

# IDEA

by

# Donus Roberts

The NFL office estimates that in 1999-2000 approximately 40,000 United States high school students participated in debate, either policy or ID. Competitive high school debate in the United States has existed for about 100 years; the National Forensic League entered the scene 76 years ago. In the United States we are proud to model debate as an educational and public policy method to enhance democracy and to empower its citizens.

Since 1994 another debate league has emerged in 33 countries with several more waiting in the wings. Its name is IDEA, International Debate Education Association. This organization began in Eastern and Central Europe but is now expanding to this hemisphere and Asia. Last year approximately 60,000 high school students debated in these 33 countries, a startling number since seven years ago there were no high school debaters in these countries, most of which were just entering the post communist era.

Last summer I represented the National Forensic League in Europe at two major functions sponsored by IDEA, the International University Debate Tourney in parliamentary debate held at Hradec

Kralove in the Czech Republic and the 6th IDEA debate camp held in Ustron, Poland where students and teachers from 36 countries gathered. This article is largely a story of what I learned, what I reported back to NFL's Executive Council.

There is a great world out there, thousands of students learning to debate in countries whose recent traditions have excluded free speech.

What I noticed most is the extraordinary enthusiasm for debate. Unlike the United States, the richest nation in the world, most of the countries that comprise IDEA are among the poorest in the world. There is little access to libraries, few families can afford magazines, few schools can afford computers, and schools have little revenue available. Yet debate participation has doubled every two years; teachers, whose pay is menial or nonexistent, are more abundant than in the United States; former students line up to judge for expenses, and community members attend in service to learn how to judge or assist programs in other ways. One debate coach from Moldova, formerly part of the Soviet Union, whose teaching salary is \$25 a month, expressed the enthusiasm I found throughout the countries. She said, "We are very poor, we have no

clean water, we have electricity three or four hours a day, sometimes not at all, but we will make it, we are doing better, we are free."

Why did debate explode in all of these countries so suddenly? Certainly it would not have been possible without the decline of communism and the evolution toward democratic systems. These political changes have been greatly accelerated by the Open Society Institute, a brainchild of George Soros, an Hungarian-born, United States entrepreneur and philanthropist, who provided seed money to start debate programs. Each country must find a way to support debate after five years. This has been difficult but up to now possible. Debate clubs in most countries have organized into NGO's, non-governmental organizations, which are eligible for grants from countries, organizations and corporations. Developing businesses and corporations in the countries have also stepped forward to aid debate clubs. Finally, there are the fund raisers on local level, such efforts as bake sales, and rummage sales, but this is difficult in countries with little money.

The national debate programs, associations and other organizations and individuals that support debate, constitute the fam-

ily of IDEA. The organization has allied itself with many other organizations, including the Civic Education Project, the English Speaking Union, the International Reading Association and Street Law, Inc. Since 1994 IDEA has introduced debate to secondary schools and universities throughout Central

advocacies, Popper was a committed to the 'Open Society,' and he was an implacable critic of totalitarianism in all of its forms. Karl Popper was born in Vienna in 1902 and died in 1994, the very year that IDEA commenced. Popper taught in universities around the world. His book that

IDEA debate camp held in the beautiful mountains of southwestern Poland, located near the small city of Ustron. Each country sends three high school students plus several coaches, judges and national directors. The topic for debate is announced in advance and each

### Format of a Karl Popper Debate

Speech	Speaker (s)	Time
Affirmative Constructive	A1	6 minutes
First Negative CX	N3 & A1	3 minutes
Negative Constructive	N1	6 minutes
First Affirmative CX	A3 & N1	3 minutes
First Affirmative Rebuttal	A2	5 minutes
Second Negative CX	N1 & A2	3 minutes
First Negative Rebuttal	N2	5 minutes
Second Affirmative CX	A1 & N2	3 minutes
Second Affirmative Rebuttal	A3	5 minutes
Second Negative Rebuttal	N3	5 minutes

### Both Sides Have 8 Minutes of Preparation Time

and Eastern Europe, the Former Soviet Union, Central Asia and Haiti and continues to expand throughout the world.

At this point IDEA emphasizes only debate, but expansion to other events such as extemporaneous speaking, oratory, oral interp and student congress will likely follow. IDEA debate follows the Karl Popper debate format. Each team has three persons, which is a format developed specifically to encourage teamwork and cooperation.

IDEA schools all adhere to one of Karl Popper's famous quotations for their motto. "I may be wrong and you may be right, and by an effort, we may get nearer to the truth." Today Karl Popper is regarded as one of the greatest, if not the greatest, philosopher of science of this century. Among his strongest

inspired IDEA is entitled, "*The Open Society and Its Enemies*."

One of the most fascinating aspects of IDEA is that it is the umbrella for both high school and university debate. Thus European universities have thousands of debaters, many more than the United States. Last summer I attended the finals of one of the two university tournaments, this one held in Hradec Kralove in the Czech Republic. Ironically, an American team that learned debate in the U. S. Urban Debate League, won the tournament. The tournament employed the British parliamentary system, although university debaters during the year use more than one format, including the U. S. policy model.

My learning about IDEA and Karl Popper Debate increased as I attended the sixth

team is expected to be prepared to debate upon arrival. The topic for the camp was "Should Economic Development be Valued Above Protection of the Environment?" They debate each other as national teams in a powermatched tournament. At the end of the first day a national tourney winner is announced. That is the first and only emphasis upon nations. After the first day the students are placed in teams, three nations involved. Unlike American camps, students with diverse abilities are placed on the same team. Like American camps the students go to various classes on the fundamentals of debate. Each team has a mentor. Near the end of the twelve day camp, another tournament is held among all of the multi-nation teams. A final winner is celebrated, but the unity

of nations is the ultimate winner.

Each day at the camp begins with breakfast at 7:00 a.m. Official activities end with dinner at 6:30. Evenings are largely self choice, although some group activities are organized by the camp, such as a display of country culture, a mystery party, movie night and a dance. One day was devoted entirely to a fieldtrip to the great Polish city of Krakow, located 90 kilometers from the camp; another afternoon featured a trip to Auschwitz, Birkenau and the Memorial Museum, located 50 kilometers from the camp.

Each student and teacher at the camp is expected to have a fundamental ability to communicate in English. All debates and classes at the camp are conducted in English. When the students return to their home country, they will, of course, debate in their native language. Tournaments within nations are usually conducted in the national language. IDEA, however, requires that each country conduct one tournament in English. Because countries are so close to each other, the number of tournaments in English is increasing. More and more students are learning English in school, so the number of tournaments in English will likely increase.

IDEA debate stresses logical argument, use of evidence and good communication skills. The topics for debate are yes/no questions, such as *Is Human Engineering Moral?* Neither the affirmative nor the negative gives a plan. The format is somewhere in-between the American policy approach and LD approach.

When IDEA began, it was

very dependent upon outside human resources because debate had no tradition in Central and Eastern Europe. Each year debate in IDEA nations becomes more dependent upon indigenous resources. This year only two U. S. teachers had major teaching assignments: Ken Broda-Bahn of Towson University and Lydia Esslinger of Syosett High School, New York.

IDEA is organized somewhat like the National Forensic League, with a director and a board of seven directors (like the NFL) and a general assembly (unlike the NFL). IDEA's director is Noel Selegzi, still an active NFL coach at Hunter College High School. The President of IDEA through 2001 is Marcin Zaleski, coach of Poland's first debate team. During the first two days of each summer camp, the board of directors meet with the general assembly, one adult, usually a teacher, from each member IDEA nation. This year the heart of the agenda centered on the legalities to make IDEA itself a large NGO.

Within nations, debate is organized into clubs, whereas in the U. S. debate is organized into NFL chapters. Given that the nations of IDEA are emerging democracies, it is logical to organize into clubs. Clubs serve the broader school community. Parents, teachers and community members are necessary as judges, fund-raisers and volunteers for the clubs. The clubs sponsor community events and work to facilitate the democratic exchange of ideas throughout their community. The clubs are as inclusive as possible, serving students of differing ages,

grades and abilities. Hungary has a younger student debate segment similar to the junior NFL. A club may include several schools or a large school with many debaters could have two.

The IDEA member nation with the largest number of debaters is Russia with approximately 6,500 high school debaters and 1,200 university debaters in 1999-2000. Romania reported 5,000 high school debaters, which is amazing given the size of the country. Poland and The Ukraine each have about 3,000 high school debaters. The tiny country of Moldova has 2,500 high school debaters and 200 university debaters. Mongolia has 2,500 high school debaters; *even* Haiti, whose poverty is overwhelming, has 200 high school debaters after one year. The most exciting fact is that the numbers from each country are on the increase.

Many of the nations are developing methods of communication with each other, which will increase with the availability of the internet. Other associations are developing newsletters. Everyone agrees that the Slovak Republic's Debate Association has a jump start on everyone else. They have their own logo, journal and color photography in the articles. They also sell merchandise such as "T" shirts and mugs. Much information on IDEA can be found at its website: [www.idebate.org](http://www.idebate.org).

One of my major objectives in my time with IDEA this summer was to start a "sister school" program. I worked in cooperation with IDEA's board of directors and two subcommittees. The final result follows this article. Both the IDEA directors

and the NFL council believe we have much to learn from each other. The first learning will be a world geography lesson for U. S. debaters, followed by a U. S. state geography lesson for IDEA debaters.

The objective of the sister schools is not international competition, although that may come in the future. It is to shrink the world, to give them and us a stake in the great changes that have occurred and will occur. It will be important in the sister school concept that all communication be positive, that any remnants of the "Ugly American" be buried deep.

During my trip to Europe, I was very encouraged that the countries of IDEA want the U. S. to communicate with them, to share our rich debate legacy and accompanying knowledge. It is flattering and a bit daunting to have debate expand across so much of the world. Before or after winning the NFL district--or before or after qualifying for TOC--tune into the new debate scene. It is a much better alternative than the sound of guns which has been the argument settler of choice in many IDEA nations. The winds of change are blowing; the United States and IDEA have much to share and learn from each other.

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