

Canadian National Debating Championships
Annual General Meeting
William Aberhart High School, Calgary, Alberta
Sunday April 13, 2008

1. Call to order & Attendance

Call to order at 10:01 am.

In attendance

Board of governors

*Martin Poirier, Alberta (Chair)
*Anne Thomas, Alberta (Co-Chair)
*Harold Kyte, Nova Scotia
*Josh Judah, Nova Scotia
**Linda Martin, Manitoba proxy for John Robinson
*Joseph Longo, Ontario proxy for Michael Muir
*Tracey Lee, British Columbia

Provincial representatives

*John Baty, British Columbia
Elisa Frank, Alberta
Angela Fraser, Alberta
**Lorelie DeRoose, Saskatchewan
Wendy James, Saskatchewan
Rhonda Smith, Manitoba
Jeff Hull, Manitoba
Prema Bursa, Manitoba
Hamish Gunthrie, Ontario
Jordan West-Prutt, Ontario
Kirsten Wyndham-West, Ontario
**Graham Phillips, Quebec
Jill Rollins, Quebec

Note: Each province has two votes – each star (*) represents one provincial vote. Each Governor has one vote in addition to any provincial votes they hold.

There were 20 votes attending the meeting.

2. Adoption of the Agenda

The following items were added to point 8:

- b. open adjudication
- c. bracketing
- d. judging
- e. representation

The agenda as amended was moved by Ann & Josh. Carried.

3. Adoption of minutes of last year General meeting

Linda & Ann moved adoption of the minutes of the 2007 General Meeting. Carried

4. By-law change

Martin & John move to change by-law 23 to read:

23. ...The remaining rounds shall be impromptu motions, including all break rounds, except for the final round where it is at the discretion of the convener to use the motion of the prepared round.

Discussion in favour cited allowing the host discretion and leeway to use the prepared motion as a tool to draw media interest to the Final, and to attempt to ensure a better round in front of media and dignitaries.

Discussion against touched on the repetition of debating the same topic more than once on the same time and the effect of judges' comments on the cases repeated at the Final.

Vote – 16 in favour. Carried.

5. Report on 2008 Championships

On behalf of Manitoba and all assembled delegates, Linda Martin thanked Martin Poirier and this organization committee for hosting the Championships. In particular, she thanked him for accommodating the dates of Passover.

Martin Poirier thanked everyone for attending.

Hamish Gunthrie spoke on behalf of Ontario, who enjoyed being here in the West and in Calgary. Ontario appreciates the work Martin's team and school did to put together the event, however Ontario has specific concerns about this event to be addressed later.

6. Bids for 2009 and beyond

2009 – Saskatchewan (Passover is April 7-17, 2009)

2010 – Victoria, BC

2011- Halifax, NS (hosting Jr. Nationals in 2009)

**note: a bid for 2012 was received from Montreal after the meeting concluded*

7. Report on 2008 North American Debate Championship

Linda reported on Manitoba's hosting plans. The North American Championships (British Parliamentary) will be from Thursday November 27 (travel day) to Sunday November 30 (travel). All teams are invited to stay for the Asper Cup, (Canadian National Debate Format) which is directly following the Championships. Competition days are Sunday November 30 and Monday December 1. The banquet will end by 7:30 for delegations wishing to fly home afterward.

The timing coincides with Manitoba's teachers' convention and will be a major showcase of debate in Manitoba. It also avoids Grey Cup weekend. Delegates will be accommodated in a hotel, however, billeting may be available if needed.

8. Varia

a. Conferral Judging

John & Joseph moved that the National Championships by-laws not allow pre-decision conferral judging.

Discussion in favour:

The purpose of judging is to render the most correct result. Some of the dangers of conferral judging are that "expert" judges can have undue influence on rookie judges. If you have one person persuading the rest to one point of view, then why have three judges? Even the perception

of influence can be a problem. Conferral works against multiple judges. A set of judges can become obsessed with one point and hang the outcome on that point to the exclusion of all other considerations. As a life skill, the judging standard should be a debater's ability to persuade the ordinary, average person, not a debate expert. It is an assumption that the "Debate after a debate" leads to better decision. This is not necessarily correct. The multiple several perceptions of three judges are important. Although an expert moderator is supposed to guide the discussion, that may not happen. Is this the time to teach the judges or provide the fairest judging to students?

Judges should be free of influence after the fact. Debaters need decisions that reflect what happened. If conferral process is a learning tool for rookie judges, then do not have conferral before decision is made, but have a discussion before comments are made. Have judges make decision, hand in ballot, then talk, then, select one judge to make the comments. Rookie judges can then learn by listening to comments, after ballots given to stats room.

Discussion against:

Conferral judging can help clarify own judging and help inexperienced judges with their decision to achieve the best result. Conferral judging is a useful tool when in a top room with experienced judges. Used correctly, conferral discussion are supposed to be about general principles, not directions by top judges. Each judge still gives their own score, and gives their own opinion. Much can be gained to train judges after the fact, rather than have them make a wrong-decision. Post-debate conference to help judges learn from each other. Conferral is a useful tool, especially considering the rushed nature of most briefings. Conferral does not necessarily lead to persuasion or pressure to conform to a decision. Conferral process can help eliminate rogue decisions by judges who skew the results.

Vote – 20 in favour. Carried.

b. Open Adjudication

Linda & Lorelie move to have closed adjudication at the National Championships

Discussion in favour:

Students lose motivation if they know they are losing. It is good if they are winning, but if they losing debaters begin to feel second rate and question what is the point. Motivation is wiped out. It is better to have hope through out and then find out when tournament is over. When the posted draw makes it obvious what the rankings are, teams at the bottom are demoralized by a crushing amount of lack of hope. It leads to cockiness by those with several wins. If everyone still thinks they have a chance, then the last rounds can still be good. Debaters will strive for continual improvement if they still feel they can win. Keeping hope alive is important, especially for regions trying to building programs.

If the purpose of revealing the outcome is to provide feedback to the debaters, then ballots with comments can be released afterwards. Comments can still be made with out revealing who won. If judges give comments right afterward, they may not always be constructive or in line with the briefings. Generally, debaters know what they did right and wrong.

Discussion against:

One advantage is for the judges to be able to explain the decision right away and their reasons. If debate teaches life-skills, then debaters need to learn to face adversity. It sends a wrong message that they only have to work hard if doing well. It is good for to debaters to hear they are not doing well so they then work to improve. The National Championships are not a place to be soft with debaters. They are here because this is a competitive, high level debate. This is a huge

positive to get the reasons for decisions. It is demoralizing not to know and it is important and helpful to hear what was wrong, and what to work on for next round.

Vote – 10 in favour & 10 against (Chair vote against – to keep status quo). Defeated.

There is no change to the by-laws and to announce or not is at discretion of the host.

c. Bracketing

It was pointed out that by-law 23 concerning debating each side of the prepared resolution was not followed. Martin apologized for the errors (not caught by the tabbing program) that occurred bracketing the second round.

If possible, a standard tabbing program should be used for all National Championships that ensures proper protections and bracketings occur.

Future hosts are reminded that they must ensure they comply with all the by-laws.

d. Judging

Hamish moves that there be at least two judges per room per round, and that if necessary, there is a firm and clear understanding that coaches be used to fill out the numbers.

No seconder. Motion not voted on.

Basically, debate is a judged activity. Judging is an imperfect method to decide a debate, and problem will never be solved. For some, they would rather have 1 experienced judge than several inexperienced ones. It was suggested that total points would have to be used rather than win-loss.

On the other hand, others felt that one judge can make bad decisions and jeopardize the outcome. It often appears judges do not read the rules or listen to the briefings. More judges with a broader range of experiences and backgrounds should make for more fair decisions. Tournaments will undoubtedly have rookie judges, but intelligent people will ask other judges about their impression of the debate and learn.

If three judges is a stipulation, then host are responsible for making it happen. It was asked, practically, what would happen if a host did not have enough judges? Would the tournament be cancelled? It was suggested that if finding quality judges in sufficient numbers was an issue, then the offer to host should not have been made.

Linda & Joseph move that the host make every effort to have a minimum 3 judges per room and if they can not, then draw from available experienced judges, including coaches in all rounds.

Vote – 20 in favour. Carried.

e. representation

Concerns were expressed that Alberta teams, and specifically William Aberhart teams were over-represented at the tournament.

It was clarified that all the William Aberhart teams were in fact the top teams selected at Provincials. One additional team was used to round out the draw.

There was discussion regarding capping the number of teams from both the host school and the host province.

It is convention to allow the hosts to double the size of their contingent. This is seen as a “carrot” to solicit help from local or host schools. It is an incentive to host and often used for networking. While building clubs is laudable, some sort of cap should be in place.

While the incentive argument is understandable, the down side is it appears unfair to all the other teams. Having so many students from one school conveys a bias and unfair advantage to those teams. Allowing the host to double a contingent unbalances representation from the rest of the country.

Concerns were raised that if the rules allow one school to overwhelm the draw, then the ability of other schools to participate threatens debate growth in regions and ultimately, programs across the country.

It was clarified that the underlying principles of the Nationals were to provide a merit-based National Championships, in contrast to the National Seminar, which emphasizes regional representation. The Championships are not specifically a tool to increase debate in a region or across the country. Individual members also adhere to regional representation at their Provincials and in selecting Junior Nationals teams.

Quality of teams and how they were qualified to come to the National Championships was questioned. Debaters must earn their way to nationals. Debate organizations in Canada are seen as a “confederation” of members allowed to select their very best delegates as they wish, and not part of a top down organization that imposes the same selection method on all its members.

By-law 12 allows the board discretion to allow additional teams. John for the Board and said that they have been listening and will discuss this issue at a future meeting.

9. Election of Board of governors

Anne called for nominations to fill the 7 positions the board.

- Lorelie DeRoose automatically on board as host
- Linda nominated by Josh, accepts
- John Baty nominated by Ann, accepts
- Josh Judah nominated by Ann, accepts
- Harold Kyte nominated by Ann, accepts
- John Robinson nominated by Linda, accepts
- Kirsten Wyndham-West nominated by Hamish, accepts
- *Martin Poirier nominated by John, declines*
- *Hamish Gunthrie nominated by Jordan, declines*

Nominations close. All are acclaimed as nominated.

10. Adjournment

Anne adjourned the meeting at 11:34 am