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Oxford and the Cross-Examination Tournament

by ROBERT P. NEWMAN*



John Peters is on the left, Patrick B. B. Mayhew on the right. They are pictured in the corridor surrounding Pitt's Commons Room. PITTSBURGH PRESS

In Hilary Term of 1947, when all England was gripped by a cold wave worse than any in living memory, I was continually embarrassed by the superior durability of my classmates on the Corpus Christi (Oxford) crew. With the Thames partially frozen over and the mercury at zero, they scarcely considered cancelling the regular afternoon rowing practice, and they reported in the usual shorts, light sweatshirt, and bare hands. Naturally,

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as the only American on the crew, I could not risk "chickening out" and disgracing my nation, much as I would have preferred crouching before my miserable fireplace. Since then it has never occurred to me that the British were anything but tough.

Some years later, I was surprised to discover that in scheduling tours of British debaters, the Institute of International Education was loath to allow them to debate more than once in any single day. The theory seemed to be that they were somewhat fragile and easily overworked.

Now the truth is that Englishmen are hard as nails, and quite capable of rigorous activity when necessity demands. Furthermore, the students of English collegiate institutions are not only well-grounded in history and politics, but remarkably fluent (at least the debaters) and flexible. There was no reason, as far as I could see, why a British team should not participate in at least two rounds of an American collegiate tournament, debating our question under our rules.

It seemed particularly appropriate, furthermore, to ask them to participate in a cross-examination tournament, where the format would allow a type of give-and-take similar to the heckling and interruptions which occur on the floor of the various union societies. Consequently, in the Spring of 1953, we started the long chain of negotiations which led to Oxford's appearance at the Pitt Sixth Annual Cross-Examination Tournament, December 11-12, 1953. Both Patrick B. B. Mayhew and John Peters had agreed to participate in June, well before our national topic was announced. The final selection of free trade was much to their liking; but they would probably have done equal justice to a domestic topic.

Since Oxford was to be a featured attraction, the schedule of the tournament as previously conducted was modified to fit them in. Instead of three rounds of debate on one day, we held five rounds, two on Friday evening. The privilege of meeting Oxford (who chose the Affirmative on free trade, naturally) was set up as a reward for the two highest-ranking Negative teams in the Tournament.

There were no decisions, except in the Oxford debates; judges were simply instructed to rate and rank the speakers, and rate the teams on a 1 to 7 scale. At the end of the fourth round, the ratings were totalled. The *second* highest-rated Negative team met Oxford in round five; the *first*-rated Negative team met Oxford in a public debate before an audience of 500. These honors went to Duquesne University and Case Institute of Technology, respectively. Pitt declared itself ineligible to meet Oxford, on the theory that a host team should not win its own tournament. This was fortunate, as a Pitt team tied with Duquesne.

For the fifth round Oxford debate, three coaches served as judges, giving a two-to-one

decision in favor of Oxford on simple "Which team did the better debating?" ballots. In the public debate, we had the following as judges: Holbert N. Carroll (PT '42), Pitt Assistant Professor of Political Science; Emery F. Bacon, Educational Director of the USW-CIO; and Harold J. Ruttenberg, President of the Star-drill-Keystone Co., all former Pitt debaters. They gave a unanimous verdict in favor of Oxford.

The final debate, between Oxford and Case Tech, was notable because of the contrasting ages and backgrounds of the opposing speakers. The Oxford boys were both 24, had served in the British Army, and were honors graduates in politics and law. The Case team, Richard Case and Jerry Duryee, were 19, and sophomores in electrical engineering. The younger age and lesser experience of the Americans were apparent on the stage; and though well-fortified with material on U.S. trade, they were clearly taken by Oxford.

Mayhew and Peters possessed the expected British polish. They had not, of course, prepared specifically for these debates; but any Englishman well-versed on current events would be equipped to discuss the topic intelligently, and they managed to produce enough references to acknowledged matters of fact to sell the audience.

The Oxford speakers did not, however, attempt to gloss over their lack of statistics on the question. In fact, in opening the debate for Oxford, Mr. Peters stated:

We are also grateful for a change in subjects. You see, this isn't one of our subjects, and this is our—sort of—first experience debating this particular thing, though I think we have debated it once before. . . . But we don't usually speak about this, and so as far as statistics and what-not are concerned, we approach it with vacant minds, which is sometimes very useful because a great deal of principle may emerge, and I hope it does.

Carrying through this unique position, the following exchanges occurred in cross-examination:

Duryee: Well, now, coming from England, perhaps you can acquaint me with some of the English tariffs. I was wondering . . .

Peters (interrupting): Very unlikely.

Duryee: What?

Peters: Very unlikely. (Laughter)

* * * *

Duryee: You believe that the American

manufacturer is one of the most subsidized individuals in the world?

Peters: Well, not *the* most, but he gets quite close to it.

Duryee: What's the comparison between the subsidy paid to American coal miners and that to English? I mean, to the American coal manufacturer and that of the English?

Peters: I have not the *faintest* idea. (Laughter and applause)

The British profession of statistical ignorance, however, did not prevent them from dealing successfully with such factual matters as U.S. foreign aid, the ban on imports of Comet airliners, Senator McCarthy and his position on Allied trade with Red China, the market for English sport cars, etc. If statistics were lacking, illustrations and specific instances were present in abundance.

One of the American debaters, upon hearing the favorable audience reaction to Peters' statements in the exchanges given above, muttered, "He wouldn't get away with that without the British accent."

But though the Oxford speakers were no walking almanacs, they were certainly not naive about the subject, and I doubt that their success depended solely upon their accents.

A great deal of their audience appeal, of course, came from their facile use of humor. This was not the canned variety, but was flexible and spontaneous. Consider the following:

Peters: Now you say that there is need to protect industries that are needed in wartime?

Case: That is correct.

Peters: And you—in the end you said that almost any industry is needed in wartime?

Case: I didn't say that. Did I?

Peters: Well, you—you did say that industry must be as diversified as possible, and that there must be as many industries as possible.

Case: Well, for instance bubble gum and Scotch Whisky would not be necessary for a war effort . . .

Peters (interrupting): And I can assure you that we would look with extreme displeasure upon American production of Scotch Whisky. (Much laughter)

The major features of the Tournament seemed successful enough to warrant their repetition this year, on December 10-11, when we will hold the Seventh Annual event. Anticipating that Oxford would not again be available, we scheduled Yale in the featured

spot, as a team of some prowess not usually appearing in the (Eastern!) Midwest. When we heard unexpectedly that Oxford could again be with us, we simply added them to the schedule: the top-ranking Negative team this year will meet Oxford in the fifth round, and the top-ranking Affirmative will meet Yale. In the public debate, Oxford and Yale will oppose.

Needless to say, this year's Oxford team, Derek Bloom and Peter Tapsell, were pleased with the Communist China question, and readily consented to participate. As last year, a registration fee will be charged to partially defray the heavy costs of scheduling two featured teams. What this amounts to is that competing schools (limited to the 30 responding first to our invitation) will pay for the chance to earn a debate against Oxford or Yale. We will also add a trophy this year, but the main reward will still be opposing a featured team.

Special Pitt medals will be given the five highest-rated speakers in the Tournament.

In addition to the unique reward aspects of the Tournament, there are two features which we think make a significant contribution to debating and which we intend to emphasize: the non-decision judging, and cross-exam style.

There can no longer be doubt that quality ratings produce a more valid criterion of excellence in a tournament situation than do wins and losses, and I personally shudder at the tenacity of the win-loss system in effect at most events. The extra statistical work of tabulating ratings is not overly burdensome, and we find the rating system highly satisfactory. We do know certain coaches who translate the ratings given their teams into wins and losses, but even they are stymied by the ties. There is some agitation for decisions, but we intend to resist it.

Nor do we intend to scuttle cross-examination for orthodox style. If debaters do tend to become stereotyped, and if tournaments tend to accelerate this process, then surely there is a need for a format requiring flexibility and encouraging spontaneity. There may be canned questions, and sometimes even answers that are rigid and over-prepared; but one good examiner can "bust up the pattern" and let in a draught of fresh air.

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Speech Training Helps Preaching

by CECIL H. JONES (OWU '34)*

My college training in speech has been invaluable to me in my profession as a minister. I can best summarize its help as follows:

1. The Importance of Good Material

It is not fair to say that speech training is solely a "technique" course. My teachers always stressed the need for good material, and we were encouraged to read widely in both classical and modern literature. The study we made of some of the world's great orations was especially stimulating. As a minister, one of my constant tasks is the preparation of sermons, speeches, etc. I am thankful that I know how to look for and find material that I can use.

2. Good Organization of Material

Actually when one comes to the final preparation of a speech upon which he has spent time and thought, he usually has more material than he can ever hope to present. Cutting and selection of material are of paramount importance. Speech training has prepared me for this task.

3. Effective Delivery

It goes without saying that a speaker must get his material across. Speech training has helped me in the care and development of the voice, and in the formation of good speech habits.

4. Logical Thinking—Especially on One's Feet

I think this has been the most important result of my own speech training. I had considerable work in debate, and this was an excellent exercise in quick, logical thinking.

Industrial Relations

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out question the best preparation for the conference table as well as the courtroom.

The field of industrial relations—the developing of techniques for improving labor-management relations—offers one of the greatest challenges today to college graduates. In no field of human endeavor does training in public speaking pay greater dividends. The

man who can stand on his feet before an audience of laboring men or of management personnel and present a point of view effectively is marked for success in the field. Collective bargaining between labor and management is the newest field of forensic activity. Training in public speaking can make a profound contribution to both sides of the bargaining table. Without such training, predicated upon effective presentation of the truth, the field of labor-management relations will be dominated by demagogues and charlatans rather than by men of good will.

Valuable as training in public speaking is as preparation for one's profession or vocation, it is equally valuable in one's community life. The individual who can present his position, whether before a large group or to only one person, in an effective and convincing manner is a leader in his community.

Cross-Examination

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One school, last year, replied to our invitation with the statement that they would like to attend, but unfortunately they debated the orthodox style only. We are convinced that the loss is theirs, and not ours. Fortunately enough schools feel otherwise to provide us with good competition despite the unfamiliarity and difficulty of the medium.

Perhaps the unwillingness to lay themselves open to embarrassing questions is partly responsible for the fact that debaters are not avidly sought to appear on public platforms. We at Pitt are convinced that orthodox style would never have kept awake the 28,000 high schoolers who were in our audiences last year; time and time again it was a sharp exchange in cross-examination that brought listeners to the edges of their chairs. Our tournament is a major training ground for audience appearances.

The Pitt Cross-Exam, then, incorporates three ideas which deviate from standard practice, and on which its uniqueness depends: cross-examination technique, measurement of proficiency by judges' ratings, and a reward system with meeting a distinguished opponent at its apex. The value of the tournament is undoubtedly increased by the participation of a British team; but the basic structure has its own purposes and values.

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