

# EXTEMP COMMENTARY

by Bob Jones with assistance of Michael Fuller

The goal of every speaker and coach at the national speech tournament is to be on stage in a final round. And there is more than one route to a final round. Having had students reach that ultimate goal in both main and supplemental events, I know the opportunities are there.

To prepare for Extemp Commentary, look at: pre-tournament preparation, speech structure, and tournament realities.

In the weeks before the tournament, speaker and coach must work to be ready through a couple of avenues. First, because the Commentary event is a limited prep event, it is important to consider the files to be used at the tournament. Having a good basic extemp file is important, but most important is not to leave any of it at home. We have seen several speakers who were in Foreign Extemp, for instance, who had only their foreign extemp files. When they then dropped out of the main event, they came to Commentary unprepared with materials on domestic issues or people. It's important also to have specialized sources in the file. Michael made extensive use of Harper's Index and kept a special file of polling results he had collected. These livened up the speeches and provided good broadbased information. It is also important to pay attention to the announced topic areas so that any areas not within the realm of normal extemp files (i.e., sports figures) can be covered in special files.

A second pre-tournament concentration is on practice. It is helpful that Oregon has an event called Radio Commentary (an editorial presented as if on radio). But even with knowledge through this event, we took special care to watch professional newscasters like Peter Jennings and Dan Rather. Without resorting to mimicry, they provided models of real commentary. We also made sure to practice delivering the speech while seated. Michael noted that this was particularly important in understanding what to do with hands and facial expressions while in a delivery mode not common to most speakers. Videotaping is a particularly useful tool for analyzing speaking style.

Speech structure deserves special attention. There are many possible patterns for speeches, but we found five areas for special consideration:

1. Have a focused thesis. Topics are

as broad as possible in Commentary. A single word topic like "Clinton" must be narrowed to something do-able by the speaker and both understandable and significant to the judge.

2. Most of the time, try to be unbiased. Present both sides of an issue or as many aspects as comfortably fit in five minutes. This shows the speaker's depth of understanding and avoids taking a stand which might offend an audience.

3. If you are going to editorialize, make that known from the beginning. It helps the audience understand your position if they know what you're doing.

4. Establish a reporter's personae. Personal pronouns can be used, but it is often more professional to speak almost third person -- "it is this reporter's opinion..."

5. Appropriate humor is a plus. A little subtle sarcasm can go a long way.

Once you've prepared and practiced, there are some hints that are only learned through tournament experience. Prep is 20 minutes. It helps to know this ahead and be prepared for the reality. Also forget the quiet controlled environment of Extemp Prep. This is Commentary, and facilities and personnel don't allow the luxury of the main event. Michael noted that one thing which really helped him in his second year in Commentary was that he knew to get to his speaking room early. The ability to check out the speaking environs even a couple minutes ahead of time may have been the advantage needed to stay "UP" in the competition. Michael also says that the speakers who advance are the ones who stay professional. Some speakers, perhaps because of their view or their coaches view of supplemental events, slack off in Commentary. Dress and manner is always vital in the decisions of the judges.

In conclusion, there is one very important concept that can make the difference of a speaker getting into a final round. The event must be taken seriously. When I prepare students for nationals, we work as hard (or harder) on the supplemental events. There may be more than one route to a final round at nationals, but there is only one way to get there -- work for it.

*(Bob Jones, Canby Union HS (OR), co-chairs the NFL Extemp Topic Committee.)*

# COMMENTS ON COMMENTARY

by Bill Hicks

Upon receiving the request from the Rostrum to join with an extremely distinguished group of coaches to provide an article on COMMENTARY, I felt like the donkey that was entered in the Kentucky Derby because the owner felt the association would do him good.

Now to the significant differences between extemp and commentary. For commentary, you should practice sitting at a table. Sit up straight and work at developing eye contact without moving too much. The movement for transitions in your speech has been changed. Move slightly forward to stress an important point or to be more personal. Move back to sitting up straight as soon as you complete the idea. Hands comfortably folded on the table appears to be the most acceptable style.

I tell my students to imagine they are talking to a camera and to be conversational with only one person as if they are in someone's living room.

Every speech needs an introduction. The extemper usually has a large collection stored up for every suitable occasion. We also carry Simpson's Quotation book in our file box as an excellent source for material.

I try to get my students to personalize their experiences in relation to the topic, if at all possible. Their goal is to feel as if they are sitting in your living room across a coffee table and are talking with just you.

The body of the commentary should flow easily from background and historical information to the area of the speaker's comments. Editorialize for a minute or two with your comments, but try not to take any controversial position. You can't win if a judge is upset with your position. Try to give as much depth to the material and your thinking as possible.

Finally, you try to get a good position in the speaking order so your presentation will be remembered, so be memorable: wear clothes that contrast with the background where you are speaking. You do not want to appear as if you are a part of the stage or table.

Smile.

*(Bill Hicks is Executive Secretary of the Indiana High School Forensic Association and coaches at Brebuelf Prep, IN.)*