

USE OF WORKSHOPS FOR TRAINING JUDGES

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SOME ANSWERS TO POPULAR QUESTIONS ABOUT THE USE
OF WORKSHOPS FOR TRAINING INDIVIDUAL EVENTS
COACHES AND JUDGES

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The judging of individual events is a difficult task. Perhaps it is exceeded in difficulty by instructing others how to perform this difficult task. The purpose of this paper is to outline the specifics for the use of workshops for training judges and coaches. It will seek to answer the five "W's" regarding this important task.

WHY ARE WORKSHOPS NEEDED?

Recently, several conventions programs and papers have focused on the issues surrounding the judging of individual events. Such issues include: ballots unusable as coaching tools (Bartanen, 1987); inconsistent judging practices (Bartanen, 1987; Hanson, 1987; Sellnow, 1987; & Trimble, 1987); failure to justify a decision (Carey & Rodier, 1987; Olson & Wells, 1988); disagreement among professional and lay judges (Nicolai, 1987); and qualities of a good critic (Bradford, 1988; Schulist, 1988).

Naturally, all of these issues are perceived as problems by members in the forensic community. Many of these problems are not intentional "errors" on the part of judges, but merely a lack of information about what both coaches and students would like to see on the ballots to make their critiques as helpful as possible. While not all problems can be cured by education, perhaps a major share of these problems could be solved through the use of workshops for coaches and judges.

WHO SHOULD BE INVOLVED?

While it might be nice to have workshops for every individual who ever views a round of individual events, that is not a practical solution. For purposes of this paper I have divided judges into two categories: primary judges and secondary judges. Primary judges are those who hear a majority of rounds at any given tournament. These judges include coaches, graduate students, faculty members: that set of individuals who regularly hear rounds week-end after week-end throughout the year. Secondary judges are those who infrequently hear rounds. Those judges who critique rounds at a single tournament a year, or who fill in for regular judges fall into this category. It is my belief that

while every judge and every ballot is important, the focus of our efforts should be on the primary judges who are hearing the vast majority of the rounds.

Within the category of primary judges are many different types of individuals who could benefit from individual events workshops. Initially, new graduate students could profit from such training. While many graduate students have expertise in performing individual events, few have extensive experience in judging the events in which they formerly competed. Many students often competed only in those events which they preferred, i.e. public address, limited preparation, interpretation, and consequently are not familiar with the specifics of the full range of events which they now are called upon to judge. Not infrequently, graduate students who have had their primary, if not exclusive, experience in debate, are scheduled to judge individual events. No doubt many of us can recount horror stories of such judges hearing poetry rounds. Perhaps the group of new, young judges, more than any other, deserves our attention because of the vast quantity of rounds they are likely to hear in their career. Because they are at the beginning of their experience as judges special attention should be afforded them to teach them to become capable critics.

Primary judges are also those who are returning coaches. While many of these judges recall some time in their past when they have been involved in individual events, they may not have judged/coached for several years and consequently are not familiar with current rules or trends in individual events. Often it takes only a short period of time for these judges to get back in the groove of judging, provided they are armed with the latest knowledge and procedures which are being followed. High school coaches who have now decided to make the switch to college forensics are another group of primary judges. While high school coaches often have extensive knowledge about the nature of individual events, again, frequently they are unfamiliar with the nuances and procedures which currently exist in college forensics.

Finally, there are a few primary judges with no previous experience. Perhaps a school has recently begun a program, and the new director has been coerced from a related field, but has not had hands-on experience in forensics. While this person may soon be a regular judge, his/her lack of past experience initially may hamper him/her in being an effective coach/judge.

While all ballots obviously have the same weight, and lay judges often do judge at most tournaments, it is the primary judges I feel who stand to benefit most from workshops. Consequently, these workshops should also benefit us as experienced coaches and should most directly benefit our students.

Perhaps a related question is who should do the training. When considering this issue, I believe it is important that this task not be undertaken by a single individual or a select few. Considering the subjective nature of judging individual events, it is diversity which fosters the continual creativity in individual events. Therefore, training should hopefully be done by those at many

levels of forensic experience. A first thought might be to have only well-seasoned coaches train judges. While they need obviously be included, workshops should not rely exclusively on veterans because they may only present one focus and will certainly not be as in tune with the questions or problems new primary judges may have. Also, it is important that when procedures and preferences are given, that those doing the training demonstrate that certain disagreements do occur, even between competent professionals. It is of utmost importance that those trained do not merely become clones of those few who train them as then we have stifled individual creativity.

WHEN SHOULD WORKSHOPS OCCUR?

This perhaps is the most academic of the five questions, as workshops will have to be scheduled when they are convenient for both the trainers and those participating in the workshops. Nevertheless, several suggestions seem logical. For primary judges, workshops should occur at the beginning of the season. In areas when there are clusters of schools and geographic distance is not prohibitive, a workshop could be held a week-end or two before the first tournament. With the advent of the National Debate Tournament Board of Trustees program of novice workshops for NDT debate, such individual events workshops may well coincide since they could potentially involve many of the same people. If an entire day or week-end is too expensive or infeasible, tournament directors may want to shoulder the responsibility for including a brief workshop prior to their tournament. While tournament schedules are always full, minor adjustments could be made to use the time during registration. It frequently occurs the night before rounds begin. Many tournaments which have both debate and individual events could begin with debate rounds and have a workshop coincide with the first few rounds of debate. Or, if necessary, a tournament could be shortened by one preliminary round or one conflict pattern to accommodate time for a workshop. Considering the preferred time for workshops is the beginning of the season, it is doubtful if most competitors will be ready for extensive competition at this point in the year.

If trainers want to do an extensive job, perhaps workshops at two or three beginning tournaments would be helpful. Not only would it give new judges time to actually experience judging and read ballots of other critics between workshop experiences, it would also bring in judges who may not have been able to attend the initial workshop. Training must be continually reinforced. If an extensive amount of time is available, the workshop could be structured to include a different type of event during each workshop, i.e. public address, interpretation, limited preparation.

If a workshop at the beginning of the season or at early tournaments is not possible, the concerned coach could run a workshop just prior to the tournament he/she directs regardless of when it occurs during the forensic year. This type of workshop has the advantage of also being able to include any lo-

cal judges who may be used at the tournament. Again, convenience is perhaps the watchword of any workshop. While it is perhaps ideal to believe that attendance at such a workshop could be required, often the needs of the tournament dictate that "all available bodies" be given ballots. The time just prior to the first round is perhaps the most appropriate time for such a workshop to occur, when judges are physically present and prepared to judge.

Just prior to national tournaments is another logical time for workshops to occur. While we frequently believe that only the "best" will be at nationals, there is often a strong contingency of hired judges who may not be familiar with current rules and practices. It is at this time that judging competence becomes critically important to our students. As a recent host of a national tournament I can attest to the number of "secondary judges" used at national tournaments. A workshop just prior to the first round may not only comfort the students involved, but could put the tabulation staff at ease, knowing that all judges have been carefully instructed on how to fill out a ballot.

WHERE SHOULD WORKSHOPS BE HELD?

Again, the answer to this question is based on a matter of convenience. One need only look to the various forensic districts or leagues to identify logical locations for workshops. Obviously central locations play a key role in maximizing attendance at workshops. If workshops can coincide with current NDT workshops, the location may already be set in the American Forensic Association calendar. Each school knows where their "first" tournament of the season is located, so the duty may fall on the hosts of the earliest tournaments to play significant roles in the planning process.

For workshops which occur just prior to rounds of competition, workshops which are located in the same general vicinity as where the rounds will actually occur is the most logical location for workshops. Workshops occurring at obscure locations and inconvenient times are unlikely to produce significant results.

WHAT SHOULD WORKSHOPS CONTAIN?

This is undoubtedly the most difficult and most controversial of the five questions. Due to the subjective nature of individual events, trainers must be cautious in providing too many details to judges so that judging no longer expresses individual preferences, but becomes almost clinical in nature.

At the very minimum, workshops should outline the rules of the events and instruct judges on the proper format for completing the ballot and tab sheet (if one exists). The ranking and rating system used, and area on the ballot for comments should be outlined. Competitors also appreciate when judges are schooled in tournament etiquette. Since judges are all role models for the competitors, this topic should not be avoided. Such occurrences as double entrants, late extemp draw, and order of speeches should all be discussed with the reasons behind the procedures. Finally, as Dean (1988) suggests, written

guidelines including the basics of tournament practices, should be given to all judges at the beginning of each tournament to familiarize them with the procedures which may vary from tournament to tournament i.e. ballot pick-up and return.

Procedures which go beyond the pragmatic rules of the tournament are unique and will vary from person to person. Nevertheless, instead of shying away from difficult questions, perhaps this is where experienced coaches/judges, the trainers, will have to spend the most time. It would seem logical to discuss each type of individual event in the three categories limited prep, interpretation, and public address. While each event has specific rules, there are many commonalities to events within each group. For example, all interpretations need to have some type of introduction; all limited prep events need to include the question or quotation. A workshop may include examples of less than perfect speeches for the participants to critique. Trainers can point out obvious problems and then discuss those areas which may touch on personal preference. Obviously the more individual attention that can be given to each participant, the more opportunity for knowledge.

Perhaps the leaders of the workshop can each discuss some of their personal preferences, such as organizational patterns, extemp question answered at the beginning or end of the speech, type of material preferred for interpretation, acting vs. interpretation standards, etc. so potential judges can get a feel for the issues they will be confronting when they critique rounds. It is important that these concepts are acknowledged to be preferences and not standards employed by the god of individual events.

CONCLUSION

The answers to these common questions about the use of workshops for training coaches and judges suggest two potential recommendations for discussion, debate, and potential action:

Recommendation 1: That this body urge national and local individual events organizations to fund, support and create a nationwide program of judging workshops to be conducted throughout the 1989-90 season.

Recommendation 2: That this body urge national individual events organizations to fund and support the creation of a videotape which can be used to train individual events judges.

It is certain, by virtue of the fact that this session even exists that training is necessary. It is our duty to discuss how such training might best be delivered to those who need it most. Central organization under the auspices of a major forensic organization could begin to co-ordinate and plan such a training program.

For those who are unable to attend live workshops, and for directors who perhaps have a high turnover of potential judges, a more permanent solution might be to have a videotape which contains necessary information for judges.

might be to have a videotape which contains necessary information for judges. While such a video would have to be short, it could prove to be a useful resource for both primary and secondary judges as they begin their task of learning exactly how to judge individual events.

For schools who have access to media facilities, certain workshops could be videotaped so that they could be shown to various audiences at different times. Perhaps major forensic organizations, such as the National Forensic Association or AFA National Individual Events Tournament committee, could sanction and support such a project. If it could not be done on a wide scale, different regions, leagues, or districts could arrange to collaborate on such a project, so that the workshop is not the work of a single school.

Perhaps the two key terms in such a project are necessity and diversity. Potential judges have certain information which they need to know in order to function effectively in their role. Judges also need to understand that the beauty of individual events lies in the diversity of talents, materials, and styles which are represented in our individual events contests.

It is important to realize that it is our responsibility as forensic educators to aid in the training of those who will be judging our students. And workshops for training judges and coaches might be an important step in improving the nature of individual events.

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