



ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Using Non-Advancing Competitors as Judges in IPDA Elimination Rounds

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Tournaments of the International Public Debate Association frequently use student competitors who do not advance to elimination rounds as judges in the same tournament. There is a dearth of research on this practice and little formal academic discussion on the advantages, disadvantages, and desirability of using such judges. This essay examines relevant literature on the practice, details a 2018 survey of IPDA competitors and coaches on five research questions, discusses implications and offers recommendations for further study. The essay raises serious concerns about the continued practice of using such judges.

Review of Literature

In the most general sense of the word, a judge is “a person able or qualified to give an opinion on something” (OED 2018). Those in the forensics community know that a judge is an especially important part of the activity—without judges, forensics could not function. Although forensics competitors and coaches alike surely recognize the vital role judges play, what makes a judge “qualified” is a common topic of discussion. However, while some scholarly work exists on what might signal that a general forensics judge is qualified, little research addresses IPDA-style debate specifically, apart from repeated references to the desirability of lay judges. Cirlin (2007) traces the history of college debate formats in the United States (p. 6). He notes that most National Debate Tournament (NDT) debates are heard “by a cadre of trained judges.” He notes

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NDT and the Cross-Examination Debate Association (CEDA) tend to use only specialized judges, which has helped foster a climate of fast talking, heavy reliance on evidence and the de-emphasis of wit, humor and ethos. He contrasts this with IPDA “eschewing trained judges” and notes:

The typical Public Debate tournament uses classroom students and freshman debaters for its judging pool. There is obviously some loss of judging expertise, but a huge rhetorical gain. You can’t speed read to a lay judge or talk debate jargon at them. So Public Debaters tend to develop a much more oratorical style than debaters on other U.S. debating circuits. And this was the goal of the format. (p. 12)

Cirlin identifies a key goal of IPDA as speaking to lay judges, in part to avoid the rhetorical pitfalls of NDT/CEDA (and perhaps other subsequent debate forms). It is important to note Cirlin’s use of student judges as a broad term. He does not specifically mention using defeated competitors at a tournament being used as judges.

This dearth of research becomes a more critical issue when considering the tendency for some tournaments, including the IPDA National Championship Tournament, to allow students who have been eliminated from the tournament to then be entered into the judging pool. This practice raises questions about competitors’ ability to fairly evaluate their peers, primarily because of apprehensions regarding a lack of judging experience or strong potential biases for or against certain students or schools. Those biases may be uniquely difficult for students to break, since they are still in a competitive role within the forensics community.

A review of current literature revealed no published work nor national convention presentations from the National Communication Association, National Forensics Journal, IPDA National Convention, or Journal of the IPDA specifically on the topic of using eliminated competitors as judges at collegiate forensics tournaments, particularly in IPDA-style debate. Research is needed, as these problems can lead to inequity in judging, which ought to be avoided to help preserve the fairness and integrity of IPDA debate. This article seeks to be a starting point for dialogue on this important topic because the IPDA as an organization ought to consider the implications of a practice that could compromise its goals.

Definitions from Cirlin (2007):

- Experienced judge (or Expert judge): a judge who is connected to a debate program, typically as a coach, a former competitor etc. and is formally trained in debate (p. 16).
- Lay judge: one with no prior experience coaching or competing in debate; a minimally trained judge who is not necessarily connected to a forensics program (p. 16 and Morris, 2005, p. 76).
- Eliminated / non-advancing competitors as judges: students who have competed, then, once eliminated from the same tournament, are included in the judging pool.
- Student judge: are those on the debate circuit as competitors (p. 16).
- Outrounds: another name for elimination rounds

Though many attempts are made to keep debate judging neutral, it is an inherently subjective activity. The forensics community typically believes that a judge should examine the argumentation in the round and select a winner based primarily on

who presented the most convincing arguments, irrespective of one's own beliefs. McBath (1975) argued that the minimum qualifications for a debate judge include "honesty, a sense of responsibility, and an ability to suspend judgment on the subject matter being considered" (p. 30). Furthermore, Morris (2005) noted that, sometimes, the best debate judge is a lay judge (p. 76). This is because lay judges are a blank slate; they evaluate the round based on the rules provided, as opposed to preconceived notions or personal paradigms. Moreover, lay judges have a better chance of avoiding the "hidden agendas" and "the politics of the activity" that often color an experienced judge's critiques of a debate round.

Cirlin (2007) identified three types of IPDA judges. Expert Judges include directors of forensics, graduate students and coaches and debate alumni. Student Judges are those on the debate circuit as competitors and Lay Judges are "reasonable intelligent human beings with no training in debate." He identifies concerns regarding both Expert and Student judges:

And both Expert and Student judges tend to become somewhat faddish in their expectations. A certain style of speaking comes into vogue and the Expert and Student judges often reward those who follow the fad and punish those who don't. Expert and Student judges can also be highly biased. They tend to vote for the teams and debaters who they think ought to win, even if they are having a bad round or are otherwise losing a debate. There can also be a lot of politics involved in the decisions of the Expert and Student judges. They might vote against team A and for team B because they like one program and not the other; or because they are afraid that if team A advances it will be more likely to beat one of their own teams later on in the competition; or because they are afraid that if they vote against team B the judges from team B will take offence and vote against their teams, etc., etc., etc. (p. 16)

This analysis seems to support a claim that Expert and Student judges could be tempted to vote on the basis of politics (they like School A better than School B), or human nature (Debater X beat my student/my teammate in Round 4 so I will vote for Debater Y in this elimination round).

One of the most challenging aspects of the subjectivity of judging rests on the idea that no two people will perceive the same situation in the same way, even with a common set of norms (Adler, Rosenfield & Proctor II, 2015). In debate terms, split ballots, or 2-1 decisions, confirm that perception influences our experiences—otherwise, all elimination rounds would be a 3-0 consensus. It is imperative that judges choose a winner who debated the best, paying no mind to subjective influences. Rounds ought to be judged on probability, or the advancement of the debater who best shows the likelihood of their idea being true (Hunsinger, Terry, & Wood, 1970). Furthermore, Minch and Borchers (1996) extended this idea in an article geared toward collegiate Lincoln-Douglas debate (p. 25). They reasoned that judges evaluate using a variety of analytic frames, meaning it is difficult to create a concrete universal standard of winning. Yet, the authors went on to contend that, even accounting for these varying frames, it is a widely accepted notion that fair judges must "leave their own thoughts and experiences at home."

However, Minch and Borchers (1996) also argued that complete objectivity is not the goal when searching for a qualified debate judge (p. 30). Good judges are ones

who weigh a round with “experience, specialized knowledge, and use of standards for what is educationally valuable and who permit subjective standards to influence how the decision is reached. This view assumes that the judge will consider both objective and subjective standards.” In other words, quality judging does not consider one’s own views, but it does allow room for some subjectivity, namely with regard to what becomes important in weighing the round. Likewise, “No two forensic judges come from the same mold,” which is evidenced by judges reacting with “varying degrees of understanding/misunderstanding, emotionalism/rationalism” (Mills, 1983, p. 20). This appears to support the IPDA’s Constitution (2015), which affirms using judges from a variety of backgrounds so students can learn to communicate effectively in more than one way.

Indeed, IPDA regards lay judging as a foundational principle of the activity. One intent of using lay judges, and not solely members of the debate community, is to prevent some of the narrowing of debate toward technical arguments, faster delivering and narrowing of understanding found in NPDA and elsewhere. IPDA hopes that using lay judges better prepares debaters able to speak to a wide array of judges.

Many judges have what Rowland (1984) described as paradigms, though not necessarily the formal, scripted paradigm that seems to be commonplace in debate formats such as CEDA or NPDA. Published or mandatory paradigms are not a prescribed feature of IPDA, though some judges still offer paradigms, which loosely give debaters a few qualities that that specific judge characteristically weighs or looks for in any given round. This type of insight is given prior to the round, either out of the judge’s own volition or when prompted by a curious student. The purpose is for students to better understand how they will be evaluated, though those clues can lead students to change their debate styles to adapt to each judge’s preferences. Yet, instead of accepting that there are a wide variety of ways in which a judge might evaluate a round and that debaters are at the mercy of each judge’s paradigm, “the critic avoids the incommensurability problem by rising above the individual paradigm and applying a standard derived from some higher principle” (p. 192-193). Rowland (1984) suggested that judges ought to assess “probabilistically any argument which is defended with both a reason and evidence that the judge perceives as supporting an argument” (p. 187) Thus, a common paradigm ought to apply, saying that any argument that meets those criteria is acceptable because reason and evidence promote the function of debate. Beyond meeting those structural requirements, a judge’s subjectivity can come into play—specifically in deciding which of those arguments are stronger, similar to Minch and Borchers’ aforementioned suggestion.

Up until this point, the advantages and disadvantages of judging methods have not been limited to a judge’s age. Though it is not a common practice, there can be benefits associated with judges who are also current competitors. In an article exploring possibilities for how to find qualified judges—an issue anyone who has organized a tournament is familiar with—Brand (2002) commented that using varsity competitors to judge novices in debate or IE “can help these future alums see the value and need for becoming a judge” (p. 64). While this is not a benefit that can be directly accessed by current competitors at the tournament, it is certainly an advantage to the greater forensics community as whole. However, while an act such as a senior judging novices may provide some benefits, the American Forensic Association (AFA) finds that the negatives outweigh the positives. In the December 2017 invitation for the 2018 National Individual Events Tournament (AFA-NIET), the AFA (p. 6) states that “an

undergraduate who judges in the open division of a forensics tournament, (a division which qualifies for AFA-NIET at-large legs), permanently forfeits his/her eligibility to compete at the AFA-NIET District or National Tournaments.” The National Forensic Association (NFA) concurs; NFA by-law section IV, part F (2017, p. 9) states:

Any student who judges any of the events described in section 2, “Events at the National Championship Tournament” at an intercollegiate qualification tournament during the NFA competitive season forfeits any remaining competitive eligibility at the National Championship Tournament. A student who judges at a tournament before otherwise exhausting his or her competitive eligibility may petition the NFA Executive Council to have eligibility reinstated.

The NFA has chosen to keep competitors and judges mutually exclusive because they reason that a student who is currently competing should not be able to influence other students’ competitive outcomes, especially the National Championship Tournament qualification process. While the NFA does allow undergraduates to judge, the organization prohibits those students from competing at national tournaments to “protect the standard of judging” (K. Morris, personal communication, May 7, 2018).

In the Northwest Forensics Conference (NFC), a five-state region of forensic competition in IE, IPDA, NPDA, and British Parliamentary, it is uncommon for undergraduate students in general to be used as IPDA judges, and no tournaments put eliminated competitors into the judging pool. Dr. Mark Porrovecchio, Director of Forensics and longtime IPDA coach at Oregon State University, said, “Since IPDA started in the Northwest, I cannot recall a tournament that used eliminated competitors as judges. I know that Southern schools brought students who expected to judge. But I do not think we ever used them” (personal communication, May 10, 2018). This is because schools are required to cover their entries prior to the tournament or incur fees to hire local judges. Additionally, schools are obligated at least one round past the complete elimination of their team to ensure judges without a conflict of interest are present. With these systems in place, the NFC is able to satisfy the judging requirements of its tournaments without turning to students who have just been eliminated from competition.

Furthermore, Professor Brent Northup, the current president of the NFC and Director of Forensics at Carroll College (personal communication, May 11, 2018), said that in BP, students will often be used as judges, but that the tournament is “either/or:” Either students compete or they judge, but not both. He understands the concern to be centered on bias, and tournaments wish to avoid having a debater judge a competitor by whom he or she was eliminated earlier. Northup recommended that some sort of judge screening/qualification or strike procedure be used if eliminated competitors were to judge to weed out potentially biased or unqualified student judges.

Given the fact that both AFA and NFA, the country’s two largest forensics governing bodies, preclude the use of current competitors as judges, it is imperative that IPDA and its participants carefully consider the advantages and disadvantages before allowing or continuing to allow the practice. Research suggests that establishing some sort of guidelines for judge qualification is also important for fairness to the competitors, so it would be helpful for the IPDA, and for regional forensics conferences, to decide whether the use of eliminated competitors as judges is

permissible. The following research questions seek to provide guidance in these areas, hopefully giving the IPDA or regional governing bodies the information to make an informed and justifiable choice.

Research Questions

Student Survey

RQ1a: Is there a correlation between the part of the country one competes in and his or her overall view of using eliminated students as judges?

RQ2a: What are the most common advantages and disadvantages students mentioned (and by what percent of the population are those beliefs held)?

RQ3a: Do students who have judged in elimination rounds have generally favorable or unfavorable views regarding the use of eliminated students as judges? Are those different views from students who have not judged?

RQ4a: Do students who have been judged by eliminated competitors in outrounds have generally favorable or unfavorable views regarding the use of eliminated students as judges? Are those views different from students who have not been judged?

RQ5a: Does the number of years one has competed in IPDA have any bearing on their general opinion toward use of eliminated students as judges?

Coaching Survey

RQ1b: Is there a correlation between the part of the country one coaches in and his or her overall view of using eliminated students as judges?

RQ2b: What are the most common advantages and disadvantages coaches mentioned (and by what percent of the population are those beliefs held)?

RQ3b: Do coaches with students who have judged in elimination rounds have generally favorable or unfavorable views regarding the use of eliminated students as judges? Are those different views from coaches with students who have not judged?

RQ4b: Do coaches with students who have been judged by eliminated competitors in outrounds have generally favorable or unfavorable views regarding the use of eliminated students as judges? Are those views different from coaches with students who have not been judged?

RQ5b: Does the number of years one has coached IPDA have any bearing on their general opinion toward use of eliminated students as judges?

Methods

In an attempt to answer the above research questions, the authors designed two surveys: one for students who currently compete in IPDA or who have competed within the last three years, and one for current IPDA coaches. Separating coach and student responses

allowed the authors to better evaluate the feelings of both groups of people involved in intercollegiate forensics.

The surveys included a mix of open and closed-ended questions. Both surveys began by asking about the participants' experience in IPDA. The student survey asked how many years the student had competed in IPDA and gave choices of one, two, three, four, or five plus years. The coach survey asked how many years the coach had coached IPDA, with the options of 1-5, 6-10, 11-15, 16-20, or 21+ years. Second was a standard demographic question about the region the coach or student competes / competed in or coaches in. There were four choices:

- Midwest (Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, Wisconsin),
- Northeast (Connecticut, Pennsylvania, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island, Vermont),
- South (Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, Washington DC and West Virginia),
- West (Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, Wyoming).

Then, the students were asked if they had ever judged an IPDA round after being eliminated and were able to choose "yes" or "no." Students were then asked if they had been ever judged by an eliminated competitor in outrounds and could choose "yes," "no," or "unsure." The coaches were asked a variation of the previous two questions, regarding whether their students had judged after being eliminated or had been judged by eliminated competitors. Next, both surveys asked, in general, how the participant felt regarding the use of eliminated students as judges. This question used a Likert-type scale; the 1 was anchored with "negative" and the 5 was anchored with "positive." Finally, both surveys asked open-ended questions about what the participants' viewed as the biggest advantages and limitations of using eliminated competitors as judges.

The survey was created with Google Forms and distributed in two ways. It was emailed to all of the IPDA coaches who are on the contact list posted to the IPDA website as of January 21, 2018. The email included both surveys and asked that coaches both respond and forward the survey to their teams. Additionally, the survey was posted to the IPDA Facebook page, as well as to personal pages. In total, 17 coaches and 74 students responded to their respective surveys. From the South region, 33 students and 12 coaches responded. From the West region, 38 students and 5 coaches responded. From the Midwest region, 3 students and 0 coaches responded, meaning no substantial conclusions could be drawn regarding the Midwest. There was also an option for the Northeast, but no students or coaches indicated this response.

Results & Discussion

This section is divided into three sub-sections: student results, coach results, and a brief comparison of the two groups. Each sub-section provides the five research questions, the data that responds to those questions, and a discussion of the results.

Students

RQ1a: Is there a correlation between the part of the country one competes in and his or her overall view of using eliminated students as judges?

There was a significant difference, $t(72) = 3.44, p < .001$, between the South region ($M = 2.85, SD = 1.33$) and the West region ($M = 1.88, SD = 1.10$) with respect to student views of using eliminated students as judges.

The average response for Southern competitors was closest to a neutral view, while the average response for Western competitors was clearly negative. The difference in opinion could be due to the prevalence of the practice. It is much more common for Southern tournaments to use eliminated competitors as outround judges than it is for Western tournaments.

When comparing data from each region, it is important to look to frequency to better understand its ramifications. Of the 33 students who responded from the South, 29 had judged other students after being eliminated, and four had not judged. Similarly, 24 students had been judged by eliminated competitors in outrounds, seven were unsure, and two had not been judged. Meanwhile, the Southern students' mean reaction toward the practice as a whole was neutral. On the other hand, of the 38 students who responded from the West, 13 had judged other students after being eliminated, and 25 had not judged. Likewise, 20 students had been judged by eliminated competitors in outrounds, eight were unsure, and 10 had not been judged. And, the Western students' mean outlook toward the practice was definitively negative.

Knowing that it is far less common for students in the West to incur eliminated students as their outround judges, it is interesting that just over 50% of students from the West indicated that they had been judged by eliminated competitors, which is likely due to attending out-of-region tournaments or a national championship tournament. However, the most important comparison that these frequencies depict is that, in both regions, it is more common for a student to have been judged by eliminated competitors than to not have been judged, but Western students' overall feelings toward the practice were almost a full point lower than the Southern average. Because it is virtually unheard of for the practice, and, more broadly, undergraduate judging, to occur at Western IPDA tournaments, Western students are instead used to being evaluated by judges whose life circumstances make them less privy to the problems associated with the eliminated competitor judge. Stated more simply, Western students typically have an elimination round judging pool that is more removed from the competition, meaning Western students see a difference in being judged by an eliminated competitor versus a more qualified judge, whereas students from the South do not see much of a difference because it is so commonplace. Students who have been exposed to circuits where the practice occurs but compete where it does not usually occur score the practice lower than students who only know tournaments that use the practice. Because Western students' data is more objective in the sense that these students experience both types of judging, their negative outlook leads to the conclusion that the use of eliminated competitors as judges is disadvantageous.

RQ2a: What are the most common advantages and disadvantages students mentioned (and by what percent of the population are those beliefs held)?

The students' most commonly-listed advantages of eliminated competitors as judges can be grouped into three approximate categories. First, 50% of students (37 total) reported the student judges having experience as being a positive aspect of allowing

eliminated competitors to be put into the judging pool. Some respondents argued that judges who are also current competitors have a strong grasp of what IPDA should look like. They can offer specific feedback, strategies, or critiques that may be more technically helpful than comments from a lay judge. Moreover, one participant commented that these types of judges can give feedback “in language and understanding” that many other judges cannot provide. Competitors are also more familiar with debate-specific tactics. One participant said that eliminated competitors “are more likely to understand what they should be looking for in a debate,” while another wrote that they ought to be well-equipped “to follow arguments, determine winners, etc.” Finally, one student mentioned that student judges may be “more likely to realize when evidence is reliable or not,” a helpful skill in close rounds. Cohesively, it appears that student judges have certain experiential advantages over other judges, particular those who are lay.

Second, 41.9% of participants (31 total) noted efficiency/convenience/helping the tournament run smoothly to be a positive. The majority of these responses mentioned avoiding a shortage of judges as one (if not the most salient) benefit. Smaller programs especially may have a hard time finding enough judges to cover their entries, and when there is a judge shortage, the tournament inevitably runs behind. Using eliminated students as judges also means it is far more likely for outrounds to have the desirable “panel of three [judges] rather than one, which vastly improves the quality of the decision.” Furthermore, a few students specifically mentioned that putting students into the judging pool provides “fresh” judges who are both not fatigued from judging all day and do not run the risk of judging a student whom they have already judged in that tournament.

Third, 8.1% of participants (6 total) said that the practice provides some benefit to the student pulled to judge. Broadly, those who provided this type of comment claimed that judging allows eliminated competitors to learn from the experience. One student in particular lauded the unique critical thinking benefits to judging, as opposed to simply watching, saying, “I think my success in debate can be partially attributed to judging varsity and professional rounds once I got knocked out of a novice round.” The same student then discussed the value of seeing a round in a different division so he or she could best help the younger students on his or her team. A few participants suggested that the practice provides something to occupy the time of an eliminated competitor.

Conversely, the students’ most commonly-listed disadvantages can be grouped into six categories. First, 64.9% participants (48 total) reported concerns with unfair judging/potential for bias. Many participants said something as simple as “they are biased.” One student gave a detailed response that is quite representative of others’ concerns regarding student bias:

These people got eliminated for a reason. Many of them are good debaters, but many aren’t. Many debate with tactics contrary to the goals and values of IPDA and judge IPDA from the perspective of another debate style. Students often are not good at repressing their biases, especially in a competitive environment. Students know the competitors and who may debate who if they vote a certain way. There are deep divisions in style even within IPDA that are often looked down upon by debaters eliminated by competitors who used that particular style. I think it’s best for the out rounds especially to be judged by experienced people

who are as removed from competition as possible to make it a fair process. Having eliminated competitors from rival schools judge non-eliminated debaters is very much like having Hillary Clinton count votes in the 2020 presidential election if Trump is nominated. There's too much at stake and I don't see why regular more experienced and less biased judges can't be used.

Representing almost 67% of the student population, the sheer prevalence of bias concerns is a point that ought to be seriously considered by leagues that allow eliminated competitors to be put into the judging pool.

Second, 23% of students (17 total) noted an issue with revenge/power dynamics/ rivalries. One student cited personal experience with this issue saying; "I know student judges have been vindictive, often judging the exact people who eliminated them from the tournament." Another student detailed an important hypothetical—a debater "could have just eliminated a teammate of [the judge] who feels they should have won," causing the judge to take retaliatory measures. Furthermore, several students commented on the presence of interschool rivalries. One response explained that:

Sometimes debaters will have an eliminated competitor from a rival school serve as a judge in their out round. While the judge from a rival school would not have been competing in the same division they are judging, they might be more inclined to vote against the competitor from their rival school. Furthermore, teammates from schools talk about their competitors frequently, and this could lead to situations in which an eliminated competitor judges a debater that his/her teammates do not like, possibly creating a greater (and unfair) burden on that competitor. Both real and hypothetical vindictive experiences with student judges ought to be taken seriously, as they threaten to compromise the educational value of IPDA.

Third, 17.6% of participants (13 total) noted that student judges lack good experience. Several students felt that eliminated competitors are just not as qualified as other judges, such as "coaches, alumni, or hired judges." In fact, one student was particularly concerned with using novice or JV students to judge varsity students because they lack credible experience, so "their critiques are not/should not necessarily be trusted." Other students were concerned with a lack of experience in general, mostly writing about how it is less fair to be judged by an eliminated student than someone who has judged before, which is a particularly potent argument regarding high-stakes outrounds.

Fourth, 6.8% of students (five total) cited logistical concerns. One student said that eliminated students who end up judging may incur exhaustion that would prohibit them from judging as well as someone who had not competed all day. One student recalled multiple instances in which he or she was judged by a young debater who was exhausted by outrounds, and as a result, the ballots that student "received from those rounds have been of very little usefulness because of lack of information, and incoherent comments." On a different note, another student mentioned a net harm to teams when students can be pulled for elimination rounds. He/she claimed that "taking a competitor away from the team's ability to prep remaining competitors. It's almost as if the team receives two hard blows, in that they lose the points from the round AND the utility of that person during some prep time." These logistical concerns could easily

impact a round negatively, which is unfair to the competitors who worked hard to earn a spot in elimination rounds.

Fifth, 5.4% of students (four total) also thought that this practice introduces an element of awkwardness/odd feelings. One respondent said that “awkward situations” could occur as an implication of bias or revenge. Other students reported feeling odd when they are (or could be) judged by other competitors, even from different divisions. This presents an unfair constraint for the competitors, especially if the awkwardness impacts one competitor more than the other (or even favors one competitor) because it limits the debaters’ ability to argue as well as they could with more objective judges.

Lastly, 4.1% of students (three total) commented on a potential for residual frustration at being eliminated. One student said that recently-eliminated student judges “tend to be less interested and more frustrated.” It could be hard for some students to put a loss out of their mind in order to focus on the round in front of them. Other students mentioned the potential for such frustration to color the round, thus resulting in unfair judging for the students debating.

RQ3a: Do students who have judged in elimination rounds have generally favorable or unfavorable views regarding the use of eliminated students as judges? Are those views different from students who have not judged?

There was a significant difference, $t(75) = 2.73, p < .01$, between individuals who had served as judges ($M = 2.66, SD = 1.33$) and those who had not served as judges ($M = 1.88, SD = 1.11$) with respect to views of using eliminated students as judges.

On average, students who have judged in elimination rounds after competing have a generally unfavorable, though close to neutral, view of the practice. These views are different from those of students who have not served as judges, who felt more negatively about the practice. This may imply an assumed bias because, once one has judged, he or she is included in the practice, and thus is likely to view it more favorably than one who has not experienced any of the benefits of judging.

RQ4a: Do students who have been judged by eliminated competitors in outrounds have generally favorable or unfavorable views regarding the use of eliminated students as judges? Are those views different from students who have not been judged?

There was no significant difference in views of using eliminated students as judges between individuals who had been judged by eliminated students and those who have not been judged by eliminated students.

While the data for comparison was not statistically significant and thus cannot be used to draw a conclusion, the mean opinions for each group can still be taken into account. There were 45 students who answered “yes” to being judged by eliminated competitors, representing 60.8% of the population. The “yes” group had a mean of 2.2 on a scale of 1-5 with 1 being negative feelings toward the practice and 5 being positive feelings. Similarly, the “no” group had a mean of 2.1, though there were only 13 students who answered “no,” representing 17.6% of the population. It should be noted, though that there was a third answer option; 16 students (21.6% of the population) answered that they were unsure if they had been judged. This compromised the amount of results that could be analyzed, which could be why the data was not statistically significant. This is especially plausible for the “no” answers, seeing as there were only

13 “no” answers. However, because the previous question about students who have judged in elimination rounds produced statistically significant results, it may be the case that judging others has more of an impact on students’ opinions of the practice than being judged.

RQ5a: Does the number of years one has competed in IPDA have any bearing on their general opinion toward use of eliminated students as judges?

There was no significant correlation between the views of using eliminated students as judges and the number of years students had competed in IPDA. This is likely due to a small sample size. Therefore, a conclusion cannot be drawn.

Coaches

RQ1b: Is there a correlation between the part of the country one coaches in and his or her overall view of using eliminated students as judges?

There was a significant difference, $t(15) = 2.92$, $p < .01$, between the South region ($M = 3.53$, $SD = 1.08$) and the West region ($M = 1.8$, $SD = 1.30$) with respect to coaches’ views of using eliminated students as judges.

Overall, coaches at schools in the South felt more positive about the use of eliminated students as outround judges than coaches in the West did. The average response for Southern coaches was closest to a positive view, while the average response for Western coaches was clearly negative.

Although the sample size was small and fairly imbalanced regionally, there are still trends in the frequency of the data. Of the 12 Southern coaches who participated, all 12 had students who both had and had been judges who were eliminated competitors. With a mean rating that was closest to a positive view, this is again likely due to prolonged exposure to the practice. Of the five Western coaches, two had non-advancing students who had been pulled to judged, and three had not had students judge. Similarly, two coaches had students who had been judged, one was unsure, and two more coaches confirmed their students had not been judged by eliminated competitors. As an extension of the argument made in response to the student frequencies under RQ1a, it would make sense that Southern coaches, who work in a region that heavily uses this practice, would accept it, not being familiar with different methods. Yet, an equal number of Western coaches had and did not have students who have both judged after being eliminated and have been judged by competitors in elimination rounds. Most importantly, their collective response was clearly negative. As mentioned earlier, this suggests that the practice is questionable because coaches with students who have access to more qualified judging find the practice more objectionable than those for whom it is a regular feature of tournaments.

RQ2b: What are the most common advantages and disadvantages coaches mentioned (and by what percent of the population are those beliefs held)?

The coaches’ most commonly-listed advantages of eliminated competitors as judges can be grouped into four approximate categories. First, 52.9% of participating coaches (nine total) praised the use of eliminated competitors as judges because it promotes efficiency/convenience/helping the tournament run smoothly. One coach commented that the practice “helps fulfil the needed judging obligations, especially for early out rounds, in which the most judges are needed.” Likewise, another coach responded by

saying “Tournaments tend to get strapped for judges as eliminated schools start to head home. If schools that remain can provide a clean judge in the form of an eliminated student, that may help with tournament logistics.” As the most popular benefit, it appears that coaches are largely concerned with how to run tournaments smoothly, and this practice is one way to do that.

Second 35.3% of coaches (six total) listed experience/knowledge as an advantage for the practice. After describing IPDA community judges as “terrible,” one coach argued that, “by comparison, students are in a better position to evaluate arguments and are more likely to do so based on the flow.” Another coach said that eliminated students “have some familiarity with the practice of debate and are not strictly lay judges.” Clearly, many coaches think that knowing at least a little about debate is helpful for judges, and eliminated competitors are typically quite familiar with IPDA.

Similarly, 35.3% of participants (six total) mentioned that the practice serves as a learning experience for student judges. One coach reported that allowing students to write ballots “changes how they see debate rounds in general because they get an entirely new perspective on what happens in rounds. They see what it looks like when someone gets a comment they've received before and never truly understood.” Moreover, another participant stated that judging gives students a “better idea for what type of argument may help more successful debaters to distinguish themselves in the field of competition.” It is understandable that coaches want their students to have valuable learning experiences, and taking part in evaluating a round can certainly give students new perspectives that they can carry into their own debating.

Lastly, 17.6% of participants (three total) said that the practice was beneficial because it eases the burdens of preliminary round judges. One coach essentially sums up the argument here by saying that the practice reduces the “judging burden from other judges in the pool who have been watching rounds for many hours a day over multiple days.” Anyone who has been to a forensics tournament, let alone judged, knows that judging an entire tournament is taxing, so it is charitable to want to make the experience as painless as possible.

Conversely, the coaches’ most commonly-listed disadvantages of eliminated competitors as judges can be grouped into three approximate categories. First, 47.1% of participants (eight total) noted a presence of bias. Most respondents who discussed bias said something similar to the practice “open[ing] the door for potential bias.” Other coaches were more specific about the bias; one recalled, “I have a few students tell me that they were judged by someone they had eliminated. One time it was a student who had debated her judge at that tournament, but the other times it was a debater faced with a judge they had eliminated at a previous tournament.” While this coach’s students had not incurred harm from these situations, he/she notes that “the concern is there,” and a different coach confirmed that he or she felt those types of rounds came with negative outcomes.

Second, 35.3% of coaches (6 total) discussed revenge/rivalries or friendships/ethical concerns as a net negative of the practice. One coach wrote that “there is a known bias among certain schools to systematically vote down competitors from certain schools, whether they are friends etc. Students who feel spurned by a certain

school voting down other competitors from that school.” Likewise, another coach questioned if students can be truly impartial when judging their competitors, seeing as many students have either rivalries or friendships that could easily influence a decision. The overall trend among these six coaches is that students have a hard time viewing a round objectively when they know the competitors as peers, which is an issue unique to the use of eliminated students as judges (as opposed to poor judging in general).

Finally, 35.3% of coaches (six total) wrote about the disadvantage of student judges’ inexperience. One coach said, “Given that they have been eliminated, these students are likely not the strongest IPDA debaters in the field. I think that there is a credibility problem when a lesser debater (at least at this one tournament) is asked to evaluate and give feedback on a student who has objectively performed better than them.” Following a similar line of logic, another coach remarked that “a little knowledge can be a dangerous thing--i.e., it may be easier to prepare for a judge who knows nothing about debate, and knows they know nothing, than a judge who knows nearly nothing but thinks they know a great deal.” At the same time, a different coach drew a parallel to teaching. He or she argued that “Students aren't trained to be judges. It's the same as asking a student to teach a course. They know a lot of the expectations but they've never practiced the skills needed to be successful.” Cohesively, these comments suggest that coaches want fair competition experiences for their students, and many responding coaches recognize that the lack of judging experience can compromise the educational quality of the sport for others.

RQ3b: Do coaches with students who have judged in elimination rounds have generally favorable or unfavorable views regarding the use of eliminated students as judges? Are those different views from coaches with students who have not judged?

The data for this question was not statistically significant; there was no difference in opinion between coaches who do and who do not have students who have judged in elimination rounds after competing at the same tournament. This is likely due to a small sample size. Therefore, a conclusion cannot be drawn.

RQ4b: Do coaches with students who have been judged by eliminated competitors in outrounds have generally favorable or unfavorable views regarding the use of eliminated students as judges? Are those views different from coaches with students who have not been judged?

There was no significant difference in views of using eliminated students as judges between coaches who had students judge outrounds and those who had not had students judge outrounds. This is likely due to a small sample size. Therefore, a conclusion cannot be drawn.

RQ5b: Does the number of years one has coached IPDA have any bearing on their general opinion toward use of eliminated students as judges?

There was no significant correlation between the coaches’ views of using eliminated students as judges and the number of years a coach had coached IPDA. This is likely due to a small sample size. Therefore, a conclusion cannot be drawn.

Comparing Students and Coaches

Interestingly, the region one coaches or competes in was the strongest predictor of positive or negative feelings, with the most positive feelings coming from those in the

South and the most negative feelings coming from those in the West. This is likely due to exposure; it is far more common for eliminated students to be put into the judging pool at tournaments in the South than it is for tournaments in the West. Thus, these students and coaches are used to the practice and accept it, while those who do not usually experience it are more likely to feel negative about it.

Although the sample sizes were quite different (17 participants for coaches and 74 participants for students), it is still interesting to compare general attitudes toward the practice of using eliminated competitors as judges in outrounds. Overall, 24.3% of students viewed the practice as positive, compared to 47.1% of coaches; 14.9% of students viewed the practice as neutral, compared to 23.5% of coaches; and 60.8% of students viewed the practice as negative, compared to 29.4% of coaches. In general, the majority of students surveyed viewed putting eliminated students into the outround judging pool as negative, and, while it is not a true majority, the most common feeling for coaches was positive.

Implications

While there are various advantages and disadvantages of using eliminated competitors as judges in outrounds, the results suggest that the potential harm outweighs the benefits. The authors find this to be true both quantitatively and qualitatively. The heart of the issue is that students are not able to meet the goals of judging as efficiently or objectively as a judge who is more experienced, unaffected by rivalries, or not preoccupied with residual frustration from being eliminated from the tournament.

Particularly for students, the practice is simply undesirable, while the coaches offered more positive feedback. Considering how just over 60% of students view eliminated competitors being put into the judging pool as negative, it is crucial to understand why. For nearly two-thirds of participating students, the answer is, at least in part, due to bias. Beyond bias, the most popular answers included revenge and inexperience. Alone, these issues are irritating to a competitor, but combined, they make for a round that is likely to be evaluated unfairly. Coaches also share in some of these sentiments. While the coaches surveyed were most likely to view the practice positively, there was no majority favorite on the Likert-type scale. Furthermore, most of the coach respondents who answered positively were from the South, a region where the practice is common and has been for many years. In other words, this practice seems to be part of IPDA culture in the South. As a result, Southern competitors may not have much experience with judges who are more qualified, so their mean neutral attitude could simply be due to familiarity.

Likewise, though coaches were keen to keep tournament efficiency in mind, almost half of the coaches also agreed that bias is a significant issue inherent to the practice. More specifically, 52.9% of coaches praised the use of eliminated competitors as judges, and 47.1% listed bias as a concern. This means coaches are aware that bias is an issue with the practice, but they are choosing to prioritize tournament efficiency over ensuring fairly judged rounds. Although everyone in the forensics community wants efficient tournaments, considering tournament efficiency to be more important than unbiased judging compromises the integrity of forensics.

Moreover, it is possible for proponents of using defeated student competitors to conflate the student judge with the lay judge. Using defeated student competitors does not automatically yield Cirlin's benefits of the lay judge, nor set aside the difficulties

identified in the Results/Discussion section. The benefits of the lay judge stem from the lack of formal association with a debate organization. IPDA regards lay judges as a foundational part of the activity and Richey notes how they help keep IPDA closer to its roots and intentions:

Lay judges help limit speed and technical jargon in the round. Lay judges tend to not understand what is happening if the debater speaks too fast or uses word that are not familiar to a layperson. Lay judges validate a core principle of IPDA: in order for debate to be truly effective, it must be accessible to all and not just a select, highly educated, sectarian few. (p. 31)

However, defeated student competitors are not the same as lay judges.

One intent of using lay judges, and not solely members of the debate community, is to prevent some of the narrowing of debate toward technical arguments, faster delivering and narrowing of understanding found in NPDA and other debate forms. Lowry (2010) embraces the use of lay judges as a “beachhead” against the excesses in other traditional debate formats (p. 3).

Lowry also values minimal interaction between judges and debaters prior to a round:

Lastly, lay judges should be instructed to only have limited exchanges prior to debate rounds with the competitors they are judging. Though audience analysis is a critical element of the public speaking process, debaters who glean information prior to a round and use it to curry favor with the judge to win the round is the crassest abuse of the lay judge’s lack of knowledge of the process and its ethical boundaries. Just as a litigator would be admonished to not address a juror by their name, debate judges should equally be cautioned that some “friendliness” with a competitor prior to a round may overstep ethical lines. (p. 4).

Yet the defeated student competitor already has a vested interest in the game and some students may have difficulty judging outrounds in an impartial fashion. It seems like using defeated student competitors, especially when such judges are known to one or both debaters in the elimination round, violates this aspiration. Using non-competitors as judges would more easily alleviate Lowry’s concern here.

Additionally, the coaches’ other major concerns mirrored the students’: Revenge and inexperience. The fact that the top three concerns are the same for both students and coaches sends a powerful message about the concerns and problems associated with this practice. As an organization that values education, IPDA ought to seriously reconsider its use of eliminated students in judging pools. Of course, one cannot ignore the coaches’ top and students’ second most influential advantage: tournament efficiency. Everyone involved in the forensics community is likely sympathetic to the merit of attempting to make tournaments run as smooth as possible. However, the efficiency of putting eliminated competitors into the judging pool is not unique to the practice. Tournaments can absolutely function just as well without relying on eliminated students to judge. For example, the Northwest Forensic Conference (NFC) does not partake in the practice at its league IPDA tournaments, but elimination rounds rarely run noticeably behind. But, beyond this regional example, the AFA and NFA run the largest and most competitive national tournaments for intercollegiate

forensics, and both organizations are able to function smoothly without running the risks that come along with using eliminated competitors as judges.

Directions for Future Research

First and foremost, because not all of the research questions in this study could be answered due to a lack of statistical power, it would be interesting to see if a larger sample would provide results, particularly for questions geared toward coaches. At the same time, gathering a sufficient sample size is challenging given the small number of IPDA coaches to begin with. Beyond this logistical issue, it would be interesting to look deeper into who competitors and coaches perceive as a “qualified” IPDA judge and what the IPDA could do with judge training or even formal recommendations in response.

Taking a step back from the specifics of this project, it could also be valuable to see a study on the impact of not breaking on students’ emotions and rational processing. Students’ reactions to either not breaking at all or being eliminated after at least one outround could offer more insight into a topic such as the one discussed in this paper because, if a hypothetical negative reaction was substantial, there could be further evidence of bias or even apathy if those competitors were then asked to judge. Moreover, it could also speak to larger implications within the forensics community.

Conclusion

Beyond data that suggests that the use of eliminated competitors as outround judges is less than ideal, there is compelling precedence from the two largest and most competitive collegiate forensics organizations in the country. As previously mentioned, both the AFA and NFA forbid the practice. Thus, the IPDA should follow AFA and NFA in disallowing the use of eliminated competitors as judges (or any undergraduates who want to keep competing). The AFA and NFA clearly recognize not only the harms already discussed, but also the conflict of interest. In seeking to protect the integrity of forensic competition, these organizations have banned this practice, presumably because they understand that it dilutes the forensic experience and potentially promotes unfair judging.

The implications of a system such as that of the AFA, NFA, or even NFC are much more sweeping than they seem. Recall that tournament efficiency is the most common benefit for the coaches and the second most common benefit for the students. What that tells us is that the primary redeeming quality of this practice is efficiency. However, knowing that tournaments can be run just as well without placing students into the judging pool means the strongest argument for the practice disappears. Likewise, the unique harms, such as the substantial concern about bias from both students and coaches, can be avoided by following a system that circumvents the use of eliminated students in outrounds as well. Of course, discontinuing the practice does mean the advantages are eliminated as well, but many of the advantages are not unique to judging at actual tournaments. More specifically, educational benefits from novice students learning from judging a varsity round can be accessed through having novices judge a practice round on their own team or flowing a varsity elimination round to determine a winner, without actually casting a ballot. Therefore, the claim to the pedagogical benefits of using eliminated students as judges could be captured just as effectively outside of real elimination rounds, all while circumventing the harms. Ultimately, we must ask ourselves this important question: if the prominent efficiency

problem that prompts the practice can be solved through other routes, does the IPDA truly want to compromise quality of debating experience for a few non-unique benefits?

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