

A Tough UK Debate Team

By Paul Owens

It is drama. It is hard work. It is self-realization. And outside the sports arena probably no other academic area requires as much self-discipline.

It is the kind of debate that competes with the best student minds in the country today. Often unheralded, as often unnoticed, but with a tradition that goes back to the Sophists of ancient Greece, it is oral combat that has often saved man from war.

Jeff Jones and Steve Mancuso are the University of Kentucky's top debaters. As a team, they won first place in the Invitational at West Georgia University at Carrollton in mid-February. They got to the semi-finals just two weeks ago in one of the last bouts before the National Debate Tournament at Arizona University in Tucson the third weekend in April by losing to a Harvard team at Northwestern University.

But the loss to Harvard, it should be said, made it one on one. The same pair just last year defeated Harvard, and this year Mancuso and Jones also won first place at the University of North Carolina and Middle Tennessee State University, and took second place in a contest at Georgetown University.

If Jones and Mancuso have no Darrowesque illusions, they do know that their experience in debating will make them better competitors whatever their career aspirations.

Jones says, "Many prominent politicians have been debaters, and chances are good that they were a member of a college debate team. The vast majority of college debaters all over the country go on to law school."

Jones began debating in high school, and as far away as Toledo's (Ohio) Whitmer High School, he and J. W. Patterson, UK debate coach and director of debate, began to hear of each other. The recruiting of Jones for UK—neither Jones nor Patterson deny that he was recruited—really was something of a "mutual agreement," says Jones. He wanted to come to UK "largely because of the debate team." A business and economics junior, Jones is headed for law school.

Mancuso isn't sure about law school—not yet. He, too, became attracted to debating while attending Princeton High School in Cincinnati. He was not unfamiliar with the debate program at UK having visited the campus as a high school student and as a debater. "I enrolled in UK primarily because of the reputation of the debate team." He is now a sophomore in business and economics.

A graduate of Union County (Ky.) High School where she was a member of the debate team, Marie Dzuris also came to UK "because it was the best place to continue my debate career." A senior, she also plans to go to law school.

Dzuris has "been on and off the team" at UK. As a high schooler she sponsored the UK workshop for her school and has served as assistant coach of Scott County High School debating efforts.

The refrain is nearly unanimous. Condon McGlothlen of Des Moines, Iowa, known at UK as a top novice, sees debate as a training field for research and research techniques. And with debate's emphasis on analysis, it is logical that many of its participants "go into law.

And not necessarily courtroom law. It is a training ground for the contract lawyer or any kind of practice that requires the disciplines of research and analysis."

And again, McGlothlen enrolled at UK "because of the debate program." He is an Arts and Sciences freshman who had been in Lexington when his team toured the National High School Debate circuit.

Whether career aspirations are in the law or in some decision-related discipline, success has been the legacy of those whose college careers were marked by experience on the debate team.

When the University of Kentucky hosted the 33rd National Debate Tournament in April of 1979 the participants who came here from the best schools in the nation were welcomed by UK President Otis Singletary:

"As a former college debater, I am well aware of the academic potential of this important activity. Instruction and experience in decision-making through debate should make a valuable contribution to the development of the skilled advocate who is well-rounded in the use of sound reasoning, sound research, and the ethical aims of persuasion."

It is the game itself. It is the competition.

"Debaters tend to become much more critical," says Mancuso. "They will forever after demand a higher burden of proof."

"You come to believe in neither one side of an argument nor the other side," says Jones. "What you are confronted with is the gray—the realization that nothing is either all white or all black."

Last fall they were nine. Now they are seven. Besides Mancuso and Jones, who have a definite berth at Tucson, UK may send another team. It depends on their qualifying at the district event the third weekend in March at Mercer College in Macon, Ga.

This could mean a role in the Tucson drama for McGlothlen, teamed with Lu Lohr of Frankfort. Rounding out the seven are Dzuris, Robert Rougeau of Detroit and Linda Duffy of Chicago.

But the UK team is not set at nine, or at seven, or even 12.

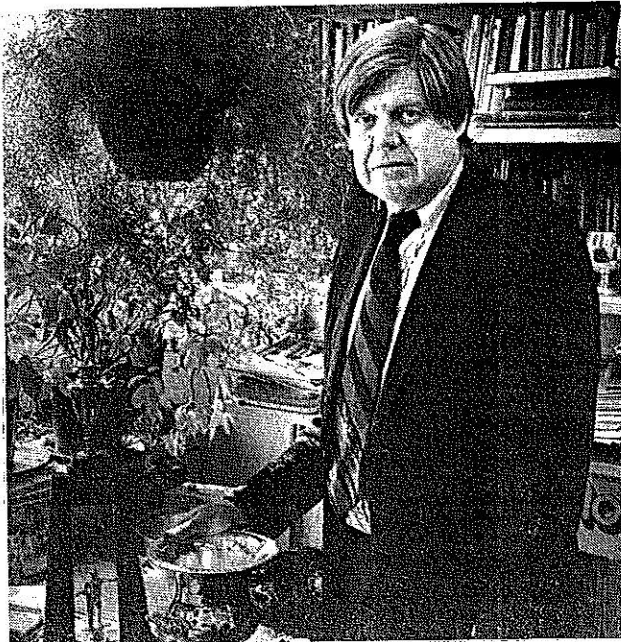
"If anyone wants to keep working and give it the time it takes, they will get a chance to continue in debate," says McGlothlen. To make the team, adds Dzuris, it means "you accept the work load and the demands of the event."

Patterson, the debate director, came to UK in 1960, took over as coach in 1971. He admits to "reasonable success." While his teams have never won the national, "we were proud to have served as host in 1979," and UK has not missed a national tournament since 1972.

But Patterson is quick to recall a major victory associated with the national. "Our own Gilbert (Gil) Skillman was judged the top speaker in 1977." He adds that the UK team has placed in the semi-finals of the event "a number of times." Also, he notes, "we have gone every year to the national since 1972."

There have been major victories. The UK team has won the National Debate Tournament sponsored by Delta Sigma Rho-Tau Kappa Alpha, a national debate honorary.

Patterson says the UK team continues to rank among the top five, often the top three, in the nation.



University of Kentucky debate director and coach J. W. Patterson. There have been major victories by UK's debate team.

Of the 16 teams chosen for the national tournament in Tucson, UK ranks in the top five, alongside Dartmouth, Harvard, Georgetown University of Washington, D. C., and Northwestern. Patterson points out that all those teams were in Lexington last year for the UK-hosted event. The ranking isn't done by Patterson but by a committee of debate coaches elected from around the country.

UK's own Henry Clay Debate Tournament, preceded by the UK-founded and sponsored Round Robin, (both begun by Patterson in 1972) attracts most of the major debate teams. Usually held early in the season, last fall 68 teams came to Kentucky for participation in the Henry Clay debates. Many of them stayed over after taking part in the Kentucky Round Robin. Patterson says: "We could enter our teams in the Henry Clay, but we don't. We generally need all our people to serve as hosts."

He adds that most colleges that field debate teams consider an invitation to the UK Round Robin one of the "most coveted bids they can get."

"While debate is highly competitive, the ultimate objective is not gamesmanship" Patterson says. "Its main purpose is to provide instruction and experience in oral advocacy. The ultimate aim is to provide an atmosphere which promotes the development of both cognitive and communication skills through the use of valid data and the laws of valid inference."

He adds that "one of the great values of the tournament situation is that it provides opportunities for our students to interact on the ideal level with top scholars from other leading colleges and universities."

The debater must be molded and trained for the big test. "The first tournament comes the last week in September,

so all summer we are reading in preparation for it," says Mancuso.

The topic for this season's debates is released in July. Dzuris says, "We start our research right away and stay with it until August. Just before school starts we have a workshop where all our people do some intense reading."

This year's debate topic is "Resolved: That the Federal Government Should Significantly Strengthen its Regulation of Mass Media Communication."

The debaters study and practice the affirmative and the negative of the argument. When the semester begins they continue to practice 20 hours a week—every week. Whatever their own bias, they must be prepared to argue against it.

There is a difference between the public conception of a debate and the highly-structured practice of college debate teams.

"Ours is more issue oriented than national debates between political candidates," Jones says. "There is more refutation. Our structure is much more rigorous." Rigorous. Discipline. Hard work.

Mancuso adds: "It takes an awful lot of work to be a debater. But it's fun, too. If you don't enjoy it, it's best to get out of it."

"Enjoy" may be the key word in the whole structure of college debate—the real motivating force.

Patterson often describes the competition as "fun." It is "intellectual fun to out-argue teams from colleges with national reputations—like Harvard, like Dartmouth, like Redlands of California"—teams whose prowess as debaters is in the history books.

Jones: "It's meeting new people. I enjoy the excitement of arguing against some of the best young minds of the country."