

PUT ME IN COACH. I'M READY TO PLAY!

by Cathy McNamara

Remember the State Championship when Joe Smith forgot his dress shoes. Remember when Suzie Brown arrived at an invitational in what appeared to be her nightgown. Remember when Mary Jones bent over during her HI and gave the male judges an eyeful. Ah yes, I remember it well. And probably, so do you.

It took me several years and even more embarrassing moments to realize that it is a coach's responsibility to do more than order a bus, make sure a kid is on it and "go" to a tournament. We all have stories of our own students attired in less than appropriate clothes, students ending up at the wrong school or irate parents waiting hours on the wrong side of the building for the bus to return. Unfortunately, the "game" of a Forensics tournament is not an easy one to explain. To use a cliché, you sort of have to "be there." However, one thing I give my students the week of their first tournament is a "Pre-Tournament Checklist." While not as good as actually "being there," it does remind them of many very important details that could easily be overlooked.

Pre-Tournament Checklist Tournament Eve

_____ 1. Where is the tournament and how do I get there?

Many schools use bus transportation for all activities while others allow students to drive. Students AND PARENTS need to know all the specifics. If a bus is supplied, where and when will it load? Where and when will it return? If suitcases are necessary, how many may a student bring? Are radios allowed? Should tournament attire be worn or carried on to change later? If students are allowed to drive, do they have accurate directions? How much money is needed?

_____ 2. What do I wear?

Don't wait until you get out of bed to realize your suit is still at the cleaners or that your dog spent the night sleeping on your best dress. Make sure the clothes you have selected are classy but not flashy. You want the judge(s) to notice how great you look and then forget about how you look and concentrate on what you say. While "dress codes" are different in every part of the country. Below is a brief list of general do's and don'ts regarding attire:

No Wild Patterns

No Gaudy Jewelry

No Wacky Hairstyles

Boys - Dress Slacks, Shirt and Tie-Coat or Vest is optional

Girls - Dresses or Skirts - No Short Skirts, No Low-Cut Blouses

Girls - Always Wear Leg Covering Shoes Should Be Comfortable

But NO Sneakers

Keep Your Hair Out of Your Face

Make Sure Your Clothes Fit

_____ 3. Make sure you review your speech/cutting/case but do not over-rehearse. You will find yourself tired of your own voice and it will be difficult to feign enthusiasm during your rounds.

_____ 4. Get plenty of rest.

Morning of the Tournament

_____ 1. Shower and shave. Wash your hair. Brush your teeth. Use deodorant. It will hopefully be a long day.

_____ 2. Eat a healthy breakfast.

_____ 3. Gather your "stuff." (extemp files, lunch money, homework, prose folder, etc.)

Before the Rounds

_____ 1. Do vocal and physical warm-ups. This will help with your nerves as well as your performance. Warming up as a squad is also a good activity to promote team unity.

_____ 2. Review your material. You know. Talk to the walls.

_____ 3. Locate all your competition rooms so you don't get lost. This is especially important if you are entered in more than one event and have a tight time schedule. Check your rooms for acoustics and performance space. Locate your focal points for Interp events.

_____ 4. Always exhibit appropriate demeanor. It would be terribly hard for a judge to "forget" they heard you using foul language in the hall prior to the round.

In the Round

_____ 1. Remember that as soon as the judge sees you, you are being judged.

_____ 2. Listen to other performers attentively. Respond genuinely with laughter (if appropriate) and applause. Do not sleep, talk or try to read what the judges write.

_____ 3. Approach the performance space with confidence and stand quietly until the judges are ready for you to begin.

_____ 4. Begin your performance immediately upon a cue from the judge. Don't "prepare" for 30 seconds prior to beginning. Do whatever preparation you need to do prior to approaching the performance space.

_____ 5. At the conclusion of your performance, take your seat with the same poise you left. Do not signal in any way to the audience that you had a good or bad performance.

_____ 6. If you wish, you may thank the judge for their time although it is my opinion that the judge should thank you. Any unsolicited "chat" with a judge could be perceived as "brown-nosing."

After the Tournament

_____ 1. Be on your best behavior at the awards presentation. You are not at a hockey game. Enthusiasm is grand; boisterous behavior is tacky.

_____ 2. Read carefully any critique sheets you receive. Remember that your judges are human beings and many of their comments are subjective.

_____ 3. Celebrate your success and set new goals for your next tournament.

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