants 62, and coaches 100. Group B reported 69.70% of hired judges' delivery comments were found to be helpful. Likewise, 80.65% of graduate assistants' delivery comments were helpful as were 62.00% of coaches' delivery comments. Overall, 69.35% of all delivery comments were found to be helpful, as reported by Group B.

Content

Comments regarding content were also plentiful, amounting to 108 if the 363 total comments, which is approximately 29.75%. Of the 108 content comments, hired judges offered 28, graduate assistants 28, and coaches 52. For hired judges' content comments, 39.29% were found to be helpful. Likewise, 39.29% of graduate assistants' content comments were helpful as were 48.08% of coaches' content comments. Overall, 43.52% of all content comments were found to be helpful.

Group B reported that comments regarding content amounted to 210 if the 710 total comments, which is approximately 29.58%. Of the 210 content comments, hired judges offered 70, graduate assistants 79, and coaches 61. For hired judges' content

comments, 65.71% were found to be helpful. Likewise, 69.62% of graduate assistants' content comments were helpful as were 65.57% of coaches' content comments. Overall, 67.14% of all content comments were found to be helpful.

Organization

Organizational comments amounted for 44 if the 363 total comments, which is approximately 12.12%. Of the 44 organizational comments, hired judges offered 10, graduate assistants 15, and coaches 19. For hired judges' organizational comments, 20.00% were found to be helpful. Likewise, 46.67% of graduate assistants' organizational comments were helpful as were 52.63% of coaches' organizational comments. Overall, 43.18% of all organizational comments were found to be helpful.

For Group B, organizational comments amounted for 63 if the 710 total comments, which is approximately 8.87%. Of the 63 organizational comments, hired judges offered 13, graduate assistants 26, and coaches 24. For hired judges' organizational comments, Group B reported that 61.54% were found to be helpful. Likewise, 84.62% of graduate assistants' organizational comments were helpful as were 83.33% of coaches' organizational comments. Overall, 79.37% of all organizational comments were found to be helpful.

Characterization

Characterization comments amounted for 34 of the 363 total comments, which is approximately 9.37%. Of the 34 characterization comments, hired judges offered 10, graduate assistants 7, and coaches 17. For hired judges' characterization comments, 30.00% were found to be helpful. Likewise, 42.86% of graduate assistants' characterization comments were helpful as were 58.82% of coaches' characterization comments. Overall, 47.06% of all characterization comments were found to be helpful.

Characterization comments amounted for 52 if the 710 total comments for Group B, which is approximately 7.32%. Of the 52 characterization comments, hired judges offered 13, graduate assistants 31, and coaches 8. Group B found that 92.31% of hired judges' characterization comments were found to be helpful. Likewise, 87.10% of graduate assistants' characterization comments were helpful as were 75.00% of coaches' characterization comments. Overall, 86.54% of all characterization comments were found to be helpful.

Rules

Of the 363 total comments, 20 were regarding rules (5.51%). Hired judges and graduate assistants offered 2 and 10 rules comments respectively, whereas coaches offered 8. When examining the helpfulness of the comments, 50.00% of hired judges' rules comments, 40.00% of graduate assistants' rules

comments and 50.00% of coaches' rules comments were observed as helpful. Overall, 45.00% of all rules comments were reportedly helpful.

Of the 710 total comments for Group B, 50 were regarding rules (7.04%). Hired judges and graduate assistants offered 10 and 12 comments respectively, whereas coaches offered 28. When examining the helpfulness of the comments, Group B found that 80.00% of hired judges' rules comments, 66.67% of graduate assistants' rules comments and 78.57% of coaches' rules comments were observed as helpful. Overall, 76.00% of all rules comments were reportedly helpful.

Topic

Comments regarding topic accounted for 10 of the 363 total comments (2.75%). Hired judges, graduate assistants, and coaches authored 6, 2, and 2 comments, respectively. Of those written by hired judges, 16.67% were helpful (83.33% not helpful); of those written by graduate assistants, 0% of the comments were reportedly helpful (100% not helpful). The helpful topic comments written by coaches accounted for 50.00% of coaches comments. Overall, 20.00% of all topic comments were reportedly helpful.

Group B found that comments regarding topic accounted for 13 of the 710 total comments (1.83%). Hired judges, graduate assistants, and coaches authored 2, 2, and 9 comments, respectively. Of those topic comments written by hired judges and graduate assistants, 0% of the comments were reportedly helpful. The only helpful topic comments were written by coaches; 77.78% of coaches' comments were helpful. Overall, 53.85% of all topic comments were reportedly helpful.

General

For Group A, the last category of comments, general, accounted for 39 of the 363 total comments (10.74%). Hired judges, graduate assistants, and coaches authored 20, 12, and 7 general comments, respectively. Regarding helpful comments, 15.00% of hired judges' general comments fit this category and 85.00% comments that were not helpful; 8.33% of graduate assistants' general comments were helpful and 91.67% were not helpful, and coaches provided no helpful general comments and 7 general comments that were not helpful. Only 10.26% of all general comments were reportedly helpful (89.74% were not helpful).

Group B found that hired judges, graduate assistants, and coaches authored 20, 27, and 14 general comments, respectively. Neither hired judges nor coaches provided any helpful comments, and 14.81% of graduate assistants' general comments were seen as helpful. Only 6.56% of all general comments were reportedly helpful (93.44% were not helpful).

Discussion

At first glance, it is clear that the coders in Group A (those with a surplus of forensic background) found fewer helpful comments than those in Group B (those with limited forensics experiences). Most interesting is the phenomenon of Group A rating 43.18% of comments helpful, but Group B found 79.37%. Again, this disparity is likely due to the experience level of the coders who represent different types of judges. It is conceivable that Group B believes some comments are helpful, but those with more forensic experience recognize that "nice delivery" is generally not helpful to a competitor.

The trend in both groups was that the comments were primarily concerned with delivery and content while rules comments were rarely given. Characterization and topic comments were also minimal, perhaps because these comments are often reserved for specific events and are not always applicable to every ballot.

Hypothesis 1 was supported. *Coaches provide comments that are more helpful than graduate assistants or hired judges.* When examining the helpfulness of comments, coaches generally provided the greatest percentage, as recorded by Group A. Of those comments authored by coaches, 41.43% were helpful. Coaches provided the greatest percentage of helpful comments in all categories, except for delivery and general comments, in which coaches provided the smallest percentage. The general comments category is deceiving because there were so few general comments that were helpful; 0 out of 7 coaches' general comments were helpful, only 1 out of 12 graduate assistants' comments were helpful, and only 3 out of 20 hired judges' comments were helpful. With these figures in mind, the interesting findings are that hired judges provide more general comments, and general comments are overwhelmingly not helpful.

Hypothesis 2 was also supported. *Graduate assistants provide comments that are more helpful than hired judges, but are less helpful than coaches.* Graduate assistants' comments were 36.08% helpful and 63.92% not helpful. This is less helpful than coaches (41.43% helpful; 58.57% not helpful), but more helpful than hired judges' (29.37% helpful; 70.63% not helpful). Graduate assistants provided the most helpful comments in characterization, the least helpful comments in rules and topic, and finished either tied with another group or in the middle in all other categories.

Future studies need to be done to further examine hired judges in the forensic arena. A question worth posing is whether competitors would benefit from hired judges who have received training prior to entering the judging process, or if adequate training is even possible without prior forensic experience.

References

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Appendix A: Group A Statistics

JUDGE TYPE	DELIVERY						ORGANIZATION					
	Helpful	%H	Not Helpful	%N	Total	%T	H	%H	N	%N	T	T%
Coaches	8	22.86%	27	77.14%	35	9.64%	10	52.63%	9	47.37%	19	5.23%
Graduate Assistants	9	39.13%	14	60.87%	23	6.34%	7	46.67%	8	53.33%	15	4.13%
Hired	16	32.00%	34	68.00%	50	13.77%	2	20.00%	8	80.00%	10	2.75%
	33	30.56%	75	69.44%	108	29.75%	19	43.18%	25	56.82%	44	12.12%
JUDGE TYPE	CONTENT						RULES					
	H	%H	N	%N	T	T%	H	%H	N	%N	T	T%
Coaches	25	48.08%	27	51.92%	52	14.33%	4	50.00%	4	50.00%	8	2.20%
Graduate Assistants	11	39.29%	17	60.71%	28	7.71%	4	40.00%	6	60.00%	10	2.75%
Hired	11	39.29%	17	60.71%	28	7.71%	1	50.00%	1	50.00%	2	0.55%
	47	43.52%	61	56.48%	108	29.75%	9	45.00%	11	55.00%	20	5.51%
JUDGE TYPE	TOPIC						CHARACTERIZATION					
	H	%H	N	%N	T	T%	H	%H	N	%N	T	T%
Coaches	1	50.00%	1	50.00%	2	0.55%	10	58.82%	7	41.18%	17	4.68%
Graduate Assistants	0	0.00%	2	100.00%	2	0.55%	3	42.86%	4	57.14%	7	1.93%
Hired	1	16.67%	5	83.33%	6	1.65%	3	30.00%	7	70.00%	10	2.75%
	2	20.00%	8	80.00%	10	2.75%	16	47.06%	18	52.94%	34	9.37%
JUDGE TYPE	GENERAL						Hired Helpful		29.37%			
	H	%H	N	%N	T	T%	Hired Not Helpful		70.63%			
Coaches	0	0.00%	7	100.00%	7	1.93%	Graduate Assistants Helpful		36.08%			
Graduate Assistants	1	8.33%	11	91.67%	12	3.31%	Graduate Assistants Not Helpful		63.92%			
Hired	3	15.00%	17	85.00%	20	5.51%	Coaches Helpful		41.43%			
	4	10.26%	35	89.74%	39	10.74%	Coaches Not Helpful		58.57%			

Appendix B: Group B Statistics

JUDGE TYPE	DELIVERY		ORGANIZATION			
	H	N	H	N		
Coaches	62	38	20	4		
Graduate Assistants	50	12	22	4		
Hired	69	30	8	5		
Total	261		63			
Total H/N	181	80	50	13		
Percent H/N	69.35%	30.65%	79.37%	20.63%		
JUDGE TYPE	CONTENT		GENERAL			
	H	N	H	N		
	40	21	0	14		
	55	24	4	23		
	46	24	0	20		
	210		61			
	141	69	4	57		
	67.14%	32.86%	6.56%	93.44%		
JUDGE TYPE	RULES		TOPIC		CHARACTERIZATION	
	H	N	H	N	H	N
	22	6	7	2	6	2
	8	4	0	2	27	4
	8	2	0	2	12	1
	50		13		52	
	38	12	7	6	45	7
	76.00%	24.00%	53.85%	46.15%	86.54%	13.46%