

PLEASE! DON'T ASK ME TO THINK!

by Marilee Dukes

The tournament was just huge--upwards of 100 LDers! I judged through six preliminary rounds of flighted competition, writing ballots in most of those 12 debates. We broke to double-octas. I had been lucky enough to have a couple of debaters who did well in the competition, so I had been actively coaching. (Perhaps my efforts in this capacity were a waste of energy, but at least I thought I was helping.) In the semi-final round, I was still in the back of the room with a ballot in front of me, and I was exhausted. At this point, the last thing I wanted to do was to think for the debaters who were about to stand in front of me. I wanted them to debate the issues clearly and then tell me why I should vote for them. Nobody did that! I had to sort out issues and weigh the arguments myself. Neither debater told me why I should vote for him/her. Both of them allowed a tired judge to "figure it out." I was in a position to vote on whatever I believed, to decide an important round (but when is a round not important) on the issues I thought were important. Sound familiar? Probably every coach has been in a similar situation. Those debaters were foolish enough to ask me to think instead of telling me why I should vote. Given the persuasive elements inherent in Lincoln Douglas debate one of the most important, yet most neglected, of the burdens of the debater comes in the final 30 - 45 seconds of the final speeches--weighing the round. It is smart debate to vocally write the ballot FOR the judge.

Frequently, in the heat

of covering the flow, the debater neglects the story that needs to be told. With any topic that is debatable, each side will win some issues. It becomes critical that the individual debater explain to the judge why the arguments that he is winning are more important than the arguments being won by the other debater. Simply covering the flow leaves room for judge intervention, for the judge to decide which arguments are more believable and more important. If the debater thinks he is winning the round, he needs to tell the judge why. Even if he does not think he is winning, s/he needs to search for that "true" argument that might be compelling enough to leave a lasting impression; certainly, there is very little chance of "pulling this one out" by simply stating argument and counter-argument. I have read an enormous number of ballots from very fine adjudica-

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tors who said something similar to this: "I kept waiting for you to focus on a reason for me to vote, but it never came" or "It was good to see a debater provide focus for the me. This made the round and the decision very clear." Even more important, a large number of Lincoln Douglas judges can be termed "lay" or are of the philosophy that this type of debate is persuasion oriented; thus, those last seconds of presenting a compelling reason for decision are fre-

quently critical.

Of course, the question at this point is obvious: Just how do I do this?

To begin with, the end of the debate should be anticipated before the debater ever leaves home. It is critical that a believable position be formulated. Any high school student should understand the concept of having a thesis; no composition in a sophomore English class will meet with approval if the student has not established a clear thesis. The debater needs to find a position, a thesis, that is the center of the cases s/he writes for the debate. As the debate progresses, every argument on both sides should, in some way, be related to that position. Then, when the time comes for weighing the issues at the end of the debate, the summary statement that becomes the RFD should relate to that original position. Of course, it is extremely important that, when formulating the position, the debater find an argument that is true and that most judges will want to believe. A "squirrely" position may win some rounds, but many judges will find it hard to buy in a close round. Why take the chance? It is also important that a portion of preparation time be left for formulating the closing statement. Obviously, this need be only a few seconds. It seems foolish, however, for a debater to stand up for a final speech without knowing what she wants the judge to think when the round is over. It would seem obvious that when the time for the last speech actually arrives, the debater would know to keep that final statement in mind

throughout the entire speech and relate the refutation of specific arguments to the positional statement. This way, the actual weighing will be easier, shorter, clearer, more relevant to the round, and more compelling. Some debaters seem to feel that the step that many of us call "crystallizing" is a substitute for weighing the round. Crystallizing, which is very important, focuses on the few issues that

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