

On the Nature of Lincoln-Douglas

(This is a combining of a series of articles published in January 2009)

The question arises, often within rounds, as to what, exactly, are the rules of LD. In fact, sometimes the question is raised whether there are any rules at all. There is occasionally even a hint of the idea that there shouldn't be any rules, as this somehow limits the reach of the activity. The VCA knows where I stand on these questions, but it may not be a bad idea to review things as we begin debating the topic that will be haunting some of us up all the way up through TOC. (And by the way, those who still haven't bought into the Modest Novice must at least admit that the idea of a longer term resolution is already walking amongst us thanks to TOC and Jan-Feb...)

First of all, we need to establish not the rules, but the source of rules, if any. That is, if we can locate an oracle, we don't have to do our own divination. I would suggest that the National Forensic League is the de facto source of the rules of the activity. I am not being coy, here, because once we accept that the NFL has ruling authority over the activity, then we must accept their rules; that's what ruling authority means. So the first question is, does the NFL have ruling authority over the activity? From any perspective, the starting point has to be that they invented the activity. LD was designed by and disseminated by the NFL as an official activity of their organization. Certainly individuals argued one-on-one prior to the creation of LD, and perhaps even participated in ad hoc academic debating sessions, but LD, with its timings, ballots and the like, came from the NFL. They can claim paternity.

Secondly, NFL provides the ongoing resolutions for the activity. Although occasionally we veer from their specifics, running cases slightly out of sync with their designated monthly timings (TOC and Jan-Feb, for instance), we generally accept their resolutions throughout the year. Even when we don't like the wording, tournaments don't to my knowledge announce that they will run the resolution but worded differently. The resolution is what the resolution is. Nothing stops tournaments from posting their own resolutions (Big Bronx used to, as did NY State Finals, as does CatNats still), but in general, we accede to the NFL's authority in this area.

Thirdly, most students who debate in an official academic capacity do so as members of the NFL. While certainly there are debates out there in the odd class or even extramural situation that are not NFL, which by their nature they are not concerned with NFL resolutions, the vast majority of academic debate is, indeed, conducted by NFL members.

If I am a dues-paying member of a group, debating an activity designed by that group, and specifically arguing a resolution posted by that group, I have to believe that I have demonstrated a de facto submission to the authority of that group regarding that activity. This does not say that I have to agree that all the exercise of that authority is good or correct; I am entitled to my opinions, which I don't sign away when I receive that certificate from Wisconsin with my name on it. I don't have to agree that all the laws of

the US are good or correct either, but nonetheless I have to obey them, or suffer the consequences. That's the way it is with ruling authorities.

I guess we could ask if LD needs rules. We made that assumption a priori, and maybe that was mistake.

There are a number of possibilities. First, that there should be clearly defined rules of engagement. Second, there should be no rules of engagement. Third, a middle position, there should be some rules, or the rules need not be clearly defined, or some combination of the two.

Given that LD is an academic competition between strangers, conducted under the auspices of a national league implicitly charged with creating academic standards (NFL is strongly involved in scholarship programs, merit acknowledgments, etc.), the first possibility, that there be clearly defined rules, would seem to fit into this understanding of the activity. Education, while often free form, is a goals-based business. We want students to learn stuff. How they learn is subject to different approaches, but that they should learn is inarguable. In addition to classroom work, secondary education offers a variety of extracurricular pursuits, some of which are competitive. One can certainly do athletic things that are non-competitive, for instance run daily on the track for 3 or 4 miles to stay in shape, and this is a perfectly wonderful thing, and it may make you smarter by making your body stronger and your brain more receptive, and a school might even reward this activity, or support it with trainers so that students learning to run don't hurt themselves by, say, not stretching first. Similarly, you can argue with people all you want to, from morning to night if you're a disagreeable enough human being. You can argue with your parents, you can argue with your teachers, you can argue with your friends (a quickly diminishing number, no doubt, if all you ever do is argue with them). You don't need rules for this, although a little helpful advice might not hurt (e.g., lay off when the person you're arguing with is holding a meat cleaver). However, once you begin to run competitively, or argue competitively, rules seem to make sense. By definition, competition means that you are pitting people against one another for the purpose of rewarding some measure of success. Rules clarify what that measure of success is. In running a mile, for instance, the rules are pretty straightforward. We all start at the same time, we don't take any shortcuts, we don't bop the runner in the aisle next to us with a rolling pin, we don't hop on a motorcycle halfway through. As I say, pretty straightforward, but rules nonetheless. Because of these rules, we get a clear winner at the mile mark.

In arguing competitively, we have a harder time measuring the winner because we don't have anything as simple as a mile marker with a tape that one person breaks first. (I wish we did.) But we do have the aim of making the competition fair for the competitors, in running and in debating. In debate, the more one knows about what is expected in order to win, the more one can direct one's efforts toward that win. A set of rules outlining what needs to be done, and the format in which it should be done, provides that

information of what one has to do to succeed. Academic debate has a special burden, because of its academic nature, of providing not merely competition but education as well, much as sports activities in an academic environment are more than strictly competitive (they create healthier students and a more engaged student body, both very valuable in the management of young scholars). When the New York Giants play, it's strictly for money and entertainment. When the Hen Hud Sailors play, it's for something else altogether.

The benefits of clearly defined rules in the scenario presented above is obvious. If there are no rules of engagement at all, there is no way not only of determining a winner but of preparing yourself to become a winner. The academic goals of the activity are more in that latter bit—preparing yourself—than in simply winning. Preparing to debate means learning all about a subject area, studying different lines of thought on a particular problem, perhaps studying philosophers and theorists who have written on that subject in the past and applying their thoughts to the issue, etc. If debate were merely about winning, we'd still need to do all that, but we would traffic even more in the specifics of rhetoric perhaps to the detriment of content (e.g., critiques of resolutions, where once a student has grasped enough of, say, Nietzsche to run amorality off-case, that student can run that same amorality off-case against virtually everything and never learn much except that Nietzsche was a self-contradicting albeit fascinating and literate fruitcake, plus enough of a particular resolution to apply fruitcake analysis to it). Rhetoric, insofar as logic is concerned (not to mention presentation) is important, of course, but not to the exclusion of content if we accept that the point of high school LD is to learn about the content and not the container.

As for the third overall possibility about rules, the idea that rules should be vague or few is much closer to no rules whatsoever than to a better way of handling rules. The fuzzier we are in establishing goals, the fuzzier our approach to reaching them. Simply apply what I've been saying above, but in a fuzzier way.

So why, then, do people suggest that rules are problematic? The chief reason seems to be that rules somehow limit the activity. That is, they tie their claim down to the existence of a (mis)conception of what the activity ought to be that can never change, and that therefore harms the activity by not allowing its natural evolution. There is certainly truth to this supposition, that the activity won't change much, and probably some truth in its underlying concern, that the activity could be improved. But the suspension of or dispensation with rules isn't the solution to this possible tendency for the activity to, for lack of a better word, stagnate. Rules can be changed. Once upon a time baseball didn't have a designated hitter. Good change, bad change? Beats me, but I can't imagine a sport more bound by rules than baseball, but even there those rules aren't static. (Speaking of which, those rules seem to help the umpires decide if a player is safe or out, or if a pitch is a ball or a strike, in a uniform way, rather than allowing each umpire to publish his or her strike-out paradigm before each game.)

So, we argue that there should be rules, because they will enhance the academic aspect of the activity as well as clarify the competitive aspect of the activity. As we said yesterday, those rules should come from the NFL.

We've argued that there should be rules for LD, and that the rules should be set by the NFL. Curiously enough, until recently, even if you subscribed to these ideas, there wasn't much you could do about it. Material explaining the rules of the activity, if any, were not disseminated by the folks at Rippin' aside from the broadest outline. Whether this was from a lack of certitude, a sense of non-necessity or a failure of organization is unclear, but my guess is that the league, in providing what little guidance it did, felt that this guidance was clear and sufficient. Further, an initial orthodoxy reflective of the league's notions of what the activity ought to be took hold at the start in actual competition and at the leading camps, so probably people felt that the ship was launched, it wasn't leaking and it was headed for the correct ports of call. All was well in Wisconsin, and they went back to their day jobs, which for most of them is shoveling snow off their cars.

Without going into an analysis of "what's wrong with LD," it was certainly clear to everyone in the last few years that whatever the initial conception of LD was, the practice of LD had become something different. So the NFL got together an assortment of coaches and sat them down and charged them with clarifying the activity in writing. In effect, it asked them to write up the rules. In a way, waiting twenty-five years to getting around to formulating what LD was all about was rather clever, because the assembled minds could look at that quarter of a century of history and analyze what they liked and what they didn't like, and cherry-pick the best material. At the same time, anyone who reads the resulting rules will feel that, while many things are clearly set out, many others are open enough to interpretation that the activity isn't completely put into a straightjacket. (And, of course, there are some that argue that total rule control has its benefits too. In Rex Stout's Nero Wolfe mysteries, for instance, the detective—who weighs a quarter of a ton—has extremely strict rules of what he will and will not do. He will not be interrupted twice a day when he is tending to the orchids on the roof of his brownstone. He will not discuss business at meals, which are as sacred as teachers' desks. He will not shake anyone's hand. And he definitely will never, under any circumstances, leave the brownstone. Much of the fun of the series is watching how Stout gets around the rules he has set for his character without actually breaking them, or else how he breaks them and gets away with it. And I don't intend this as a pure digression simply to illustrate a minor point. There are people who can eloquently explain how the movies of the thirties and forties, which were produced under a strict code of "decency," were sexier than movies where everyone is naked as a jay bird. A marvelous rhyme in poetry fulfills a particular rule of that form and provides a special joy not inherent to non-rhyming poetry; if you think that rhymes in poetry are a silly, old-fashioned idea, go through your iPod and figure out how many songs in there with really great lyrics are the ones that don't rhyme. It is a classic thought, even a truism, that some of the best artistic work done in almost any field is done best with rules, which the best artists use to their own advantage.)

The rules that the committee laid down for LD after much conferring and hobnobbing are in the NFL's district manual. There are those that argue that, because these rules are in the district manual that they should only apply to district tournaments, but this is analogous to claiming that the rules of baseball should only apply to the world series, or the major leagues, or some other part of the whole. I don't question the mild logic of this claim, but it's pretty silly. If the rules only apply to district or NFL tournaments, then logically they don't apply to any other contests, which means that there are literally no rules whatsoever except at NFL events, which is just goofy. Still, one wishes that there were some other place that the rules were posted as overall strictures so that those among us who are genetically inclined to argue about everything under the sun (which is, I estimate, roughly 93% of the debate universe) wouldn't be able to pick them apart with this sort of argument. But, they are where they are.

Let's take a look at them. (Finally!)

Lincoln Douglas Debate Event Description

Event description – Lincoln Douglas debate is designed to center on a proposition of value. A proposition of value concerns itself with what ought to be instead of what is. A value is an ideal held by individuals, societies, governments, etc. Debaters are encouraged to develop argumentation based upon a values perspective. To that end, no plan (or counterplan) will be offered by the debaters. In Lincoln Douglas Debate, a plan is defined by the NFL as a formalized, comprehensive proposal for implementation. The debate should focus on reasoning to support a general principle instead of particular plans and counterplans. Debaters may offer generalized, practical examples or solutions to illustrate how the general principle could guide decisions.

This is the top of the description in the district manual. It tells you, briefly, what LD is about. Since the activity did evolve from Policy, it is not surprising that, to some extent, although implicitly, it describes the activity in terms that separate it from Policy.

The activity is described as revolving around a question of what we ought to do as a "proposition of value." This is a way of saying that we are dealing with ethics and/or morality. In the traditional study of ethics, we are very much discussing what we ought to do, against a background of some overarching rationale for doing it. That is, you can't determine right actions in a vacuum. You need to see them as they relate to a notion of rightness actually held by some people and/or achieving benefit for some people. The specific idea of value, "an ideal held by individuals, societies, governments, etc." takes in a lot of territory, but it is inclusive of the broad ideas of morality and justice and any other big concept we might have of right and wrong action. So we will say that we are going to argue what we ought to do to achieve some specific ideals-based end. We are

going to achieve justice or morality or whatever by doing these things. We are arguing that something is right or wrong, and using capital V Values as our guiding principles.

There is no assumption that we are or are not already doing that thing that we are being asked to consider—“what ought to be instead of what is.” We might be doing it, or we might not be doing it. “What ought to be instead of what is” does not necessarily allude to logically fallacious arguments that what we are doing is right because we’re doing it (although that is nonetheless true). Nor does it mean that resolutions should not be interpreted as being about whether a situation is extant because the word “is” is in the resolution (although this is also nonetheless true). This is more to separate it, albeit implicitly, from Policy. In Policy debate, the resolution is a proposition of change. This year, for instance, the resolution is “Resolved: The United States federal government should substantially increase alternative energy incentives in the United States.” The burden of the affirmative is to demonstrate that we should do this thing. The affirmative can’t say no, let’s not do it. On the other hand, the burden of the negative can be a number of things, including that we should not do this thing, or that we’re better off with the status quo, that what ought to be is what is. (Or, at least logically the negative can take that position. I gather they usually do other things altogether.) Most importantly, in Policy, there is a stated, rules-based, presumption for the negative, that the status quo is ok. This phraseology in the event description of LD is the first to indicate that there is no identical presumption that the status quo is ok, much less a presumption for the negative (which we’ll get into later).

Given that we are looking to “develop argumentation based upon a values perspective,” i.e., argue what we ought to do based on broad principles of social right and wrong, “no plan (or counterplan) will be offered by the debaters.” We are arguing the underlying correctness of an action, not its “implementation.” Implementation, or plans and counterplans (some other way of implementation), is the bread and butter of Policy. Plans are what they’re carrying around in all those tubs. That’s why there’s these sentences here that make it pretty clear that LD is something else. How something would or could be done doesn’t matter. That it should, or shouldn’t, be done, is the issue at hand.

Which brings up two side points. First, there are often arguments in LD about how, because something can’t be implemented, we shouldn’t do it. These are not my favorite arguments for a variety of reasons, chief among them being that they are just not the strongest arguments that people can come up with. They presume too many preclusions for my taste, and they aren’t really addressing the core rightness or wrongness of an action; they’re tricky arguments, and because of the nature of LD (no plans/counterplans), fairly loosey goosey. These are the kinds of arguments that appeal to, well, mostly lazy debaters who don’t want to dig too deeply into the literature surrounding a topic. Secondly, a counterplan, if I’m not mistaken, is a different way to achieve the same goal. Which means that, in Policy, if someone wins with a counterplan, they’ve out affirmed the affirmative, so to speak. But in LD, isn’t it analogous that running a counterplan means that you are inherently accepting the affirmative position of what we should do, and simply saying that we should do it some other way? I’m no theorist, but if you ask me, if you accept your opponent’s position of what we should do

or not do, I'm not left with much reason to vote for you, since you've already conceded the core argument. So while this language in the event description is relevant as much to LD's Policy roots (and differences) as anything else, there's other perfectly good reasons to consider it relevant.

From here the rules go on to state:

The hallmarks of Lincoln Douglas debate include:

- 1) Parallel Burdens**
- 2) Value Structure**
- 3) Argumentation**
- 4) Cross Examination**
- 5) Effective Delivery**

1. Parallel Burdens - No question of values can be determined entirely true or false. This is why the resolution is debatable. Therefore neither debater should be held to a standard of absolute proof. No debater can realistically be expected to prove complete validity or invalidity of the resolution. The better debater is the one who, on the whole, proves his/her side of the resolution more valid as a general principle.

- Burden of proof: Each debater has the equal burden to prove the validity of his/her side of the resolution as a general principle. As an LD resolution is a statement of value, there is no presumption for either side.**
- Burden of clash: Each debater has an equal burden to clash with his/her opponent's position. After a case is presented, neither debater should be rewarded for presenting a speech completely unrelated to the arguments of his/her opponent.**
- Resolitional burden: The debaters are equally obligated to focus the debate on the central questions of the resolution, not whether the resolution itself is worthy of debate. Because the affirmative must uphold the resolution, the negative must also argue the resolution as presented.**

I know. You just read that twice. You don't believe it. You certainly won't act as if it's true, and the next time someone posits the absolute fact that there is a presumption for the negative in LD, you will agree with them. [Sigh...]

There is, of course, a presumption for the negative in Policy. This may be where the idea that there is a presumption for the negative in LD comes from, but that has never been true. In Policy, the affirmative must argue a change the status quo; that is the affirmative's burden. And that is also the source of the presumption. Since we cannot have a tie in a zero sum game of debate, we need to set some parameter for adjudicating when, in fact, there appears to be a tie. Because we ask that the aff change the status quo, we set the standard at that point; i.e., our starting point is that the status quo is okay, and the aff must prove that it isn't. If they don't prove this, then the neg, if the neg upholds the status quo, wins. I doubt that many debates devolve in this way (at least they don't in the literature I consulted on this question), but there you are. In the case of a tie, the negative wins if there's a presumption for the negative. That's what a presumption means.

There has never been a negative presumption in LD, and the rules explicitly state that “there is no presumption for either side.” So, if an affirmative makes various claims in a round, the idea that all the negative has to do is prove these claims false equals a negative win is not true. At best, this would mean an unresolvable tie. Personally, I would also maintain that this would be a remarkably weak position on the part of the neg, rules, presumptions and burdens notwithstanding. The cliché that the best offense is a good defense stands up in a debate: the negative with a strong advocacy is a much better case than a negative with no advocacy other than the falseness of the other side. That kind of case is pure defense with no offense. That is weak argumentation.

There are other obvious issues in this Part 1 of the rules that conflict with much popular belief. “Neither debater should be held to a standard of absolute proof” would undermine a lot of theory arguments. A realistic argument between conflicting sides should indeed be in conflict, but the idea that one side has to prove everything and the other side only has to prove that everything can’t be proven is, well, silly. And, as with the no-advocacy neg, is another attempt to run an argument with no advocacy. It’s weak debating. Calling it “theory” merely dresses it up in its Sunday clothes in an attempt to hide its internal vacuity. That it often works is, as I say, rather remarkable. A lot of people are suckers for a lot of things if they think it’s smart and progressive. Given that, if it were true that one side must argue absolutes and the other need not the side that need not ought to win exactly all the time, it’s not surprising that the rules preclude this approach.

“Each debater has the equal burden to prove the validity of his/her side of the resolution as a general principle.” That’s clear enough. You’ve got to have an advocacy that is cut from the LD mold of upholding a value. “Neither debater should be rewarded for presenting a speech completely unrelated to the arguments of his/her opponent” would toss a lot of negs right out the window for obvious reasons, not to mention the clear statement that both sides must “focus the debate on the central questions of the resolution, not whether the resolution itself is worthy of debate. Because the affirmative must uphold the resolution, the negative must also argue the resolution as presented.” Off-case? Pre-standards? Bias makes it unarguable? Suck it up. If the resolution is not arguable, your best strategy is to do Extemp for a couple of months until the next resolution rolls around. Or PF. Or, heaven forbid, Dec. But if you’re going to walk into an LD round to debate either side, you must have an argument for your side, it must be in aid of a value, and it must be relevant to and accepting of the resolution.

I don’t make this stuff up. It’s the people who disagree with me who need to put their cards on the table and demonstrate first, there should be no rules, or failing this, that the source of the rules should be someone other than NFL. Until that point, well....

2. Value Structure -The value structure (or framework) is established by the debater to serve two functions: a) to provide an interpretation of the central focus of the resolution, and b) to provide a method for the judge to evaluate the central questions of the resolution. The value structure often consists of a statement of the resolution (if affirming), definitions (dictionary or contextual), the value premise (or

core value), and the value criterion (or standard). This structure is commonly but not always employed.

Definitions: The affirmative should offer definitions, be they dictionary or contextual, that provides a reasonable ground for debate. The negative has the option to challenge these definitions and to offer counter-definitions.

Value Premise/Core Value: A value is an ideal held by individuals, societies, governments, etc. that serves as the highest goal to be protected, respected, maximized, advanced, or achieved. In general, the debater will establish a value which focuses the central questions of the resolution and will serve as a foundation for argumentation.

Value Criterion/Standard: In general, each debater will present a value criterion (a standard) which the debater will use to:

- explain how the value should be protected, respected, maximized, advanced, or achieved.

- measure whether a given side or argument protects, respects, maximizes, advances, or achieves the value.

- evaluate the relevance and importance of an argument in the context of the round.

The relationship between the value premise and the criterion should be clearly articulated. During the debate, the debaters may argue the validity or priority of the two value structures. They may accept their opponent's value structure, prove the superiority of their own value structure, or synthesize the two.

There's not much here of any real controversy. The only important questions that arise are two. First, do cases absolutely have to contain explicit values and criteria? The answer is, mostly yes. There's some hedging language in here that suggests that either the committee writing this up was acting very much like a committee, or else they simply didn't want to clamp down 100% on something that is not naturally inherent. That is, one can conceive of a perfectly acceptable, values-oriented LD round without values and criteria—although in practice values and criteria have become very, very helpful—so excluding them is not totally disallowed. Realistically, the rules are saying, this is what you ought to do, but if you don't do it, it's not necessarily wrong. (Which is in keeping with their own burdens of generally proving something to be true!) The strong suggestion that V and C are good and recommended is clear as day, but you couldn't drop someone just because of their exclusion.

The second big question, and this one is answered definitively, is whether debaters need to uphold the same value. For some reason, certain debaters and judges, usually more inexperienced, come into a round believing that it is somehow against the rules to have different values, or at the very least that both values will stand at the end of the round. But the rules clearly explain that anything goes, that values and criteria can be the same or different or synthesized. It is up to the judge to evaluate where the better job was done on the basis of the job itself and not some predetermined way the job ought to be done. Hardest thing of all, if you ask me, is judging a really good round where debaters stand

for different values achieved through different criteria. But, that's why we earn the big bucks. And why there's panels, and squirrels.

3. Argumentation – Because Lincoln Douglas debate is an educational debate activity, debaters are obligated to construct logical chains of reasoning which lead to the conclusion of the affirmative or negative position. The nature of proof may take a variety of forms (e.g., a student's original analysis, application of philosophy, examples, analogies, statistics, expert opinion, etc.). Arguments should be presented in a cohesive manner that shows a clear relationship to the value structure. Any research should be conducted and presented ethically from academically sound and appropriately cited sources.

I can't imagine anything less controversial than the above paragraph. "Don't make up the research," would seem to sum it up. I have nothing to add, except that I have only occasionally felt the need to examine a piece of evidence, and have always been rather amused that LDers think that handing you their case with the quote typed up in it somehow suffices, especially when my problem is not that I didn't hear or understand the quote so much as I didn't quite believe it. If you're going to have evidence, would it kill you to photocopy it directly from the source? If you want to be a Policy debater, act like one.

4. Cross-Examination - Cross-examination should be used by the debater to clarify, challenge, and/or advance arguments in the round.

I guess one can extrapolate from this that CX should not be used as another three minutes of prep time. Certainly it is no great leap to accept that the timings for the speeches in LD have been set by the NFL (it's on their ballots). The acceptance of flex prep seems about as reasonable as the acceptance of a debater deciding in a round that he'll take his thirteen minutes of debate as 4, 4 and 5 rather than 6, 4 and 3. Whatever. Cases that are so unintelligible that they have to be read during prep is the culprit here, mixed in with a little fashion-following. Anyhow, aside from this, the explanation of CX here is definitely the starting point to training any debater what to do while standing there for three minutes of free air time. Good CX skills are hard to acquire, in that they require a mix of careful analysis of what's been heard so far, respectful yet firm questioning, plus laying strategic groundwork for your own case. Maybe that's why people like flex prep instead: They get to bypass one of the hardest jobs in a round.

5. Effective delivery: Lincoln Douglas debate is an oral communication activity that requires clarity of thought and expression. Arguments should be worded and delivered in a manner accessible to an educated non-specialist audience. This encompasses:

- Written communication: Cases and arguments should be constructed in a manner that is organized, accessible, and informative to the listener. The debater should employ clear logic and analysis supported by topical research.

- Verbal communication: The debater has the obligation to be clear, audible and comprehensible, and to speak persuasively to the listeners. Additionally, debaters should strive for fluency, expressiveness, effective word choice, and eloquence.**
- Non-verbal communication: The debater should demonstrate an effective use of gestures, eye-contact, and posture. Throughout the debate, the debaters should demonstrate civility as well as a professional demeanor and style of delivery.**

“An educated non-specialist audience”? Come on, now. Those are strikin’ words, pardner. The number of “top” debaters today who can win a ballot from, say, the average Supreme Court justice is pretty small. Our theoretically hottest debaters are capable only of picking up ballots from a select (and often pre-selected) group of professional LD judges. I’ve talked about this many times in the past.

That effective speaking is only marginally valued these days in LD is hardly a shocker. There is even a subset of people who don’t even bother to stand up to present their cases. Again, debaters who imitate what they think is Policy are sort of missing the point of their idolatry. The value of Policy debate, aside from the classic rhetorical benefits, is the manipulation of research. Go to court some day; you might see lawyers with as many tubs as your average Policy team. LD, with none of the need to get tons of evidence across in a short period of time, goes fast presumably simply to fit more stuff into less time. I wonder why announcers on TV don’t do this. After all, if K Couric talked twice as fast, she’d cover twice as much news. John Stewart, at twice the speed, would be twice as funny. If Obama’s inauguration speech were twice as fast, he could have included all kinds of other stuff as well. Beats me. Anyhow, the battle to get debaters to speak well in a classic sense is a losing one, and I have no intention of fighting it at any length here now. Given that there is no realistic use for extreme speaking speed outside of debate, the logic of using it inside debate must stand or fall on its own merits. The only thing I can say is that, if your judge says go slowly, it behooves you to go slowly. From my own experience, in my heyday I could flow just about anything, but since nowadays I judge only a few times a year, I’m rusty. I admit as much to anyone I judge. If they choose to ignore this warning, they will not deliver effectively. They may, if they wish, blame me for not receiving effectively, and they may be perfectly justified in doing so, but that won’t help them earn any speaker points on my particular ballot. Come to think of it, the number one complaint I hear from judges, regardless of paradigm or experience, is that when debaters ask for preferences before a round, the debaters then proceed to ignore those preferences. How about a new slogan: “Don’t Care? Don’t Ask!”

We have made the case that, first, that rules are needed for LD rounds, and second, that the rules provided by the NFL are the rules we should abide by. Then we have presented those rules and analyzed what they are saying.

Are these the best possible rules for the activity? Not necessarily, although my opinion is that they are pretty good, and if I were asked to come up with something, it wouldn’t be much different from this. In our analysis, we have decidedly not been evaluating the

rules, however, but simply enumerating them and discussing their meaning. The thing is, once you accept the need for rules, and the provenance of the NFL, you are sort of stuck with accepting the NFL's rules. Who wants to play a game with someone who keeps complaining that the rules are unfair? As we've said often in the past, an LD round is not the place where one should debate the rules of LD. Once you decide to debate LD, well, following the rules already in place is what you have to do. If you think the rules should be changed, then come up with a way to do so that does not include your implicit acceptance of those rules in a debate round operating under those rules. Taking a "conscientious objector" approach and flouting the rules in a round is not quite the way to do it; as any conscientious objection scholar will tell you, when you break the law you should expect to pay the consequences, which in this case would be to lose the round. The point of conscientious objection is to publicize injustice, not evade consequences.

I have heard an argument that because the NFL is irredeemably flawed, their rules cannot stand. I don't buy this logic, because this would mean that in a region where murder is illegal but the local police are corrupt, the law against murder is no longer valid. For that matter, I don't buy the underlying premise that the NFL is irredeemably flawed. Their website may be just slightly more complex than your average Hieronymus Bosch triptych, and the VCA is well aware that I am no longer the world's worst district chair (much to the acclaim of Rippin', it would seem), but I have never believed, and I certainly doubt if I have ever claimed, that they are in any way, shape or form not looking out for what they think are the best interests of students, nor that they are in any way, shape or form not the people I want as the underlying organization behind what we do.

So what if you happen to disagree with their rules? Are you stuck with them? Of course not. You have avenues of change you may pursue within the organization. You pay your dues: communicate with Rippin' and the LD folks and see how that works out. Or, if you run a tournament, post different rules for that tournament. As long as the rules are clear, people will follow them. Nothing stops anyone from doing that. CFL certainly does it. TOC does it (by not running the topic of the moment), and the northeast will be doing the same with The Northeast Championships. Next year the Modest Novice will have its unique, non-NFL topic. I have heard of tournaments that experiment with different speech timings and the like. I see nothing in the NFL rules that say, if you don't follow these rules you will be expelled from forensics. But if you're not going to follow these rules, some other clear rules are required; a game with no rules is no game at all. As I say, the issue of what the best rules might be is vastly different from the issue of the inherent need for rules. And until such point as clear and specific rules are in place substituting for the NFL's rules at a tournament, the NFL's rules must stand. You don't have to love 'em, you just have to obey them. If you don't like it, and you're not willing to offer change in a productive, practical fashion, either within the system or through your own ostensive and academically sound alternate system, then do all of us a favor and take up competitive cucumber growing. LD rounds (and cucumbering) will both profit from your secession from the activity.