

On Being a Mommy Judge

When my son became a debater, I was told that I would have to get involved as a judge, especially if my son wanted to go to many tournaments. I decided that I would support my son in this activity. As an English-speaking mommy, I was only required to invest 1 hour in judge training. From then on, I received on-the-job training, starting as a novice and advancing to varsity.

When I agree to serve as a judge at a tournament, I accept full responsibility. I don't leave unless I am "dismissed." I check the schematics to make sure I get to where I am supposed to be when I am supposed to be there (I admit that one time the "judge squad" had to find me to tell me that I was supposed to be judging when I was sitting around gabbing with other mommies; I was embarrassed and I hope that never happens again). I make sure my ballots get to the tab room, even if I have to bring them there myself. I read my son's cases so I have some knowledge and understanding of the resolution (sometimes he asks me to read his cases to make sure it can be understood by a mommy/daddy judge). I flow the debate and try to follow the contentions, subpoints, blocks, rebuttals, harms, values and warrants. I try to write something meaningful on the ballots. After a tournament, I read my son's ballots to try to gain insight into other judges' insights. I have been operating with two basic assumptions: 1) this is the way adults behave and 2) I need to be a role model for my children and other people's children, not the other way around. Apparently, some mommy and daddy judges should be taking grown-up lessons from their children.

Last week I judged 5 varsity rounds and I found myself pushed to the limit of my debate judging skills. These debaters were moving so fast, that it was difficult for me to follow their arguments. Flowing became almost impossible. After they read their cases, I found it easier to spend more energy on listening instead of flowing. I tried to see the big picture instead of all the little pieces. I found it difficult to write something on the ballot that would support my decision. I gave it my best shot, and that's good enough for me. When I found myself as one of three judges in the first break round, I had to disclose, and this was after the God-coach of debate gave his treatise on how and why he made his decision. That was a hard act to follow, and although I accept the basic premise that debate is an activity that can and should be judged by mommies and daddies, I was a bit intimidated. I had been exposed as a mommy judge.

So what's the payback? Why do I make the effort and "volunteer" to serve as a judge? I get to sit around high school cafeterias eating not hot pizza, cross the Bear Mountain Bridge in a school bus, and watch the steam rise in a stifling hot classroom when it's below freezing outside. I also get to see my son put on a suit and tie and engage in an activity that I know will serve him well today and in the future. I leave these debate tournaments with a renewed faith in American youth. The writing, thinking and speaking skills that are on display really blows me away.

I know that there are some mommies and daddies that are better judges than me (my husband for starters). Apparently, there are far too many that are worse, simply because

they don't make the effort. I have decided that I need to be the best judge that I am capable of being. My son is entitled to no less than that from any mommy or daddy judge.