

# QUESTIONS AND CONCERNS ABOUT EXTEMPORANEOUS SPEAKING by Robert C. Carroll

Over the past eighteen years, as a high school and college forensics contestant, judge and coach, I have observed the evolution of the individual event Extemporaneous Speaking. It has been my pleasure over that period of time to enter into discussions with other judges and coaches, and more than a few contestants, over the changing nature of the event. While most of these discussions have focused on the theory and application of Unified Analysis, others have centered on the evolution of the event and still others have coalesced around how to improve the event. In this article, I hope to address some of the questions and concerns raised in those discussions by first, examining the evolution of the event, second, offering some suggestions for the improvement of the event, and third, commenting briefly on the application of Unified Analysis to the event.

## Evolution of Extemporaneous Speaking

Let us begin with a short examination of the evolution of the event. Back in the dark ages, when I was a secondary school student, extemp speaking was the land of delivery, especially on the national level. Speakers, who spoke well, regardless of how poor the analysis they offered, were rewarded with trophies. Several national final rounds from this era were comprised almost entirely of speakers who never stated the question, never answered the question, never supported the answer to the question, never utilized preview and review statements, cited three or fewer sources for evidence, stated obvious factual errors, used generic introductions exceeding two minutes in length, but who spoke in a very eloquent manner with excellent word choice, occasional humor and fluent delivery. In short, the event was judged exclusively as a contest in declamation, with style triumphing over substance. Content was irrelevant. It became limited preparation oratory. Review the audio and videotapes yourself if you doubt my claims.

I attribute this historical circumstance to the demise of communication in policy debate. Face the facts: prior to 1977, only three contestants in the history of the NFL NSDT ever won double national championships and each of these individuals won in policy debate and extemporaneous speaking. This is understandable, because both events stressed knowledge of current events, careful analysis of a topic (resolution or question), solid organization, skilled

argumentation, and consistent use of evidence, while requiring a professional delivery. Over the years, as policy debate left normal forensic space to travel in debate hyperspace, focusing exclusively on analysis (some would argue bad analysis), the backlash against this trend was felt most noticeably in extemp speaking, with the coaches and judges narrowing their focus exclusively to delivery.

This trend was not so noticeable on the collegiate level, where analysis outweighed, but did not eliminate, delivery. Whether it was because of more graduate students coaching and judging, or because of the greater analytic abilities of young adults versus adolescents, or even because of the culture of educational intensity that inevitably surrounds the college scene, I cannot say. What I can say is that compared to high school extemp, in college extemp, content was relevant. Contestants who could not break in high school were national finalists in college and contestants who could not advance past round ten were national champions. Granted, the exception to this rule existed on both levels, but by and large, this was the pattern.

I am pleased to report that this is no longer true. Now, on the secondary school level, content is relevant once more. National final rounds of the past several years are comprised of speakers who state and answer the question, support the answer with logical argumentation, cite nine or more sources for evidence, avoid factual errors, utilize specific introductions averaging one minute in length, and still speak in a very professional manner. In short, the event is now judged as a contest in public essay writing and speaking, with substance being as critical an element as style. It has become a public speaking event once again.

I attribute this current trend to the growth and development of Lincoln-Douglas debate. Besides knowledge of history and philosophy, value debate stresses those requirements that policy debate once did. Individuals who coach and judge one event often coach and judge the other, myself included, and contestants who succeed in one event often succeed in the other as well. Of all the events at the NFL NSDT tournament over the past several years, the most frequent double qualification has been in LD and FX or USX. More than any other two events in which students are allowed to double enter, these are complimentary. The transference of skills is too intuitive for further elaboration. The crossover in coach-

📎 Evolution of Extemp Speaking

📎 Suggestions for Improvement

📎 Standardization of Rules

📎 Preparation Period

📎 Directed Instructions

📎 Modeling

📎 Transference

📎 Judges

Students Observe

Time Signals

Flow Speeches

Current Events

Judge Questioning

📎 Entering More Than (1) Event

📎 Application of Unified Analysis

📎 Myths/Substructuring

📎 Argumentation Requirements

📎 "Change" Benefits

ing and judging brings content into extemp and delivery into debate, improving both events.

Reinforcement for these observations comes from my continued involvement with college forensics. At the AFA NIET, the NIET operated by the same organization that operates the NDT, delivery has always been a more important criterion than at the NFA NIET. It appears that the backlash against excessive speed and non-communicatory delivery persists within an organization that offers national contests for both extemporaneous speaking and policy debate (AFA), but not within an organization that offers national contests for both extemp and Lincoln-Douglas debate (NFA).

### **Suggestions For Improvement**

This idea of improving the event serves as a clean transition into my second point. My suggestions for improvements are aimed at everyone involved in forensics: national and state organizations; tournament hosts; coaches; judges; and contestants. Each has a role to play in the continued evolution of extemp speaking.

Let me utilize a top down approach and start with national and state organizations. The National Forensic League needs to consolidate the three categories of extemporaneous speaking offered - national/domestic/United States Extemp (USX), international/foreign extemp (FX), and extemp commentary (XC) - into one event, extemporaneous speaking (EX). I am as a big an advocate for the event as anyone you are likely to find on the planet, and even I cannot understand why three varieties of it must be practiced. This only serves to dilute competition and reduce the educational value of the event; the true extemporaneous speaker should be well versed in all current events, regardless of place of origin of the news story. A standard thirty-minute preparation period, seven-minute speaking period and public address style serve the event well. Here, the NFL could learn from the National Catholic Forensic League and offer just one version of the event.

### **Standardization of Rules**

A consistent set of rules for the event from both the NFL and NCFL would benefit state organizations, which would do well to adopt national rules for their state contests. When I coached in Illinois, I was at a huge competitive disadvantage in teaching my

students; the state uses a forty-five minute preparation period and a six-minute speaking period. Regardless of the talent of the student and the dedication of the coach, that type of structural disadvantage is impossible to circumvent in preparation for the national tournament. Thus, the one step every national and state organization could take to improve the event is standardize rules to include only one category, thirty minutes of preparation and seven minutes of speaking time.

### **Preparation Period**

This structural disadvantage is further extended by a majority of tournament hosts who refuse to run the event the way it is designed, with a preparation period for each round. Instead most offer one preparation period and force contestants to use the same speech for three preliminary rounds with a new draw for the final round or offer two preparation periods and force contestants to use the first speech for rounds one and two and the second speech for round three and the final round. Some tournaments do not even offer preparation periods at the tournament; they ask contestants to bring prepared speeches to the contest and use them for every round. Once again, students cannot be expected to compete and learn if a semi-extemporaneous contest is offered. And as far as I am concerned, any tournament that requests students to prepare in advance is only offering oratory on a question of current events.

It is little wonder I learned more about the event my first year at college than I ever did in high school, and in high school I actually worked with an experienced coach and traveled to numerous tournaments on a competitive team. As a high school contestant, only at the District and State Series tournaments and the Bradley University Invitational did I prepare every round. As a college contestant, I prepared every round at every tournament I attended, period. While I probably prepared some sixty to seventy speeches in competition in high school, I prepared over sixty my first year of college alone. As a coach, I still can find only four regional tournaments to attend each year with a preparation period for each round, excluding the tournament I once hosted. Thus, the one step every tournament host could take to improve the quality and educational value of the event is offer a preparation period for each round. If you need assistance in scheduling or writing questions, call me and I will be happy to

volunteer my services to the cause.

### **Directed Instruction**

Of all the persons involved with forensics, coaches could do the most to improve the event, yet probably do the least. Most coaches have the mentality that if it benefits students other than their own, they immediately dislike it. As a coach, I finally recognized the fact, albeit belatedly, that as a coach I am everyone's coach; a coach for my students, other contestants, judges, and even other coaches. My obligation to the activity does not end with preparing my students alone for competition; it involves using the competitive atmosphere as an environment to learn and improve. Despite this, that mentality persists. The first step most coaches could take is an attitude change concerning the nature of competition. The second would be to allow the students to prepare a speech from scratch, deliver it and critique the speech in both writing and orally. Far too many coaches I have had the pleasure of working with will either assist the student in the preparation process, whereas I will only answer questions, or have the student deliver a speech he or she wrote in competition over the weekend or the night before. In other words, the student will never learn the crucial time allocation skills the event requires in both preparation and delivery unless the student actually practices these skills under supervision with immediate, critical feedback. Education refers to this as directed instruction.

### **Modeling**

The third step would be to teach the students to remain in the room after speaking and observe the contestants who follow and observe elimination/final rounds even when they are not competing. Far too many extemp speakers never get the opportunity to watch other speakers and learn, as their coaches never teach this or misinform them about the procedure of the event. I still, to this day, meet coaches and judges who argue that the rules for extemp mandate, on both the national and state levels, that speakers must leave the room immediately after finishing. This is simply not the case. The result is that with the exception of a handful of rounds, such as the national, state or district final rounds, the audience is comprised entirely of the judge(s). Education refers to this as modeling.

### **Transference**

The fourth step would be to teach the

students not only extemporaneous speaking, but also other events that utilize the same crucial skills. Most extemp coaches do not solely coach extemp, but usually also coach some form of debate, from policy to value to congressional, or other forms of public address, such as oratory, expository or impromptu. Unfortunately, many coaches tend to leave a student in just one event once the student has mastered the basic skills and allow him or her to polish his or her skills by him or herself. Too few coaches cross train students in several events simultaneously, even though I have found this to be an excellent method for rapid improvement and the cross application of skills. Coaches should note that, as mentioned before, most every student in the national finals and semifinals qualified in another event, or, at the very least, participated in at least one other event during the course of the academic year. This not only provides a talented and dedicated student three chances to qualify (Lincoln-Douglas, Student Congress or Extemporaneous Speaking) instead of one (extemp), but also gives him or her a better shot at breaking and reaching those ever elusive elimination rounds. It also provides an opportunity for a hard working student to earn a quadruple ruby. Education refers to his as transference.

### **Judges**

Judges, too, need to better learn the rules of the event, and differentiate these rules from standards that have evolved over time.

### **Students Observe**

Judges should know that some coaches, such as myself, teach their students to observe, behave as a good audience members, take notes for further reference and that these skills are not illegal and that students should not be ranked down for displaying these skills.

### **Time Signals**

Judges should offer to provide time signals for all contestants and at least provide time signals for contestants when asked. This is simply not that difficult.

### **Flow Speeches**

Judges should also learn to flow speeches so they can follow argumentation and have notes to refer to at the conclusion of the round. I will grant that flowing and providing time signals does tend to take your attention away from the speaker, but the other people in the audience can be good members and maintain eye contact. The judge has more important things to do

as the critic of the contestant. And it is not as if a judge stops listening when he or she stops watching. Besides, good coaches teach their students to make immediate eye contact with a judge when he or she raises his or her head and looks towards them.

### **Current Events**

Finally, judges should have at least a cursory knowledge of current events, so that they may comment on the content of the speech.

The importance of observation cannot be overestimated. As a college contestant, I was allowed to observe rounds, as opposed to high school, where the practice was frowned upon. Consequently, I learned more in the first year of college about what to do and what not to do than in four years of high school. If learning is an important element of the event, then students must be permitted to watch and listen to their peers speak. Removing the element of acting as an audience transforms the event from an educational one into purely a competitive one.

### **Judge Questioning**

Last, but not least, are the contestants. If a student has no desire to improve, a rare quality for someone who enters this event, then that student will not. Maturation will occur, but not necessarily improvement. Contestants need to learn to not be afraid to wait until the conclusion of the rounds as the return of the ballots to approach their judges and ask questions about the speech they delivered or request suggestions for improvement or inquiry about the philosophy of the judge towards the event. Contestants need also to learn that their judges are not idiots; most, if not all, have bachelor degrees (many have masters and a few have doctorates) and practical work experience which allows them to understand and appreciate the impacts of current events, provided that those events are well developed and explained. Too many contestants still focus their time and effort in the preparation room on writing funny jokes and practicing smooth transitions to the detriment of developing logical arguments and explaining supporting evidence.

### **Entering More Than (1) Event**

Finally, contestants need to realize the importance of working on several other events to augment their extemp skills; the benefits of Lincoln-Douglas debate has already been touched upon, other events which benefit a extemp speaker are Parli-

mentary debate (Student Congress) and impromptu speaking.

## **The Application of Unified Analysis to the Event**

Most of my suggestions for improving the content of an extemporaneous speech have been offered before in previous articles on the use of Unified Analysis to organize limited preparation speeches. I will not reiterate those arguments here, but will instead, briefly clarify some of the issues surrounding UA. *MYTH...* The first issue is the myth about the mandatory number of main points and subpoints; the second is the myth about the mandatory number of source citations.

*MYTH...* Somehow, a myth has evolved that UA requires organizing a speech with two main points and two subpoints for each main point. While this is the style I teach and my preferred style as a judge, this is only one form of UA. What UA advocates is that all main points, regardless of number, support the answer to the question posed and are independent of each other in consideration. In other words, I, as a judge, could reject the first main point of a speech as ill advised or misconceived, but my consideration of the second point is not contingent upon the first. What UA also advocates is that all subpoints, regardless of number, support the thesis of the main point and are also independent of each other. I teach my students to utilize two main points with two subpoints because I believe that this offers the optimal balance between quantity of arguments and quality of arguments in a single speech, as I prefer speakers develop a limited number of arguments and ideas well, rather than underdevelop a spread.

### **Substructuring**

The main idea is that substructure is necessary because speakers should present arguments within the main points in the most coherent manner possible; substructure allows them to do this. Too many speakers still practice "dump and run" analysis, where they present all the evidence within the first thirty seconds of the main point, and then spend the remaining time explaining the significance of the evidence or applying the evidence to the thesis. Practicing UA with substructure allows a speaker to explain the argument first, then support the argument with the relevant evidence, not vice versa. Simply presenting two main points and two subpoints may give a

speech structure and organization, but does nothing to increase the argumentation and analysis and is certainly not UA. The points must be reasons, be labeled as reasons and support the answer; the subpoints must support the main point. Anything less is just a pale imitation of UA. Accept no substitutes!

*Myths...* Likewise, a myth has also evolved that UA demands a certain, inflexible number of source citations within the speech, usually nine. Once again, while this is the style I teach and my preferred number as a judge, the minimum number of sources required in a speech is truly the function of the number of arguments a speaker wishes to make. I teach my students to cite nine sources, one in the justification step of the introduction, to give significance to the asking of the question, and two to support each subpoint. Really, a speaker needs only to cite evidence to support each subpoint, which itself is basically a detailed argument. A speech of two main points with two

subpoints each absolutely requires four sources, whereas speeches of three main points with two subpoints each or two main points with three subpoints each require a minimum of six sources. I have seen both of the latter variety and have given them high marks, when done well.

### **Argumentation Requirements**

The main idea is that argumentation requires careful analysis and relevant evidence, speakers should present the argument first, explain it, then support it before moving on to the next argument; I seem to recall this as the famous four S's of forensics: signpost; state, support and summarize. "Dump and run" analysis, also violates this 4-S rule, as well as the substructure rule; so it is doubly bad. In general, I tend to believe that it is impossible to be too organized and cite too much evidence, unless the speaker either speaks too fast or offers no original analysis, merely a synopsis of varying viewpoints.

### **"Change" Benefits**

Clearly, extemporaneous speaking is in a state of flux as it makes the transition between an event which once was dominated by concerns exclusively over delivery to an event which is concerned about analysis, argumentation, evidence, organization and delivery in equal parts. The development and growth of other events, particularly value debate, has spurred improvements in the event. The result is an event that is not limited-preparation oratory, but a mixture of the best of both worlds, debate and public speaking. All participants in forensics - coaches, contestants and judges alike - benefit from this change.

*(Robert C. Carroll is a former coach with Homewood-Flossmoor (IL) HS and Merrillville (IN) HS. He now works with Saint Xavier University. This is Mr. Carroll's fourth article submitted for publication in the Rostrum.)*