

Dear Selection Committee,

I write in whole-hearted support of Megan Smith's nomination for the IPDA 2020-2021 Coach of the Year award. I have to begin by acknowledging that Megan's contributions to this organization and the positive impact she has had on debaters are not limited to this year alone. I first met Megan when I competed in the IPDA novice division over a decade ago. She was then a first-year graduate assistant at the University of Louisiana at Monroe. It was apparent to me that even in her first year of coaching, Megan was the engine that drove the Warhawks novice squad to their season long championship. Her debaters looked to her not only for help fashioning brilliant arguments, but also for her calm, down-to-earth leadership. Over the years, I have seen Megan work tirelessly to build a completely new program at Texas A&M International University in Laredo, Texas and help guide debaters at BPC and other programs to success. And now, after several more years of hard work, Megan has rebuilt the debate program at Louisiana Tech University, my alma mater.

At each of these steps in her career, Megan has always drawn ambitious and eager students to her programs, and she has an incredible knack for encouraging genuine camaraderie in her teams. She has consistently helped those students grow in confidence and hone their skills to be successful, and even championship winning, debaters. But while championships are what all debaters dream of, Megan is truly an educator at heart. Her joy is in the journey each student takes to becoming a better debater and better person. I know that she receives the greatest satisfaction from seeing a student go from barely being to deliver an opening in front of their own team to being impatient for the next round at a tournament. Megan's students take on the best of her traits, becoming debaters who are smart, ethical, competitive, and always well prepared.

How does Megan foster this work ethic and love for debate in her students? I can tell you that Megan's style is neither domineering or condescending. Megan's authority as a coach comes from the respect and encouragement that she gives her debaters. She doesn't flaunt her experience and intelligence to her students; she doesn't need to. Megan does not "demand." Instead, she sets expectations and then makes students believe that they not only can but that they want to meet those expectations. Students, and I would add parenthetically even her friends, want to give the best of themselves for her not just because they know that they have her support. They give their best for her because Megan helps them realize that they as individuals are worthy of that support.

Megan is a coach who understands that leadership does not mean being out in front of her team. She knows the value of quietly building up the people around her, even her competitors. Having observed her in dozens of tournaments, I believe, and I think all other coaches on the circuit would agree, that Megan's ethical standards are beyond reproach. Anyone who has worked with her knows, Megan will never fail to make the right decision simply because it is a hard decision.

Frankly, this honor is long overdue. Throughout her career, Megan has always had the respect of her opponents, the admiration of her colleagues, and the love of her debaters. Megan has built and rebuilt great debate programs, but more importantly she has helped build great people. She is a friend; she is a teacher; she is a leader; she is a role model; Megan Smith is your IPDA Coach of the Year.

Many thanks,

Robert Reeves
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2008-2009 IPDA Open Division Season Long Champion