



LEE RUNION

Ross Smith, left, and Allan Louden: "Everybody who's been part of this program is part of this because they have all taught us something."

Arguably overdue

Wake Forest's first national debate championship is tribute not only to this year's team, but to all the teams in school's storied debate history

Allan Louden could argue either side of who won the National Debate Tournament for Wake Forest. He could tell you the champions were senior Brian Prestes and junior Daveed Gartenstein-Ross. On the other hand, he could just as easily convince you that every student and every coach that has participated in the

debate program at Wake Forest for the past 50 years were the real winners.

"Brian and Daveed did this for all those who came before them," the debate program director said. "Everybody who's been part of this program is part of this because they have all taught us something."

Louden said he and coach Ross
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Smith have received hundreds of calls from alumni and former assistant coaches because the win matters to them all. The two-and-a-half-foot-tall trophy Prestes and Gartenstein-Ross brought home from Lynchburg, Va., sat on a table in Louden's office surrounded by dying flowers and gold and black balloons.

"The flowers are dead..." Louden said, "but I'm just not ready to let them go yet."

The Wake Forest Debate squad was more than ready to win the national championship. "We've been in the final four for four of the last five years," Louden said. "I use the metaphor because if you don't put it in sports terms, people don't understand."

Prior to the tournament, the Wake Forest squad was ranked sixth in the nation. Prestes and Gartenstein-Ross, who were ranked second, entered the arena prepared to argue for carbon dioxide permits to reduce greenhouse gas, as well as to defend against other arguments related to the subject of reducing emissions and pollution. The flip of a coin determines which team will take the affirmative stand. Participants cannot predict what arguments they will face, although national scouting reports forecast the general directions that will be taken in the tournament.

Prestes and Gartenstein-Ross lost the coin flip in the last two rounds and had to hold their ground through new and unexpected cases presented by the University of Michigan and the University of Georgia. In the semifinals, they faced the challenge of poking holes in the University of Michigan team's case for installing air filters on international flights to impede the spread of viruses and other airborne diseases. That win gave the Wake Forest team the right to go on to the finals, lose the flip all over again and stand firm against the University of Georgia's proposed solution to global warming, which was to mandate installation of solar units in all new federal buildings in hopes that Asia and the rest of the world would follow suit.

Since the affirmative team is known



The winning team of DAVEED GARTENSTEIN-ROSS, left, and BRIAN PRESTES display the championship trophy amid celebratory toilet paper in the debate room in Carswell Hall after the tournament.

supporters held their breath when the tournament director announced that the judges had selected a winner four to one. But that was before he added "for the negative, Wake Forest."

Louden said the whole ballroom gave the team a standing ovation for 15 minutes. "It's a lot more fun to win when people are happy to see you win," he said. "It's not always that way."

Louden said he could almost feel Prestes and Gartenstein-Ross willing the wins. "There is an intangible quality about wanting something to happen," he said. "You can't coach that. You can organize. You can motivate. You can provide resources and instruction so it's possible, but that last part has to come from them. It's really a question of drive."

Gartenstein-Ross and Prestes won't be caught arguing about what made them a good debate team. Both will tell you they have complementary strengths.

"Brian taught me a lot about affirmative debating," Gartenstein-Ross said. "I think he's one of the best affirmative speakers in the nation. He also taught me a lot about political process arguments or how the ramifications of an affirmative proposal can affect the process of agenda-setting in Washington. I think I helped him conceptualize answers to philosophical arguments against our case. Teams often choose to attack your proposal from philosophical grounds as opposed to attacking from a policy perspective."

Daveed is real versatile," Prestes said. "He's a kind of a random-type guy, so no matter what the other team would say, he'd always have a response. I'm good at the things that I'm good at, but he has a broader base. He's interested in almost everything and was able to fill holes. I've been debating for a long time, but I've always tried to avoid the philosophical side of things. He helped me build that up."

Louden also attributes the win to the drive of Coach Ross Smith, who has been with the team since 1985. "Ross is incredibly innovative," Louden said. "He's the reason we've become so competitive. He's always re-inventing things and other debate teams all over the country have picked up on some of his innovations. What makes me successful in this job is that I'm not afraid to hire people who are smarter than I am — and then know enough to stay out of their way."

Smith said in addition to the planning, organization and research coordination that he and his six assistant coaches do for the Wake Forest Debate squad, they also spend time one-on-one or in small groups to create an atmosphere that encourages debaters to toss ideas around.

"By spending this time with them," he said, "it helps form the habit of mind that enables them to better debate on the spot, which, hopefully, will come in handy later in life."

—Kathryn Woestendiek ♦