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The Golden Rules of Strategy

Strategy, n: a plan designed to achieve a particular long-term aim

- 1) Research. The largest strategic advantage in LD comes from research. Research provides the evidence to make *stock* positions rock-solid. It gives your arguments credibility that a high-school student cannot provide, no matter how reasonable the argument may be. Strong evidence is often nuanced enough to make *stock* arguments unique while keeping every type of judge engaged in your argument.
- 2) Use pieces of evidence that can serve more than one purpose (ie, that can apply to several arguments). Consider the following resolution: On balance, violent revolution is a just response to political oppression. The negative may argue that a clear standard for justice doesn't exist. However, affirmative evidence that describes the horrors of statism (reliance on state authority) would provide offense by justifying violent revolution against the state, and it would also provide a "hidden" standard for justice. By denying the state's primacy in decisions of justice, revolting against the state is not unjust.
- 3) Make sure to include spikes (short, powerful arguments that you can extend easily) throughout your case. A spike should preempt negative arguments; extending them makes 1AR's much easier.
- 4) Have multiple negative cases, or at least multiple versions of your negative case, each of which is timed differently. This ensures that when you are constructing your rebuttal in prep time, you are using your speech time as effectively as possible. Remember, the negative has 7 minutes of argumentation that the affirmative only has 4 minutes to respond to. Proper time allocation can maximize the negative advantage. For example, if you only have a few responses to make to an affirmative case, an NC filled with unique arguments (that may take 3:30 or 4:00) will be to your advantage. You will maximize the offense you have on the flow, which increases the number of ways you can win.
- 5) Conversely, as the affirmative, you want to have multiple independent warrants (reasons to believe your argument) and ways to explain the story you present. This makes the time skew manageable, because the negative has to beat each justification and you only need one to win your argument.
- 6) Keep your eyes open for technical mistakes in your opponent's case and rebuttals. If you can point out the lack of a warrant in your opponent's arguments, do so. If your opponent's argument lacks a warrant, which happens often (even in big

rounds), you should make that argument one of your first extensions in the next speech.

- 7) Weigh arguments whenever you can; this helps judges see your positions in close comparison rather than complete opposition. Also, weighing can help you recover from drops; never hesitate to admit that you dropped something, and then tell the judge why your argument X means that drop Y doesn't matter.
- 8) Do everything you can to provide yourself with more ways to win. This includes turning arguments whenever possible (because turns generate offense), responding to opponents' case arguments with points you made in your own case, and being as persuasive as possible. You want to win in every possible dimension – argumentation, communication, and common-sense. Never lose composure. It's not just about winning the flow; it's about making the judge comfortable about giving you a win.
- 9) Think of some really good examples that can be used to illustrate the philosophical or abstract points in your case. Use these examples to monopolize CX time and demonstrate that there is some empirical confirmation of your ideas. You thus illustrate your advocacy, add more substance to your arguments, and provide the judge with concrete examples of the superiority of your arguments.
- 10) Read up on the current events surrounding the topic. Current events help judges relate to the ideas you are discussing, and they are often simple illustrations for complex or abstract concepts. In short, an understanding of current affairs keeps you grounded and provides an easy way to connect your arguments to the judge.
- 11) ***MAKE YOUR CASE AS CLEAR, SOLID, AND SOUND AS POSSIBLE!*** You have virtually infinite preparation time to construct cases. Utilize that time to construct the best position possible – it should be organized and lucid, and the arguments should be the clearest and most effective you can make them. While the round usually comes down to the rebuttals, an effective case makes your job much easier.
- 12) Do everything you can to learn about the judge in the back of the room. Whoever best understands what a judge is looking for can best adapt one's own arguments accordingly.
- 13) Always consider the game on three levels. First, take into account your presentation. If I see two debaters, and one *looks* as if she's winning, natural human instinct is to see if my inclination is right. Second, use specific arguments, phrases, or ideas that appeals to judges' gut instinct. If I feel that an argument is right, then I'm most likely to buy your justifications for why it is true than your opponent's justifications for why it isn't. Appealing to intuition is an incredibly powerful weapon; judges often claim to be *tabula rasa*, but when it comes to the

evaluation of the actual truth or falsity of a claim, common sense matters. Finally, do your best to win on the flow – respond to your opponent's points and try to cover his strongest (most important) arguments. Debaters can win on the first two levels and still lose. The converse is even more likely; all the time, debaters feel that they have won the flow, but lost the round because they were unclear or their arguments failed the common-sense test. Note how the winning debater usually has more speaking points. There is a clear correlation, in front of almost every judge, between successful presentation, intuitive argumentation, and victory.

Final Notes: Debate – like anything else – is what you make of it. Focus on your goals and you'll slowly move towards them. As you compete, it will become clearer what it means to win. Round strategy becomes clearer as you gain experience; these points will become second-nature.

Good luck!

- Josh

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