

ADVICE TO PLAYERS

by Tony Figliola

In an age when overpaid athletes deliver groin kicks to cameramen and send saliva spewing at low paid referees, we, in the forensic community, must insure that our competitive meetings are civil ones. When one student conducts him-/herself professionally and treats fellow performers respectfully, others will want to engage in similarly edifying behaviors because, quite simply, they really have a way of making everyone feel good about themselves and about our noble craft. With this in mind, I offer my "Advice to the Players".

1. En route to the tournament or at the affair, either by yourself or with your team, engage in vocal warm ups. Your vocal mechanisms are not unlike an athlete's body that needs to be stretched and conditioned prior to performance.

2. Check out your rooms before the round begins--note size, shape, arrangement, acoustics. Experiment and adapt PRIOR to the opening assembly.

3. If you are the next speaker, allow your judge to finish writing his/her ballot before you get up from your chair. Unobtrusively note when the judge is ready, then approach center stage.

4. Once you are in front of the room--in the SACRED SPACE be focused and ready to perform.

a. Act maturely before the round commences; don't arm wrestle the guy behind you, or tell annoying jokes.

b. Exude a quiet confidence as you get up from your chair.

c. Do not engage in what might detract from your concentration or the audience's estimation of your ability: do not take off your watch, fix your hair or clothing, remove change from your pocket; do not egregiously search for focal points; do

not fidget or show other such signs of anxiety.

d. Do not begin with cliches--"Are the judges ready?" Try to "sense this out" with an inquisitive look and a polite nod.

e. Do not blatantly bow head or body before you begin--there's no need to draw attention to the fact that you need to concentrate to start. After getting the nod from the judge, freeze in a neutral position for a second or two, then start teaser or intro.

5. Deliver intro sincerely, conversationally, passionately. Compose it with care, avoiding those hackneyed expressions: "All of us, at one time or another," and so on. Be personal and creative. Write in your own voice. There are different theories about the purpose of an introduction.

a. It should advance the argument--the moral/social/intellectual point--of the literature, justifying its importance/significance.

b. It should set up expectations that are then fulfilled in the selection. The result is listener satisfaction, because, if you performed the material correctly, you delivered what you promised.

c. It should be written in the tone of the selection.

d. It need only name title and author if the teaser self-explanatory. (Not the best choice.)

6. Dress conservatively, but stylishly. Look mature. Choose clothes that establish ethos and that subtly create mood. For example, do not wear a hot-pink mini when performing *Agnes of God*. Ump-teen years ago I judged a girl at a national invitational who wore just that--along with pink shoes. Nuns don't make a habit of dressing in this fashion.

7. Limit, if not elimi-

nate, all too noticeable jewelry and other such adornments. Door-knocker earrings are ill-advised.

8. Listen attentively to fellow contestants. Attend to nothing and no one but them. Don't read your script, recite your speech, do your algebra homework, put your head down, go to sleep, paint your nails, take off your shoes and socks, or play solitaire. To my befuddlement and consternation, I've seen competitors do these things in rounds. Rather, be supportive of others when they are performing.

9. Do not make boastful comments about your successes in the judge's hearing or to other contestants. At college nationals last year, a student's parents signed their son's name on the blackboard, and wrote next to it, in parenthesis, "He won this event at AFA Nationals last week." I kid you not.

10. Do not look at the judge writing while others are performing or while you are performing.

11. Focus only on your performance, on doing the best job you can. The minute you start thinking about (1) the first kid who was really excellent or (2) the judge who is writing an awful lot or (3) the fact that you drew first speaking position for the second time today, that minute your performance will be substandard--concentrate only on your work each round.

12. By the same token, never be concerned about "the competition" or about "beating a specific opponent." By worrying about others, you automatically give them power and drain yourself of the necessary energy and concentration that you need to do the best job you can. Throw yourself totally into your work; have a great time doing it. Results will accrue.

13. Do not dwell upon inadvertent or even inten-

tional distractions. If you get angry, you have just worsened your chances of turning in a solid performance. As well, forgive yourself if you make an error; forget about it, and continue.

14. Win and lose gracefully. Make no distasteful comments about judges (who did not advance you into finals) and/or contestants (who made finals).

15. During awards, politely applaud all winners. Exercise reserve when a member of your team receives an honor. When you receive a certificate or trophy, always smile and show appreciation, even if your placement is lower than you expected. And if you receive top honors, don't plop to your knees, bow to some deity, kiss your trophy, and tap dance off the stage. These antics made a boy quite unforgettable at a recent January competition.

16. Don't read your ballots at the tournament site. Examine them on the way home or at home/school. And as you do, try to understand and learn from the most insignificant of comments. Ask yourself: "How could I have 'won over' the