

TOP TEN DEBATE SCHOOLS OF THE CENTURY

by James M. Copeland

The Nation's top debate school of the 20th Century is Glenbrook-North (IL). Since the first national tournament in 1931, North has won the Debate Championship four times: 1974 (Steven Davis, coach), 1986 (Jeffrey Wortman, coach) and 1997 and 1999 (Ted Belch, coach). North finished second in 1996 (Ted Belch, coach) and 1980 (Pam Schultz-Takona, coach).

Using the number of final round appearances as a standard, the second best debate school of all time is Seminole, (OK) coached by the legendary H. B. Mitchell: first in 1956, 1958, and 1959 and second in 1938, 1951, and 1955.

Seminole appeared in four finals in five years (1955-1959) and Glenbrook-North has made the stage three times in four years (1996-1999), but may add to their string this year.

Third is Oklahoma City - Classen coached to championships by Hall of Famer C. E. "Pop" Grady in 1937, 1939, and 1941 and another in 1951 coached by Gerald Kidd.

Tied for Fourth is Toledo-Whitmer (OH), coached by NFL's most successful woman debate coach, Esther Kalmbach. Whitmer won back to back in 1971 and 1972 and was second in 1966. Also fourth is Houston - Bellaire (TX), winner in 1968 (Hall of Famer Bill Henderson, coach) and 1979 (Hall of Fame coach David Johnson at the helm). Bellaire also lost the final round in 1984 with Johnson coaching.

Sixth is shared by Elgin (IL), whose unsung coach R. S. Cartwright led Elgin to the title in 1938 and second in 1934 and 1937, and The St. Mark's School of Texas, coached by NDCA founder David Baker, first in 1990 and second in 1987 and 1992.

Also sixth is Miami Beach (FL) HS. Beach appeared in three final rounds, winning in 1954, Margaret Roberge (Sprinkle), coach and losing in 1964, Ernie Beresh, coach and 1975, Ralph Carey, coach.

Tied for ninth is Greenhill (TX) and Westminster School of Atlanta (GA). Both won twice: Greenhill in 1996 and 1998 (coached by Alex Pritchard and Aaron Timmons); Westminster in 1988 and 1991 (coached by Eric Brannan). Greenhill also added an LD title and placed an LD runnerup (coached by Timmons).

Special recognition must go to Vestavia Hills, coached by Hall of Fame doyen Marilee Dukes. The Hill Folk won debate in 1992 and LD in 1994 and 1998. Vestavia, Regis (NY) and Greenhill have won both debate and LD titles.

Near the top ten are Louisville (OH), Edmond (OK), Bristow (OK) and San Antonio-Lee (TX). Each split in two final rounds each, one win and one loss.

Honorable mention is awarded to Mullen (CO), coached by Hall of Fame member Frank Sferra, which lost in two finals 1968 and 1971; Topeka (KS), which lost in both 1931 and 1989 and to Milwaukee-Marquette (WI), coached by James Copeland. Marquette was runnerup in 1971, and the only school to have two teams in the semifinals the same year, 1974; both teams lost.

Unlike the National Catholic Grand Debate final round and the Tournament of Champions final round both closed out by Marquette, the NFL Debate final round has never been closed out and only in 1974 did Marquette have a chance. Bill and Cat Bennett at St. Michael's (NM) closed out LD finals in 1986.

Beside Seminole, (1958,1959) and Toledo Whitmer, (1971, 1972) no other

schools have won back to back national debate titles. But Bristow (OK) won in 1940 after a loss in 1939, Elgin (IL) lost in 1937 but won in 1938 and Seminole won in 1956 after losing in 1955. Glenbrook-North lost in 1996 but won in 1997.

An oddity is Classen's four titles, coming in staircase years, 1937, 1939, 1941. After the 1941 tournament the war years intervened so no national tournaments were held. After the war the Principal's Association banned debate at nationals from 1946 to 1950 ("too competitive"). When debate was restored, Classen won again in 1951!

Only two students have captured two national debate titles. Eugene Edwards and William J. Holloway of Classen won as callow sophomores in 1939 and again as seniors in 1941- but both years with two other teammates as part of a 4-person team. Three other students appeared in two final rounds, Cyclone Covey (what a kewl name) of Bristow in 1939 and 1940 and Doris Ollman and John Amott from Elgin (IL) who lost the finals in 1937 and won in 1938, but in 1937 were part of a three person team.

Only one person has both won the nationals in debate and later coached the national debate championship team. Jeffrey Wortman won in 1981 at Glenbrook-South (IL) and coached the winner in 1986 at Glenbrook-North.

There are many standards to measure the excellence of a debate program. If using a *competitive* standard, these schools which appeared in several NFL national tournament final rounds are clearly the very best in the 20th Century.

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