

THE FIRST STEP

by Lois Annette C. Askew

When the speech specialists with the Birmingham City and Jefferson County Schools-- Julia Matson and Vic Vichtner-- recruited teachers and students for forensics programs in their schools, they encountered a problem: students of beginning programs disliked debating against the high powered teams.

Dr. Michael Janas, Samford debate coach, faced a similar problem. He sent his Samford debaters to orient a county school to policy debate. The Samford students instructed the students on the current policy topic and invited the high school debaters to attend the annual Samford University Debate Tournament. The debaters attended the tournament, hit three high powered teams, lost each round, and returned home, folded their debate materials, and said, "We can't face them again." The competition had been too overwhelming. The polarization continued between the highly prepared teams with summer workshops under their belt and the totally green, newly prepared teams.

Dr. Janas decided that a new type of debate would be necessary. One that would bring the county and city high schools into a debating situation that would be fresh, require a minimum of preparation, and assure them of a strong footing in an academic area that these students could handle. Sometimes Dr. Janas labels this debate the Birmingham -style debate. At other times, he more accurately calls it Parliamentary Debate. This forensics activity, newly created, springing from the thinking of the young Samford professor, involves three persons per team. This arrangement consists of a first affirmative, second affirmative, affir-

mative rebuttalist. The negative team has a first negative, second negative, and negative rebuttalist.

According to the prescribed rules, the function of the first affirmative and first negative is to present the cases. The second affirmative and second negative argue their positions, respectively, and attack the opponents' views. Then the affirmative and negative rebuttalists refute the argument of worth on the flow and prove their winning points.

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Another unusual quality of this parliamentary debate is that the times are short. Only six minutes is the limit for the first affirmative, first negative, second affirmative, and the second negative. The rebuttals are only four minutes each.

The topics for the debate have proved to be of interest to the students. The first one concerned the death penalty. The second resolution was that the programs supporting affirmative action should be abolished. Now the students are working on the de-escalation of the war on drugs by the United States Government. These are topics on which the students can find current information in a short period of time.

Before scheduling tournaments for the students, Dr. Janas and his assistant, Michael Jordan conducted three afternoon workshops for coaches. They reviewed the basics of re-

search, the philosophy behind debating, and the techniques of simple argumentation.

The response to the two tournaments that the students in the Birmingham area have attended is positive. On the first afternoon of a tournament held at Samford University, a coach of a policy debate team who had traveled with his team to many high powered tournaments, said, "This is the way a tournament ought to be, relaxed, calm, and free of hassle." Another coach stated, "This inspires the students to want to debate. Perhaps they will want to compete later on a much more competitive level." A student whose parents had objected to the long hours of the regular novice policy debate tournaments found the event fun and fulfilling. Even Dr. Janas, the founder of the Parliamentary Debate Circuit in the Birmingham area, wrote to the teachers, supervisors, and students that he believed this type of debate to be one of the most successful experiments in the nation. And the success now assures the Birmingham Area of two accomplishments: more students want to debate and more are wanting to participate in larger tournaments now that they have experienced the simplified debate format at the Parliamentary Debate Tournaments. As Michael Jordan, assistant coach at Samford University, says, "It [parliamentary debate] is a great first step for beginning coaches and debaters. The real focus is getting the teachers and the students so involved that will not be overwhelmed."

(Lois Askew coaches at Huffman, AL)