

The Fallacy of No-Decision Debates

BY PROFESSOR KARL E. MUNDT

(Professor Mundt is head of the Speech Department of Eastern State Teacher's College, Madison, South Dakota.. The article herewith is reprinted from the "National Forensic League Bulletin." Professor Mundt is the national vice president of the N.F.L.)



URING the past decade or so of intercollegiate and interscholastic debating, there has been much said and written about the so-called evils of decision debates with the resultant emphasis which is placed on the winning of debates. Some schools have practically discontinued decision debates; others have intermingled a large number of no-decision contests along with a few decision debates; while others have stayed by the decision debate in one form or another, using a variety of judging systems such as the expert judge, the audience decision where debates are held before neutral audiences, the traditional three-voter decision, and the so-called "jury decision" in which from six to twelve well-informed laymen act as the judges. From out of the experiences of the past decade of experimentation with the no-decision type of debate, it seems to me that certain lessons can be rather clearly drawn and, to me, these lessons point distinctly to the idea that there is a significant fallacy in no-decision debates.

Critics of decision debating in collège or in high school have stated that the motive of working toward a decision creates an artificial situation in debating wherein the emphasis is placed upon winning rather than upon effective debating. Personally, I am ready to emphatically deny this charge. To the contrary, I believe the no-decision debate is the contest (if it *can* be called a "contest") which is marked by artificiality. Where else in all the field of effective speech does a speaker ever give a speech which might be called a "no-decision" production. Effective speaking aims at conviction. To convince is to win a decision from the audience; to fail to convince is to lose the decision. Effective speaking in the world at large must win this decision (exemplified by the convictions established in the minds of the listeners). If the decision is lost—if the audience remains unconvinced of the sincerity, the validity, or the importance of a speaker's speech—effective speaking does not take place. Why, then, should we jeopardize such a vital training as competitive inter-school debating by attempting to put it apart from all other effective speaking and direct that it, alone, shall operate on the "no-decision" basis?

When I say that the no-decision debate is jeopardizing the very basis of effective training in debating, I mean exactly that. I have known of many schools in late years which have changed from the decision debate to the no-decision debate. The result? Schools in which speakers used to study dili-

gently to unearth the very last argument for or against a proposition and in which the speakers used to master their defects of delivery earnestly before entering a contest, now send debate teams out to represent them in which the arguments touch on the surface only and in which they violate every principle of effective speaking while upholding their side of the argument. Effective extempore speech, in many cases, has been replaced by carelessly prepared speeches which are literally read from cards or manuscript. I have heard debates which appeared more like an essay-reading contest than the animated interchange of arguments and the sincere attempts of refutation which are exemplified in a hotly contested debate in which both sides strive intently for a decision.

I would place this challenge before the critics of decision debating. For one season place your athletics on this artificial (as I see it) plane of a no-decision contest. Let us take basketball for an illustration. Remove the hoops from the bank board and allow the teams to pass the ball and throw it against the bank board with no possibility of making a basket. Give them no opportunity for registering a score; no chance to learn from an impartial source whether they have won or lost the contest. Will training and team work, and school spirit still be exemplified in the basketball contest? Ridiculous, you say? Precisely! And is it not equally impossible to assume that debaters will work as intently, will prepare themselves as carefully, and will debate as effectively when there is no chance to measure the results by some type of decision? In some schools no-decision debating, running contrary as it does to every human instinct of rivalry, has practically killed debating. In others, it has reduced debating to a pitiful spectacle of its former brilliance. If debating is to remain what it should be, the most effective avenue for training in effective, extemporaneous speech, we must retain the decision feature.

I care not which of the various types of judging is used; let each school provide the type of judging best suited to its environment and to the judging ability in its locality, above all let it not choose the pernicious course of no-decision debating to escape the occasional evil of a poorly given decision. Debaters, as athletes, must learn that sometimes the best side cannot win; debaters, as athletes, must learn to lose gracefully even when they can honestly feel that the best side did not win. Not always in life, either, does the reward go to the most meritorious. Debaters can better learn to face defeats smilingly in school than to be rudely awakened later in life that never again after leaving their debate team, are they confronted with a situation wherein their speech will be passively received by an audience with a "no-decision" attitude.

The National Forensic League very frankly recognizes the importance of decision debating. Three extra points are awarded for a winning debate over a no-decision contest. I think our constitutional provision is a wise one because the decision contest will nine times out of ten represent a much better contest than the no-decision event.

This year, in Eastern State Teachers' College where the writer is in charge of intercollegiate debating, we have taken our stand definitely against no-decision debating. In every letter we send out, we state frankly that we

much prefer to schedule a decision contest judged by any of the current judging systems. We have an inexperienced squad; we shall lose most of our debates. But more important than that, these college debaters have a definite goal for which to work in each contest; they can get a check on their accomplishments; they will learn that speaking is a practical art in which a man can know that he is being "judged" every time he gets to his feet in public. And if they learn that, this particular debate coach will be satisfied, even if we lose every single debate. "Debating without a decision and for the mere sake of debating" is like batting a tennis ball for the mere sake of the batting—there will be no flashes of excellency unless there is a man on the other side of the net batting the balls back and unless there is some way of determining which side is doing the better job of "batting."



The Annual Pi Kappa Delta Banquet



ANY Chapters will expect to make a real "affair" of their annual Pi Kappa Delta banquet. With some it will be an installation banquet at which time the new members will be particularly honored. Some Chapters will have had their installation banquets earlier and will close with a sort of good fellowship get-together event as a climax to the year's forensic associations.

The editor of THE FORENSIC has received already, programs of some chapters. These programs are nicely printed and include some very interesting features. The program of the Kansas Zeta of State Teachers' College includes, in addition to a very palatable menu, a very interesting program of toasts and other features, including music. The program also lists the active honorary and graduate members. We were interested in noticing that their graduate membership list has a total of 95. They have a present active membership of 25. Is there a chapter in the organization that can boast of a larger membership?

Please write and tell us of your annual banquet. It should make interesting reading for our first FORENSIC next year.

Perhaps some of you have not yet held your annual banquet, or whether you have or not, the following suggestions for toast masters and banquet speakers as given out some time ago at South Dakota State College may be of interest to you.

I. Questions every after-dinner speaker should ask himself:

1. Shall I say *something* or just talk?
2. What is my subject?
3. Shall I tell a story—"OR THE STORY"?
4. How much time is allotted me?

5. What will interest or amuse and at the same time be of value to this particular audience?
6. How many others are on the program?
7. How much can the audience stand?. How much *will* they stand—*from me*?

II. Remember that:

1. Of the 100,000,000 after-dinner speakers who have preceded you, all but eight have begun with, "when the toastmaster asked me to speak here tonight"—will you be one of the nine?
2. The path of least resistance is to use other people's material.
3. The easiest way to make an after-dinner speech, is to tell stories. This is also usually the least effective way.
4. You should have a beginning—or at least an ending.
5. You should avoid the shop-worn—the trite—if you expect what you say to outlive you.
6. You should never apologize. You may not need to say that you are "no orator as Brutus is," leave something to the imagination of the audience.
7. You should not start with Adam and come all the way along step by step—your audience probably knows as much about Adam as you do anyhow. Then, too, it is too great a distance to cover in five minutes, unless you are really in a hurry.
8. Amongst the bushel of nonsense chaff, there should be at least one grain of sense.
9. The toastmaster has honored you by asking you to be one number of his program—he expects you to make a contribution—what will you do to square yourself with him?
10. You may want to speak again sometime on a like occasion.

III. As a toastmaster, it is your business:

1. To introduce the speakers in such a way as to make them appear most at ease, and to best advantage before the audience.
2. To direct the group thought toward a proper emphasis of the theme of the program, if there is to be a general theme running through all the speeches.
3. To introduce the speakers primarily—not to appear on the program for "several addresses," one to be given before and after each speaker.
4. To leave a few stories for the speakers. Perhaps you may have a chance to tell some of the stories you know at some later date. Of course if you don't want this honor again, go on and tell all the stories you have heard, and can find.

IV. Profit by the success and failures of other speakers and toastmasters.

DON'TS FOR CLUB SPEAKERS

(The following "Don'ts" for club speakers was printed some time ago in the *General Federation News*. They contain some suggestions for those who will speak at banquets and for other occasions. Do you consider all of them important?)

Don't write your remarks on paper. Write them on stiff cards that won't crackle.

Don't begin with an apology. It does not disarm criticism; it awakens it.

Besides it is no compliment to the chairman who appointed you, to intimate that he made a mistake.

Don't mention shortness of the time allotted to you. That wastes it.

Don't say that you looked in the dictionary to find the exact meaning of your topic.

Don't criticize the program committee.

Don't refer to what you said on a former occasion or to what you are going to say after awhile. Keep the minds of your audience on the present moment.

Don't tell all you know. Your audience likes to think that it knows a little, too.

Look at your audience. If it is getting bored, you can shorten up accordingly.

Be logical. Be concise. Think a few thoughts of your own and present them simply, naturally and earnestly.

Don't try to talk with empty lungs. Fill them before each sentence.

Practice deep breathing beforehand. Learn how far a breath will take you.

Stress your consonants. Make the initial consonants clear. Make the finals clear. Make them all clear.

Mark the difference between "m" and "n", "b" and "p". Many people are a little deaf. Make it easy for them.

Space your words properly, or your audience will get sleepy. Always pause after a noun, because it is the subject of your sentence and tells what you are talking about. Never pause after a verb. A verb denotes action. Hurry up and tell what has happened.

Don't lose your place if you should happen to be applauded.

Take a few lessons from a good teacher of voice production.

Shades of Westfall and Tiffin

Professor Geo. R. R. Pflaum, our efficient convention chairman of the "big doings" for Wichita next year is not the only one thinking about Wichita and that event.

Professor Dana T. Burns of Baldwin-Wallace College, Berea, Ohio, and his Alpha chapter promise (or should I say threaten) to don the derby as their "official costume" to be again in evidence at next year's convention as it was last year at Tiffin.

Their action in this regard came as a response to former president-editor Westfall's suggestions that chapters adopt some such costume for the national convention.



BALDWIN-WALLACE DEBATERS

Dear Prof. McCarty:

You may recall that at the request of President Westfall, that chapters adopt some "costume" for the '28 convention, that Ohio Alpha "chose" the derby, which was in evidence at that convention. As the enclosure will show—we still have 'em. We have definite plans to the effect that they will be seen in Wichita in 1930. Fraternally,

Dana T. Burns,
Head of Department.

Perhaps some other chapters can find something equally distinctive.

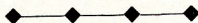
MisCellAny, et Coetera, and thE Like, — — And So Forth

GOING UP

When the pioneers made their early trips across the continent they felt they did a good day's work in travel, if by their crude methods of transportation—the ox-drawn or horse-drawn vehicle—they could cover fifteen miles a day.



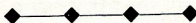
The modern pioneer goes one-tenth that distance into the air before he considers himself on the best airway level and fifteen miles—the day's travel for the early pioneer—is only a matter of seven minutes forward.



We had the experience of traveling by the modern pioneer method two years ago when as a member of the "Second A. E. F." we traveled from Paris to London, a distance of almost 300 miles, in less than three hours' time.



We agree with the St. Thomas men, whose pictures appear elsewhere in this issue, regarding the speed, interest, etc., of the air method of travel.



We wonder who and how many of the membership of Pi Kappa Delta will travel by air to Wichita to attend the national convention. Our convention chairman Pflaum promises a free ride after we get there. We believe it was to be free. We Scotch want it clear on that point. Tell us again, Mr. Pflaum.

The Convention Chairman's Page

by

GEORGE R. R. PFLAUM
Convention Chairman

National Pi Kappa Delta Homecoming Convention



Wichita, Kansas, 1930

The Kansas Regional Pi Kappa Delta Tournament has just completed its convention in Wichita and we find that Wichita University, as well as Wichita City, promises to be an excellent convention center. We were very royally entertained and this assures us of royal entertainment for the National Convention next year.



May I mention a few words about the good times we hope to have. First, we plan for trips through the airplane factories of Wichita and a trip over the city of Wichita in airplanes. Wichita University provided excellent facilities for a sight-seeing trip around the most attractive inland city that we have in Kansas. This will be a very pleasant and enjoyable trip. Then we will have several mixers at the Hotel Broadview, our hotel headquarters, with dinners on the Roof Garden and plenty of good music and entertainment for rest periods between tournament events. The University of Wichita does things up right when it comes to entertaining, so bring your glad rags and a spirit of full participation in the social gatherings. Your convention chairman believes that old saying of "all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy" so we are trying to introduce plenty of get-togethers and social activities. We will have time for some shows as well as some intellectual benefits. Please come prepared to have a good time and don't forget to bring your alumni members along.

THE FORENSIC

OF PI KAPPA DELTA

GEORGE McCARTY, Editor

GEORGE W. FINLEY, Business Manager

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Number 1

Do Forensics Get Into Your Editorial Columns?

We are pleased to note the number of college papers that give editorial space in review of the year in forensics.

The following concerning the province convention of the Province of the Lakes indicates that forensics at the State Normal College, of Ypsilanti, Michigan are receiving some attention in this form.

The Ability To Speak

What more tragic comment can be made of a person than: "He seems to know his 'stuff', but he can't put it across". Yet how often we hear this said. One can scarcely name an undertaking of consequence which during its development has not needed someone to explain it and interpret it to others. Evidences of this may be plainly seen in the history of the world. All great movements have had their fiery, or golden tongued orators. The voice of the convincing speaker draws a following to him like magic.

One real orator, trained and developed in the department of speech of any one school, and thereby fitted to "put across" a great idea for the benefit of mankind, would fully justify all speech departments for a decade.

One has only to read the speeches of the great orators and debaters in our own early political history to feel the power which these men exercised over the people of that period. And, although the spread of the newspaper service over the country and the influence of rapid means of communication may have robbed us of the "soap-box" orator, people still turn out in large throngs to hear lecturers on various subjects. Even in our rather blase present day, there is no estimating the

amount of influence which the masterful voice of Herbert Hoover had over the millions of radio listeners during the last political campaign.

Our educational system has almost since its beginning recognized the importance of the ability to speak and has made forensic work a part of the curriculum. Evidence that this accomplishment is of still more importance today is seen in the truly large amount of debating and oratorical activity which is carried on in the high schools, the colleges, and the universities of this country.

Michigan State Normal College, a pioneer in education, has long had a highly developed speech department. That its good work is still continuing is shown by the fine showing which the Ypsilanti contestants made recently in the "Province of the Lakes" conference, held here under the auspices of Pi Kappa Delta, the national forensic fraternity.

The instructors and coaches of that department deserve no small amount of praise for their work. The participants, who have given much of their time and effort, should receive our vote of thanks, for they have held high the standard of the Normal College in a contest in the "art of speaking."



Following are some editorials from various college papers.

Pi Kappa Delta

Sometimes the other fine activities of the campus are snowed under beneath the overwhelming interest in athletics. It may be suggested that the interest in athletics is not exactly to be termed "overwhelming," but in comparison with the interest exhibited in other campus activities, or rather the lack of it, certainly that word is descriptive.

One of these activities is debate, and in the same line of interest, Pi Kappa Delta, National Honorary Forensic Fraternity. Too many of the students on this campus are not even aware of its existence, and yet it has probably been of much value to the college as a publicity agent as any other one activity—with the usual exceptions of athletics and dramatics.

Some very fine things have been done in the last few years by Pi Kappa Delta, its members, and its aspirants. The *Exponent* wants to express its appreciation, and it hopes that other institutions on the campus may do likewise.—*The Exponent*, Baldwin-Wallace College, Berea, Ohio.

Paying Dividends

When the representatives of Park returned from the Pi Kappa Delta convention held at Des Moines, there was a warm welcome awaiting Arthur Todd for his exceptional work there. No welcome could be too warm for him, for it was only through persistent effort on his part that such an honor could come to Park.

Dr. F. W. Beers, his coach, says, "Arthur Todd's achievement at the

convention at Des Moines is an illustration of what can be accomplished when a man is willing to pay the price for achievement. Todd's oration was not gotten up in a week or a month. In producing it he studied, read widely, wrote, polished, condensed, rewrote, added here, threw out there, repolished, balanced and organized until he had done his one hundred per cent best in the writing.

"Then he worked on the delivery, the presentation, with the same persistence until he was prepared to do his absolute best there; and if he had done anything less, there would have been no Park victory at Des Moines, with those confident, experienced, outstanding, and seemingly unbeatable orators in the fray.

"To my mind, this is the most outstanding victory our college has achieved since Glenn Ginn won the Inter-state at Evanston two years ago. But it was no accident; it was earned by the right kind of persistent application and purposeful effort—the kind that gets results. I only wish more work of this character were being done by our prospective orators. Such investment of mental resources brings paying dividends."—*The Park Stylus*, Park College, Parkville, Missouri.

Brain Teams

Debating had always struck us as being a silly practice. To see a group of gawky youths one after another ascend the platform and recite a canned resume of all the available statistics on the efficacy of capital punishment, the virtues of government ownership, or the necessity of increased naval armament is not our idea of a valuable or an enjoyable experience. But debating apparently isn't the haphazard wind-jamming which it once was. At Detroit City the last two years have demonstrated that debating can be more than mere public speaking. In the first place careful schedule making established a definite system of competition and introduced into debating the same thrill students have always found in athletics. In the second place, the old-fashioned dispensers of hot air find themselves sadly out of luck when they come up against an aggregation of thinkers alive to all the manifold aspects of a subject. Such an aggregation is our present debating team. We may have no "brain team" to compete with Harvard or Dartmouth, in encounters similar to their recent classics, but our debating team, with its record of ten victories out of fourteen starts against well-known and worthy opponents this season, should satisfy us that in one field of brain work we are well represented.—*The Detroit Collegian*, College of the City of Detroit, Michigan.

Come Over Into Macedonia and HELP US!

The question has been raised with us, and perhaps you have heard a like question, as to why the FORENSIC does not carry advertising.

Recently one of our large universities wanted to place advertising with us. The editor passed on the inquiry to the National President, and to our National Secretary-Treasurer, Mr. Finley. Professor Finley, after investigating the matter, informed us as follows:

"I found that the magazine is entered under the Act of August 24, 1912, which Act forbids the carrying of general advertising. Under that Act we get a flat rate of postage. If we take on advertising we will have to change our classification and send the magazine out under the zone system. That would increase the postage considerably. I do not know just how much, but my impression is that it would be enough to take off all our profits unless we went in for rather extensive advertising. And so I'm doubtful about the advisability of branching out in this line. However, if you feel that it would be a wise move, we'll go into it still further and lay it before the council as a whole. I think such a change in policy should be submitted to the whole group before any definite action is taken."



PROVINCE GOVERNORS—ATTENTION!

Please notify National Secretary Finley if any change was made in your office at your recent Province Convention.



COACHES! STUDENTS!

Get ready to tell us your plans for attending the National at Wichita. The October FORENSIC will be interested in knowing of them.



"FINE" LIST—GET RIGHT!

Remember that Secretary Finley doesn't like to send you "fine" statements. Put someone in charge of chapter details to include among other duties the mailing of your college paper to the FORENSIC Editor.

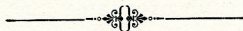
Schools under "fine" penalty **be sure** to send copies of your college paper to the Forensic Editor the remainder of the school year.

WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

When the editor asks for pictures to be used for The Forensic he asks for "unmounted photographs, bright finish, suitable for making cuts." About half of those received for our Province Convention number were not suitable for making cuts.

Also, some were not used because we could not use all, so we selected on basis of high winning from those suitable. Some were not used also because no explanation, either concerning the individual (name omitted in three cases) or the school represented. We could not read the names in a few cases. What would you do in such a case? There was not time after we heard from you to ask for explanation. Then, too, some were so unprompt (is there such a word?) that we weren't sure you wanted to "make" The Forensic.

It was impossible to use some of the information because there were conflicting reports from some schools in the same province as to their winnings. What would you do?



THANKS AGAIN

Pi Kappa Delta has attracted attention to itself repeatedly from outside sources because of its high purpose and effective performance.

The reaction of a well known professor of speech in one of our large universities may interest you. We quote him: "Allow me to express my commendation of the work that Pi Kappa Delta is doing in promoting effective speaking. I am very much interested in your organization. It seems to me that you have an opportunity of influencing the style of speaking among our smaller organizations. Certainly you are the most active in promoting speaking of any of our honorary fraternities."

OFFICIAL LETTER

Answer by May 10, 1929

Dear Friends:

You will note that I am calling for three other items of information in this letter. Be sure to let me have all of them. Fraternally yours,

Fraternally yours,

G. W. Finley,

National Secretary.

First Choice.....

.....

Second Choice.....

Number of active members in this chapter at the present time:

Number who expect to be in school next fall: Person to whom chapter mail should be sent next fall: .

(Name)

(Address)

Name of College.....

Signed