At the top in national competition... debaters may well be UK's...

SUPER TEAM

By RON MITCHELL

The two teams square off, waiting for the officials to start the contest. There is a
nervousness among the participants and a ripple of excitement in the audience as the
action begins. Team members of both sides play the
game with skill, patience and fierce deter-
nmination achieved through many past con-
tests and countless hours of practice.

Finally, the match is over—and the Univer-
sity of Kentucky team has once again
emerged as the victor.

This, however, is no athletic event played
on the gridiron or in a spacious arena with
thousands of cheering fans.

Rather, it's a college debate, where polished
debaters test their verbal skills and persuasiveness
against an opposing team. The audience
usually is small and includes other debaters,
friends and relatives of the judges.

Instead of a tipoff or kickoff, the contest
begins with ten-minute "constructive," or
opening arguments, by each of the two
members of both teams. This is followed by
five-minute rebuttals by each member to the
position presented in the constructive.

The team is assigned either the affirmative
or negative side of the issue just shortly
before the debate and therefore must be
prepared to argue either side. This year's topic
is "Resolved that the Federal Government
Develop a Comprehensive Plan to Control
Land Use in the United States."

The judges—ranging in number from three
to nine per match—pick the winner based on
which team presented the most rational argu-
ment, regardless of the position taken on the
issue.

The UK debate teams in recent years
captured their share of favorable decisions
and have achieved national recognition among
major college debate teams.

The top varsity debate team of Gil Skill-
man, of Parkersburg, W. Va., and Garry
Oberst, of Owensboro, has won three major

"It irks me sometimes that so few people
are familiar with our success, but you can't
complain too much," explains Skillman. "We
are sometimes negligent in sending out reports
of our victories and most of our debates are
not held here at UK."

Debate activity does not hinder the de-
baters' academic progress, Skillman said, since
all team members structure their time to allow
for both debate and study activities. "Debate
generally have better grades than other
students because they know how to work
under pressure and are able to effectively
schedule study time."

The actual debate is only a small part of the
debate program, Skillman says, explaining
that he has seven boxes of "evidence," the
result of continuous research on this year's
topic alone.

The topic is selected from a plurality vote
among all debate teams across the country.

Coaches submit suggested topics to a national
committee and each school is polled on the
top five.

"At each tournament, some team always
brings up an aspect of the topic we hadn't
thought of," said Skillman. "Usually we can
consult the evidence boxes for help, but
sometimes we have to bluff our way."

Skillman, a debater in high school, said his
participation in the debate program "has
given me research skills which have helped me
as an economics major. And many debaters
are pre-law majors who use it to learn how to
present persuasive arguments."

Kevin French, a freshman political science
major, said he became involved in debate
even before a student at Larue County High
School and chose to attend UK because of the
debate program.

A member of one of the two novice debate
teams, French said his participation in debate
helps him "get into the grind of things, keep
me on the ball. If you're not doing something
like debate, then it's too easy to neglect your
studies and slack a bit."

Crate and left trophies were won at Golden West
Tourney in California; other trophies is from Drury
College Invitational in Missouri. All are first place.

national events this season, defeating such
traditional teams as UCLA, Harvard, North-
western and Georgetown, among others.

In 1972-73 and, again last year, the UK
debate team--ranked third in the nation. The
two annual debates hosted by UK have grown
in popularity and competitiveness and those
tournaments now have a select field of top
teams each year.

Much of the team's consistent success can be
credited to Dr. J. W. Patterson, the UK
debate director.

Patterson's duties include planning all
debates, organizing research and teaching
fundamentals and techniques of debating. He
is assisted by one graduate student.

"Many aspects of the debate program are
frustrating. You are constantly faced with
logistics over which you have no control, such
as space, travel and student schedules," he
said.

The relative anonymity of the debate team
does not bother Patterson "as long as the UK
students who want the training are getting it.
I perceive the debate program as an academic
activity rather than just a game we play."

Skillman, a junior economics major, said he
averages 30-40 hours per week doing research
and practicing debates. During weeks when
the team travels to a tournament at another
school, as many as four days are devoted to
debate.