

Harangue

The Debaters Association of Victoria's Magazine for Students

In this issue...

Taking a hard line with **Nick Boyd-Caine**

Review of round 4 debates

The *Harangue* Quiz!

... and much more!

Dear students,

This is the final issue of Harangue for this year, and for many of you, round five will be your last debate for the year. Good luck with it, and congratulations on your performance throughout the year!

Further, good luck to those of you competing in the finals series!

Michael Ciesielski (publications editor)

Development Squad



The third incarnation of the Development Squad recently ran over four Sundays at the DAV offices in North Melbourne. The Development Squad program offers free debating coaching to talented students who otherwise might not have access to coaching. Each debating co-ordinator can nominate one student from their school for selection.

The training is designed and delivered by Wayne Jovic, a lawyer and President of the DAV, assisted by Jonathan Benney (Vice-President, Adjudication and Training), Charisma Dungan (Executive Officer), Iman Ben Mansour (Development Squad Alumna), and Michael Ciesielski (Publications Officer).

The Development Squad participants are anonymously surveyed after the conclusion of the program. The vast majority of comments received were very positive. The Development Squad program will run again this semester. For more information, please make contact with your debating co-ordinator or the DAV office.

The Hard Line

By **Nick Boyd-Caine**, Schools Administrator

Possibly the hardest, and rarest, argumentative position taken in debating is 'the hard line.' This is sad, because a hard line case can often be the most rewarding, as well as the most fun way to argue a case. In this article I will briefly outline the what, why, and when of hard lines, before highlighting a few examples of when a hard line could have been taken, using topics from earlier in the year.

A hard line is when you take your side of the topic and make a definitive, uncompromising position, which is the centre-point of your case. It usually contains arguments which will polarise opinion. Finally, the hard line often has obviously identifiable advantages and disadvantages.

So, why should we use a hard line? Firstly, there is a tactical advantage. Often teams will attempt to run arguments that leave all the subjects of the debate slightly better off. We can call this a middle line. The problem with using the middle line is that any real benefits that the case creates are slight. For example, in a topic "That we should ban alcohol" a middle line might be "that we ban alcohol for all people under the age of 21." Obviously, this means that people under the age of 21 might get drunk in public less often. But that in itself is not a massive benefit. A hard line will seek to make obvious, large scale benefits. In the above topic, the hard line might be "that we ban all sale, production, and distribution of alcohol within Australia, for all people." The benefits to this are then easily identifiable. This ban would mean that there would no longer be any al-

cohol related disease/illness in Australia, which is an excellent thing, and applies to many people.

Obviously, there are problems with a hard line. The most pressing concern is that it usually leaves you open to hard hitting rebuttal.

This is because it takes a definitive stance. In the above example, the rebuttal could be economically based. "A blanket ban on alcohol would ruin Australia's wine economy, leaving hun-

dreds of people out of work, and destroying a valuable part of the economy." This is a wide reaching piece of rebuttal. The reason that it is more likely that this sort of rebuttal will occur against a hard line is because a hard line is wide reaching. It makes an all-encompassing point, which then enables a wider range of problems to be found.

Nonetheless, there is great value in the hard line. The chief reason to use it is that it makes your side of the debate very easy to identify. The basic defence for a hard line is also easy to muster. Essentially, you will be arguing that the obvious benefits created by your argument, the prevention of all alcohol related disease, outweighs the negatives that this will cause economic hardship. This is what you do in all debates, but a hard line makes it much easier to identify exactly what you are saying; who it affects, how it affects them, the flow on effects, etc.

Secondly, there is a more subtle tactical advantage. Often one of the key points in winning a debate is separating your team from your opposition in the mind of the adjudica-

tor. In almost all debates, the team that is more memorable will be the winning team. If you set yourself the challenge of tackling a hard line, of proving a definitive, far reaching case, this will make you more memorable. Remember also that many adjudicators see the same debate in different regions. Often they will have heard many of the arguments before. If you can bring something new to the table, that will help you be one of the memorable teams.

What kinds of topics are best suited to hard lines? There are simple ways to identify this. If the topic asks you to ban something, having a blanket ban will be the harder line than only implementing the ban in some cases. In a debate that is about the economy or the environment, choose which one you think is more important, and then pursue arguments that are the best for that one area, instead of arguments that are ok for both. Remember, your chief mission will be to prove that your positive material (arguments) is more valuable, important, than the rebuttal that your opposition has made. Often this rebuttal will be valid, but stick to your guns and defend your point, by showing why the health benefits of alcohol are more important than the economic problems, or that the economy simply cannot exist if we don't have nuclear power plants. Either way, you should have fun with the hard line, if for no other reason that the expressions on the faces of the opposition as you make an argument that they haven't even considered.

Good luck, and remember: the harder the line, the better your performance.

Harangue Quiz

Send your answers to these questions to the DAV office by August 15th. **Email debater@dav.com.au and you could win a \$50 Myer voucher.**

Thanks to Owen Dziubek, an intern in the DAV office, for compiling the questions.

1. What disease did authorities fear pilgrims attending World Youth Day in Sydney would possibly carry?
2. 3A water restrictions are now in force. List three rules that you must follow under these restrictions.'
3. Why is it vital for Australia to help reduce China's carbon emissions?
4. The Australian government was recently considering whether or not plastic bags should be banned because of how harmful they are to the environment. If you could choose to ban one thing in an attempt to help save the environment, what would it be? Why? (Remember to be reasonable in your choice and explanation.)
5. What organ has been successfully replaced with an artificial one, by two leading surgeons? Is this the first time this organ has been replaced with an artificial one?
6. Why do some teachers dread having intelligent students in their classrooms?
7. Name two marine animals that are affected by climate change and pollution.
8. Why did nine Greenpeace protestors recently climb a 140-metre high chimney?

Round 4 Review

Secret Topic (example: “That Australians pay too much tax”)

This topic required teams to take a nuanced approach. Positions such as “we should pay no tax at all” or “we should pay 100% tax” are obviously not reasonable, and teams who took these lines did not perform well. Instead, a reasonable appraisal of the nature of taxation was a good starting point. Why do we pay taxes? Is it fair for people to pay taxes for things that they don’t use (e.g., childless people and schools; indoors-types and parks). It was important to explain the idea of “too much” — why is the current level of taxation reasonable or unreasonable? If it’s not reasonable, how much is reasonable? Teams needed to be clear about what they were arguing for.

Secret Topic (example: “That we should ban offensive music”)

Setting up the case was very important for affirmative teams. They needed to be clear about both what qualified music as “offensive”, and why banning it was necessary. Affirmative teams performed well when they could point to clear negative effects of offensive music.

Negative teams generally performed well when they were able to speak about the importance of freedom of expression. Particularly strong teams examined the cases where speech is already censored or not censored, and made comparisons with offensive music.

Secret Topic (example: “That school principals should be allowed to use the strap to discipline students”)

Affirmative teams needed to be clear about the reason for proposing the drastic new measures. Since the implementation of corporal punishment was clearly a big change, it was necessary to explain the impetus for implementing it (perhaps with reference to current discipline - or lack thereof).

Affirmative teams also tended to get bogged down in details when introducing their case. Although models are a valuable way of outlining your vision for the topic’s implementation, be wary of spending too much time on irrelevant policy (e.g., the width of the strap, how many studs, etc.) rather than arguments for its implementation.

That Australia should abolish compulsory voting.

When thinking about arguments for either side of this topic, teams needed focus on staying relevant. This meant making sure that arguments were actually about compulsory voting, and not just the importance of voting, or a history of voting.

Teams should test their arguments to make sure that they aren’t true for both sides of the topic. For example, voter fraud is possible both with and without compulsory voting, so a general discussion of voter fraud carries no argumentative weight. If the point being made is how much more prevalent the fraud might be under one particular system, this is what needs to be explained.

Acknowledgements

Harangue thanks Nick Boyd-Caine, Owen Dziubek, and Julianne Hortle.

Harangue is published by the **Debaters Association of Victoria**

6/87-89 Flemington Road, North Melbourne

t: 9348 9477 f: 9348 9466 e: debater@dav.com.au