

DEBATE SURVEY RESULTS

by Glenda Ferguson

A special thanks to those of you who took the time to fill out and return the Debate Judging Survey. We were especially appreciative of those of you who took the time to write comments.

Let me give you some background as to why this survey was generated in the first place.

Every year at Nationals people complain about judging. As I am usually working in debate tab, I hear more debate complaints than anything else.

The Council, in considering these complaints, basically agreed that we can not and indeed SHOULD NOT, try to dictate to anyone how debate should be practiced. We represent a wide range of debate philosophies. However, we did believe that we could find some common ground and try to improve the quality of judging at Nationals. We can't really do a good job without your input.

Thus, the "survey". [71 surveys were returned]

These questions represented concerns or ideas that had been voiced by some NFL coaches many times and we wanted to get membership response.

I am going to discuss these questions out of order since some of them do not require lengthy responses.

#2 "Would you be in favor of a two-tier system in policy debate that would allow you to enter teams either in a slower or faster division at the Nationals?"

This question resulted in a resounding "No" from both camps for the same reasons.

The "national" debate coaches believed that Nationals was unique, this system would take away from this uniqueness, and they didn't want to be branded as "elitists" any more than usual.

The "regional" debate coach believed that Nationals was unique, this system would take away from that uniqueness and they didn't want to be branded as "slow" debate.

#7 "Should Lincoln Douglas decisions be given in the room after both flights have been completed beginning with round 7?"

The majority did want the results announced at the END of both flights to reduce the possibility of mistakes in posting and also be consistent with team debate. The Council voted to put this system in effect in Fayetteville.

#4 "Should judges who either coach or debate in college be allowed to judge at the National Tournament, even though s/he has not judged the current high school debate topic?"

99% of people responding said "yes".

#3 "Should all debate judges judging at the National Tournament be required to have judged at least 20 rounds of the current topic?"

99% responding agreed that a debate judge should have experience—either as debate coach or judge.

The system is set up so that only people who fill out the debate judging card are put into the debate judging pool. However, NFL can't run a tournament with-

out bodies. There are penalties for those people who do not take their judging responsibilities seriously, but it doesn't seem to matter. We can either increase those penalties or go to another system.

The Council did vote to only use judges who had a combination of 30 on numbers of rounds judged and/or years coached beginning with rounds 7 through 12. These rounds would still be assigned by the computer.

#1 "How many judges do you want in the rounds - 1, 2, or 3?"

The majority of responses favored keeping 3 judges in the round. Several favored two judges. Some people voting for 3 stated that while 3 judges were preferable, they would accept 2 if we were having trouble getting 3 *qualified* people.

The reasons for keeping 3: Debaters get a clear decision, easier to adjust to 3 judges; tradition.

The reason for 2: Easier to find judges who want to be there and who had some experience.

#5 "What is your idea of a "qualified" debate judge?"

Believe it or not there was a great deal of agreement on this issue from both camps. The majority of coaches agreed that the qualified judge is one who:

1. wants to be there
2. has knowledge of debate theory
3. will listen
4. has some debate judging experience
5. keeps an open mind
6. overcomes preconceived notions about who will win
7. realizes these are kids doing their best and does not punish them for going to debate institutes or not going to debate institutes.

#6 "What do you think can be done to encourage more debate judges to judge at Nationals?"

Not many answers here. Some suggested that we should pay more for the outrounds. No action was taken on that suggestion. During the Council discussion we heard a lot of war stories about how some judges were verbally attacked by the debaters and in some instances by debate coaches. People don't like to be put in uncomfortable situations. We would like to encourage rather than punish. However, if people don't start judging, we may not be able to keep the three-person panels.

So, this will be a start. I honestly believe that the Council as a whole would like to improve the judging at Nationals, but people have to meet judging responsibilities.

We are all participating in a tournament that represents a lot of different styles and ideas and trying to provide a positive educational experience for hard working young people.

(Council member Glenda Ferguson is chair of the NFL Debate Judge Committee.)