It's debatable

Some call UK's debate team the best in the country, but 'winning not everything'

By CARY WILLIS
Entertainment Editor

Football has Larry McCrimmon, and Tim Grosh.
Basketball has Sam Bowie and Dirk Minnefield.
And debate has Jeff Jones and Steve Manceuso.

Their names may not be household words, and you might not see them featured on the 6 o'clock news, but the debate team needs Manceuso and Jones just as badly as the basketball squad needs Bowie and Minnefield.

"Some people would say we have the top team in the country," said J.W. Patterson, director of debate at UK. "And Jeff is our top debater. He's been in for four years."

The coach said he shouldn't try to rate his team, but said it does compete against some very good ones.

"George-town, Harvard, and Northwestern, for example," Patterson said. "West Georgia may have the strongest program in the nation this year."

The debate season runs from September through March, with the national tournament in April. Last year, UK was eliminated just before the quarterfinals at the national competition in Arizona. If invited to next April's meet, UK will battle 61 other teams from Pomona, Calif.

So far, UK's top varsity team (Jones and Manceuso) has won two tournaments and lost one. It will compete in about 10 more tournaments before April.

"I spend 10 to 20 hours a week researching the topic, depending on how long we are at a tournament," said Manceuso, an economics junior from Cincinnati. "It takes a lot of time and sacrifice to be good. I miss a lot of football and basketball games and other student activities."

But he said the time spent is worth it.

"You see people (competing debaters) all around the country and you develop good, close relationships with some of them. Doing well in competition isn't as important as meeting the people."

Jones, a senior majoring in philosophy and business, said he spends an average of 25 hours a week preparing for debates, but may spend up to 60 hours when a meet is near. "It definitely interferes with studies, but if you plan ahead, you can get by."

Both men said they do most of their research at the M.L. King Library, but like to use other libraries when the topic calls for it. Communications freshman Paul Rupas, another UK team member, said he reads "a lot of magazine articles" and sometimes practices his speech delivery.

"They've been involved with debate since their sophomore year in high school," said Patricia. "They're just as important as the people on the team."

"We're the underdog, and it's a great feeling beating the Dartmouths and Harvards," he said.

"Whoever plans to go to law school after graduation, said debate is competitive, instructional, and socially enjoyable. The only thing is, it requires almost too much to be really good at it."

According to Patterson, one topic is chosen each year by a panel of coaches, and every tournament is based on variations of that subject. This year's topic is, "Should the United States significantly increase foreign military commitment?"

"It's a good argument," said Manceuso. "It's a good line of argument, and it's a good line of argument."

Manceuso said the topic is almost always political in nature. "Sometimes, it's not. Sometimes, it's not."

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"Well, he keeps us on the right track and working hard," he said. "He's in just for the competition like so many are. Most are hung up on winning. He's a great believer in making us teach ourselves."

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