

"SO HERE'S TO THE SMALL PROGRAMS"

by

William L. Crocker, Jr.

On January 28, 2000, two wonderful things happened to me that tie the sometimes unrelated ends of forensic coaching together. First, the National Forensic League calculated that as of that date, I had finally, after 14 years of coaching, accrued enough points to become a diamond key coach. It is an honor I have secretly coveted since the first day I restarted the program at Silver Lake Regional High School. The other thing I will relate later.

In September of 1986 I started a new job and moved about 50 miles. After finding an apartment and settling into the new position, I started looking for a school that needed a speech coach. As luck (or intervention) would have it, not far away, Silver Lake needed to get their program up and running again after years of languishing.

In early September, I placed daily notices that if anyone was interested in speech, to come to a meeting in the cafeteria. I was scared that no one would show up. Luckily, three people did. And that was the start.

Alecks, Kerri-Lynn and Jim were the nucleus. Well, they were the entire team! At the first tournament, Alecks and Jim actually broke into final rounds and we were also awarded the best new school and were given a trophy and a standing ovation. (A rather dubious honor since Silver Lake had been around since the early 1970's). I will never forget that day!

Since that time, we have grown larger, but never more than 15 members for some unknown reason. It has always bothered me why we never got any larger. But, I was happy with what we had and continued plugging along. At the banquet the previous May, I asked the returning members to each bring a new person to the first meeting of the year in the fall. That they did...and then some! At that meeting there were 34 people. After all was said and done, we still had about 26 members...only six were veterans.

So this was the first year we competed with the larger teams and had a chance to win some sweepstakes trophies. We took

"That's what we are in this for!"

our share, but that is not what this endeavor is all about and not what this missive is all about, either.

Getting to the point, I want to express my respect, my admiration and my "I know....I've been there's to the small speech and debate programs. The ones that do not receive the ink, the glory and hardware. The ones that keep plugging on, year after year and to the coaches who know just what it is like.

Here's to the small programs...

The one's run by non-educators who, have to deal with being an outsider. Who hear the "Who's He" from teachers and staff when they walk into school each day.

Here's to the small programs...

The one's that need only a van and not a bus, or even two. And here's to the coaches who drive those vans, year in and year out.

Here's to the small programs...

The one's who go to district tournaments knowing there is not a chance that they will win one of those big trophies, but go to compete anyway.

Here's to the small programs...

The one's that take on the huge schools, hoping that maybe they'll be lucky

and send one to nationals. And here's to the coaches who know what it's like to hear a quiet van on the way home when it doesn't happen...and blame themselves.

Here's to the small programs...

The one's that have to beg for recognition in a school where sometimes it's not fashionable to do speech and debate.

Here's to the small programs...

The one's that have no budget lines, but still manage to get what they need to prosper...one way or another.

Here's to the small programs...

The one's with one coach but with parents, wives, fiancées, alumni and friends willing to make it work.

Here's to the small programs...

The one's that don't have to worry about having too many people on the team.

And, here's to the small programs and to their coaches...

Your deeds and works may not get the attention they deserve, but that's not what you are in this for anyway.

To complete this tome, I mentioned two wonderful things happened to me on January 28. The other was the mother of one of the first members of the team stopped by my room and asked if I was the speech and debate coach. I answered that was I. She said she was Alecks' mother and that he was doing fine and working in Boston. She also told me that he often tells her that speech and debate was one of the best things that happened to him in high school. She added, that what I taught him in speech, he uses every day in his work. Good for you Alecks!

That's what we are in this for!

(William L. Crocker, Jr. coaches at Silver Lake Regional (MA) HS)