

# MY "COACH OF THE YEAR"

by William H. Bennett

When he was headmaster of the Westminster School in London from 1640 to 1695 Richard Busby had a great reputation as both teacher and disciplinarian. As Dr. Busby was showing King Charles II around his school, it was noticed that, contrary to etiquette, the headmaster kept his hat on in the royal presence. Busby excused himself in these words: "It would not do for my boys to suppose that there existed in the world any greater man than Dr. Busby."

Great teachers are rare and becoming rarer. Bad pay, increased personal safety risks in public schools, and confronting too many parents who are more interested in grades than in learning, lures most good teachers to other occupations. S.A.T. scores of education majors are now the lowest of any academic discipline in our nation's colleges. So it is important that we reward and praise those teachers who defy the trend, the Dr. Busby's of the 1990s who remind us what a good teacher can be and should do.

In speech we give awards to teachers. The NFL gives its Coach of the Year Award, plus diamond degrees to successful educators who excel the required number of years. Emory has its key, and many state associations recognize coaches for competitive excellence. But too many of these honors rest on or incorporate as a very important facet a dubious criteria: prolonged competitive success. Thus coaches with large budgets or an abnormally large number of higher socioeconomic and/or high intelligence students receive almost all of these honors.

But what other criteria are there? How should the speech community determine who deserves our greatest coaching honors? Six tests suggest themselves. First is

longevity. Staying with the activity deserves commendation. Second is working successfully with students of average economic and intellectual background; coaching the average student well deserves acknowledgment. Third is to demonstrate an appropriate emotional concern for students, to care for your students. Fourth is proven ability to survive and even produce winners on a minimal or nonexistent budget. Next is keeping a speech program alive when there are few students to draw from. And a final criteria is demonstrated ability to coach alone, to succeed when there is nobody else to help you.

A coach who can succeed at all these levels deserves our greatest honors. This is the type of teacher who can get students to learn not only because the material is useful but because they want to please the teacher. As George Farquhar reminded us in *The Inconstant* "Charming women can true converts make. We love the precepts for the teacher's sake." Sister Isabella Glenn of Trinidad Catholic High school in Colorado is such a teacher. She is a woman of amazing skill, perseverance, and love.

Sister Isabella will be celebrating her diamond anniversary (75 years) as a Sister of Charity this coming August. She has been teaching 72 years and has taught English I, II, III, and IV; Latin I, II, III, IV; Journalism; Religion at all grade levels; World History; Government; Chemistry; Geometry; Algebra I and II; and, of course, Speech and Debate.

Sister started teaching in January 1923 at St. Mary's School in Morrow, Ohio. She had 72 children in her class of second and third grade students. The mind boggles at the control, discipline and learning challenges that con-

front a teacher with so many kids. But Isabella loves to teach. As she says "It is one way to pass along Christian love to the young. It is also exciting -- it's fun to see ideas come to life in other people's minds and to know you lit the match!"

For the last 21 years she has taught at Trinidad Catholic. As the years have passed her coaching and speech involvement has remained undiminished. She supports speech because "it defines us in our social life, in business, sometimes even within the home." And she continues to coach and support debate at a very small school with few students and a tiny budget. Most of the last decade she has had to be the only coach. She loves speech though because "it helps the reasoning process. Competition has a salutary effect on a student who gives a sloppy presentation. Being judged in tournaments is often a painful experience which, if survived, can lead to real progress."

Sr. Glenn's interests are not all teaching and speech. She is an avid Bronco football fan. She enjoys reading Louis L'Amour and other "good western" authors. Isabella delights in a good game of pinochle.

Her one truly challenging wish is to go to Ireland, "if not now then on my way to heaven". But that will only be possible, says Principal Joseph Reorda, if someone outside the school is generous enough "to make this possible".

What Sister Isabella represents is more than the deserving recipient of a coach's award. Her method, her involvement and her commitment to knowledge. And in that she serves more than her students, more than her school. As Adlai Stevenson told a Wisconsin audience in

other. The opportunity to vote for a balance case may cause the less experienced judge to forget that he, like debaters, is not necessarily judging the final truth of what is said, but is rather judging the skill, logic, and persuasion of the positions assigned by the resolution.

If my argument from competitive fairness is not enough to dissuade the zealous balancer, let him look to the wording of the resolutions. The statement of a priority which explicitly includes two values or alternatives implies that each debater is to defend one of the alternatives at the expense of the other. Recently, we have witnessed a trend toward wording topics of hierarchy with "When in conflict" at the beginning of the sentence. This wording reflects an effort on the part of the L/D Topic Committee to eliminate balance negatives by stressing the necessity of a choice. The debate applies only when the values are in conflict, and one value must be prioritized. Similarly, the Committee has also worded several resolutions with the preface "On balance," implying that the positions to be debated cannot be held to standards of absolute validity in every instance, but instead are questions of the truth of the general principles in their broadest application. Through its wording, NFL has clearly attempted to create as much fairness as possible in the burdens assigned to each side by curbing the possibility of balance negatives. If, somehow, an occasional resolution does not explicitly exclude the possibility of a balance case, coaches and judges should take the initiative to exclude such arguments from competition.

(Jason Baldwin was the most successful L/D debater on the National L/D circuit. Now a college student, he is a member of the NFL topic wording committee.)