

Controversy



NFL'S NEW DEBATE EVENT



by
Donus Roberts

NFL's New Debate Division

At the fall Executive Council meeting a new debate event was established for a one year trial. Each district may send its winning team to the 2003 Atlanta Nationals.

The new event is tentatively called **CONTROVERSY**.

Why is NFL Considering a New Debate Division?

The NFL began as a debate organization with extemp, oratory and interp added in that order. NFL sponsors three interp events, three public address events (two extemps and oratory) and two debate events, policy and LD. Of the approximate 1700 charter NFL schools in our organization, about 600 do policy debate, about 1250 do LD debate and approximately 1500 do some mix of individual events.

NFL's current growth is entirely in individual events. LD is growing marginally. Policy debate is falling precipitously. The net result is an organization on a plateau. Some years memberships are up 1%, some years down 1%. That something will change in the immediate future to improve our lot seems rose-colored thinking.

Financially NFL has to grow to pay the bills. We have two ways to finance the core NFL: raise membership/chapter dues or grow the organization. Most of the grants to NFL are targeted. Less than 5% of the grant money can be used to operate the league. To stay even NFL needs to increase revenue from memberships, chapter dues and merchandise sales by 5% a year.

And NFL has no event to market to the media, whether the media is CNN, CSPAN, cable access TV, service clubs or parents. Policy debate and LD debate have become specialized, filled with code-words that ordinary people do not understand on topics people don't wish to hear. Debaters often talk beyond the speed limit. Extemp has also become a documentation speech, oratory has become interp, interp has become filled with innuendo and explicitness.

What Audience Are We Targeting?

Our first target is students who do not debate now because current debate is a lifetime commitment. These are bright students who want diversified activities. They are not interested in researching a topic for a year or most of a year. They are attracted to Academic Decathlons, Model UNs, Odyssey of the Mind or similar contests. They want to play a game but not be consumed by the game.

Our second target is schools that currently do not debate, maybe never have. We believe that the cost and complexity of current debate has made debate impossible for small schools and for schools without extensive financial resources. We want a debate division that is doable for schools like Chamberlain, Platte and Parkston, schools that had debate 20 years ago, as well as for schools like Harrisburg, West Central and Tri Valley, schools who have not ever had debate. [The above examples are in South Dakota but you know of others in your state.]

We want to target a student who will debate if s/he does not have to miss school so much or who does not have to compete every weekend to keep up or attend a summer camp. With computer scheduling, on Saturdays, four rounds of debate could be held, plus semis and finals.

We want talented teachers in schools to coach this division without having to learn the special language of the current divisions. These talented teachers currently advise quiz bowls, academic decathlons, etc. Because of the time commitment, they would not become involved with the current debate divisions.

We need to have this division judged by community adults, chaperones or teachers who do not need to learn a special language and listen to high pitch speed-talking. These people care deeply about public issues. Each round will move rapidly and take about half an hour to complete.

We want to reach an audience of adults and students in America through media as well as tournaments. Television is a key to almost everything. We might wish a different world, but it is not there. For heaven's sake, the national spelling contest and geography bee are on TV, yet we cannot find an outlet for NFL events.

What Are Some Nuts and Bolts

Controversy, of course, will use current controversial subjects. **There will be a new topic the first of each month announced at www.nflonline.org.** (We are also considering great historical issues). Research can be accomplished by watching TV news programs, reading news magazines or using search engines such as Google or AOL. Topics will be brief, current and require no plan.

Sample Topics:

- Airline pilots should be armed in the cockpit
- The U.S. should depose Sadaam Hussain
- The SAT test should not be required
- Capital punishment should be abolished
- The U.S. should drill for oil in the Arctic Preserve
- Marijuana should be decriminalized
- Daschle should be elected President

Format:

- Two speakers on each team
- Teams may rotate aff. and neg. (or)
- Teams may flip to determine sides and speaker order:
- The winner of the coin toss may chose EITHER aff. or neg. OR first or last speaker;
- Loser of the coin toss will chose speaker order (if the winner chooses side) OR side (if the winner chooses speaker order). Note, the negative may speak first arguing against the resolution before any affirmative speech has taken place.

Time Limits

Team A Speaker 1	4 min
Team B Speaker 1	4 min
Crossfire (between A1 & B1)	2 min
Team A Speaker 2	4 min
Team B Speaker 2	4 min
Crossfire (between A2 & B2)	2 min
A1 summary	2 min
B1 summary	2 min
Grand Crossfire (all speakers)	3 min
A2 Last Shot	1 min
B2 Last Shot	1 min

2 min prep time per team
33 minutes total time

Judging

Judges should come from the community. Librarians, teachers, business people, ordinary citizens who vote and sit on juries are the target audience. Service club members are a good source of judges. College debaters, ex-debaters and debate coaches who are not classroom teachers should not judge this event.

Instructions

During the crossfire period, both speakers have the floor and may ask and answer questions during the 2 minute period. The participants are instructed to keep questions and answers succinct; rudeness should not be tolerated. In the Grand Crossfire all four students have the floor. The first question of each crossfire **must** be posed by the team which did not speak just prior to the crossfire period.

The last shot gives the second speaker from each team one final opportunity to discuss one issue and one only. Presumably the winning argument, in the judgment of the team, will be chosen. Each team may choose a different argument or the same argument. A last shot speaker who argues more than one issue will lose the debate.

Speaking in this event must be clear, conversational and direct. A speaker may win all of the issues in a round but lose the debate because of the indifference to communication.

Media Format

A shortened format for media will be available that will take 28 minutes, including commercials, to be used for televised rounds.

The media--especially television--will cover Youth competitions if they are interesting and exciting and even regularly broadcast (i.e. Texaco's College Bowl and the National Spelling Bee).

By presenting exciting, current, controversial topics within a lively, brief, dramatic format, adults and the media will be willing to listen. Students will be drawn to participate.

Implementation

NFL rules of evidence will apply.

Quotas for NFL district entries will be expanded by two. These bonus entries will be available only if a chapter enters one Controversy Team. Additional Controversy entries count against entry quotas. The district winning team will qualify for nationals. Students in this event may not double enter in any other district event except Student Congress.

For the NFL district, and the Nationals the pairing procedures will be the same as the other debate divisions.

Trial Year

The NFL coaches of this nation have demanded a new debate event -- one which will be relevant to real world issues, community audiences and the media.

This new event contains several new and exciting features: a last shot, crossfire periods, topics will be developed from significant issues. The possibilities also exist for topics of fact and/or on significant historical issues.

After the 2003 trial year, all coaches and participants will have avenues to express their input (conferences, surveys, letters) and the final rules and procedures will be codified after their input.

I encourage all schools to give this new event a try.