

DOWN AND OUT IN FORENSICS TOWN

by
Tim S. McGlasson
Golden West High
School
Visalia, CA

It is the Y2k and I have hit the wall. After 18 years of coaching Forensics and Debate, I'm hanging up my NFL Membership and Degrees....this is The End. I've had enough.

The Cause: Burnout.

The Reason: A yearly schedule of family obligation-abuse and infernal marathon-like tournament woe in the name of scholastic competition.

The Standard: Holidays and weekends are blurred visions enroute to an early grave or a messy divorce settlement.

Of all the unnecessary Pain I have had to endure throughout my life, Forensics contains the most in superfluous suffering. I faintly resemble my formerly enthusiastic young self who came into this profession with wide eyed anticipation of each new season of competition. My thirst for knowledge has been usurped by yet another tearful good-bye from my son and daughter and a view from my spouse's jaundiced eye. My Forensics Widow wife is left, yet again, to provide the sole parental support for our two, beautiful young ones. Unfairly, I wive as I drive off to yet another tournament only to return long after dark and long after my wife has tucked them in. Another lost weekend. Another missed opportunity.

Meanwhile, as I make that final early AM phone call to one more overslept debater or forgetful Interper, I herd my Team onto the bus or van to drive the hour long journey to the Tournament site. There, I am greeted by several other coaches whose families miss them, and the younger and most single coaches without the heartache of family time lost. I look at them and wonder, "Do they feel the same as I? Do the coaches sans all things kindred cared or even understand the sacrifice? Quickly, my mind is jolted from the constant self loathing and guilt as I stumble into the TAB room. Deadlines, angry Forensic Directors, hag-

gard Tournament Hosts, clueless school administrators and a varitable plethora of TWO judges asking where to go and what school I do if my Billy needs his medicine during the Out Rounds? Confusion reigns supreme and rampant irresponsibility leads the march.

Round 1. My Pain has been replaced by frustration as I work out yet another DROP from the event I'm running. LONG past due, for the judges who aren't there.

Round 2. The morning judges are dropping like flies as the thoroughly panicked Tournament Host looks to the coaches to judge, again, and bail his/her butt out. And the jockeying for position of competitors continues behind the scenes in another politically inspired effort to gain advantage over a competing squad.

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Round 3.01. The JV/Novice Fourth Round has been canceled and the three remaining judges are begged to stick around long enough to get the Varsity competition out. This now consists of tired and bored kids completely disgusted and miffed by the inability of the adults to actually run a smooth tournament.

Round 3.02. In a heated debate, the more rabid coaches, generally the family-less ones, complain loudly to the Tournament Host about the audacity of some to wish the tournament declared: Sine die. After all, it's only 8:35 PM and we have ALL Sunday to sleep.

By 10 PM, the headlights of our bus

FINALLY reach the walls of our high school and the incessant Wait for less than circumpect parents begins. And I wait and wait. One car comes then two. A couple phone calls more and the last parent staggers in to claim his/her child. The day is finally and mercifully....almost over.

As I grope through the darkened halls of my school lugging the Extemp boxes or debate evidence books, left shoes, blankets, favorite pens, pillows, hotel souvenirs and fit the key into my classroom door, the Pain returns. Sometimes, as I close the door and make my way back to the parking lot...I weep. And for the last time this season, as I turned the key in the ignition, I wondered what my son looked like when he was just a baby.