

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 tenseness 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 determination achieved through many past contests and countless hours of practice.

Finally, the match is over—and the University 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 or relatives and the judges.

Instead of a tipoff or kickoff, the contest begins with ten-minute "constructives," 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 constructives.

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 argument, regardless of the position taken on the issue.

The UK debate teams have 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 Skillman, of Parkersburg, W. Va., and Gerry Oberst, of Owensboro, has won three major



Center and left trophies were won at Golden West tourney in California; other trophy is from Drury College invitational in Missouri. All are first place.

national events this season, defeating such stalwart teams as UCLA, Harvard, Northwestern 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 the 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.

"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 debaters' academic progress, Skillman said, since team members structure their time to allow for both debate and study activities. "Debaters 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 taken of 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 while 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 sleep a lot."