

Episode 8

We're Only in it for the... Education?

Max Klarr is nervously tapping his fingers on his arm rest. The plane will be landing in about half an hour, and he should be in his normal state of excited enthusiasm over storming into a tournament and having his team blast its way to the top. Instead, his stomach is churning and he's wondering if, after this weekend, he will be facing unemployment.

Don't come back without any trophies. That is the implicit battle cry of Affluent Geek Academy. The school does not participate in very many competitive activities. They do have a couple of Tropical Fish Collecting trophies—the little metal tetras where the Nike ought to be make a unique if not exactly prepossessing display in the team trophy cabinet next to the real tetras—and last year's Comic Book Trivia Contest did yield an Iron Man tie pin and a case of bottled water, but there is no trophiage whatsoever for sports. Not a single piece of tin. Affluent Geek has no football team, nor baseball team, nor basketball team. Half of the students in the school can't throw a ball, and the other half can't catch one. There are the occasional students so full of nervous energy that they can sprint for a hundred meters or so, but as a general rule they look so scrawny compared to the other participants who show up at track meets that they confine their running to staying at the back of the pack, keeping as much out of harm's way as possible.

It is in the debate arena where Affluent Geek shines. Almost every week the team, under the leadership of coach Max Klarr, will board their private plane and head to where the biggest tournament might be, and then either win the thing or come damned close. And when they return to Steve Jobs Airport in Cupertino, they never fail to emerge from the plane carrying trophies that are often bigger than they are, and plenty of them.

Affluent Geek's dominance in debate is not accidental. As a coach, Max Klarr is, in a word, a terror. He terrorizes his own students, and he terrorizes everyone else's students. He is notorious for sitting in the back of the room, waiting to jump on the judges if they decide incorrectly—that is, against Affluent Geek. This would not be all that unusual—there are plenty of coaches who do not take losing well—if he were not simultaneously in the back of the room in half a dozen rounds at the same time, plus the one that he himself is judging. No one knows how he does it, but do it he does. Being laid into after the “wrong” decision against Affluent Geek is known as being Klarred. Hardly a person alive in circuit level debate has not been Klarred at least once in their judging career.

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There are those who think that Klarr is simply hyper-competitive. This may be true, but even more true is the fact that his job depends on winning. Plenty of teams look

to win above all else, but that doesn't begin to describe the Affluent Geek situation. Most other teams' coaches have a day job teaching social studies or English, or have debate classes where no one really expects much more than surviving occasional local competition in one piece, spread across a broad base. Aff Geek, on the other hand, is a small school to begin with, and its debaters are hand-picked during the enrollment process, based on their test scores ranging back to pre-K. They enlist a new annual crop of debaters the way the big football colleges farm their players from the high schools, or the way the pros farm their crop from the colleges. AG has one single display case for its debate trophies. In that case, they keep exactly 1000 trophies. Any new trophy won by the team replaces the oldest trophy in the display, which is sent to a vault in the sub-basement. No one knows how many trophies are buried away down there, but estimates go as high as seven figures. It could be true.

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Normally Klarr would be almost rubbing his hands in glee over the upcoming weekend. He has four debaters and five "assistant coaches" on the flight with him. The assistant coaches are, in reality, recent high school graduates who have kept their hand in the activity while in college, making decent money and providing training, research and case positions to the team. They also scout other debaters, auditing competitors' rounds to see who is running what to prepare counter arguments and strategies. The four Aff Geek debaters on the plane have taken trophies at tournaments across the country. The team travels somewhere nearly every week, so among them they almost can't help at least making it into elimination and qualifying rounds.

But they are not all capital W Winners. They are stars, but not superstars. Affluent Geek's—and Max Klarr's—superstar is Alice B. Alice. Alice is a senior, and has won not one, not two, not three, but four tournaments this year, all highly competitive, national events. The ones she lost she made it to the final round and dropped on exactly one ballot each time, probably because it would be too late in the tournament for the recalcitrant judge to get Klarred. Alice B., or as she is often known, B. Alice, was odds-on favorite to win LD at the COC.

And then she got the mumps, because her literally affluent geek parents, to whom science is presumably a believable idea, given that they make their living in technology, did not accept the idea that childhood vaccination was good for their lively little offspring lo those many years ago. Meaning that at this moment, Alice B. Alice is home in bed with a head the size of a prize-winning pumpkin. No doubt the offspring of the other anti-vaccers in the school are starting to blow up as well.

Don't come back without any trophies.

With Alice B. on board, there was no way Affluent Geek wasn't coming home with at least one trophy, and perhaps the biggest one of all. With the remaining team members? Good as they are, there is a distinct chance that none of them might break.

Don't come back without any trophies.

Which means that Max Klarr's job could be in jeopardy.

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"Please fasten your seatbelts," the co-pilot's voice comes over the intercom.

Yeah, Max Klarr thinks. Fasten your seatbelts. It's going to be a bumpy tournament.

Everybody else is also on their way now to Kentucky. For the last hour or so the commercial planes have been getting back into the air, and Detroit Metro has even announced a departure time for the Nighten Day's threesome on their LPW. One Facebook page after another has announced impending departures. The tournament is back on track.

There are 71 debaters expected to show up, after the late scratch of Alice B. Alice. Perhaps the best analysis of who's who at the tournament is in "The Conqueror," Stats McGillicuddy's debate tip sheet. Stats is probably the quintessential high school debate nerd. He started collecting tournament data as a 6th grader. Within a couple of years he knew all there was to know about every debater, coach and judge both on the circuit and off. If you opened your mouth competitively anywhere in America, Stats knew about it within five minutes. And an hour later he knew how you had done, who you had done it to, and how your judge or panel felt about it. Stats, whose given name was Malachi, had every intention of becoming a debater himself once he entered high school, but the drama of numbers and data, which might overwhelm the average forensician, became more interesting to him than actual forensics. He began to dedicate himself to getting more than just the numbers. What were people running? What were their cases? What was winning for whom, and what wasn't? What judges liked which arguments? What tournaments favored which styles of debating? It reached the point where young Malachi realized that, for a big national tournament, he had a pretty good idea, in advance, of who was going to win. As a matter of fact, for just about any tournament, Malachi McGillicuddy could predict the results with almost preternatural accuracy.

That was when Malachi began sharing his information. He took on the name Stats, and started publishing a tip sheet in advance of every major tournament. He would go down the field and attach odds on who would go how far. All in good fun, of course, because, needless to say, the idea that people might use those odds in some proactive fashion, i.e., betting on debate tournaments, was ridiculous.

Except in Las Vegas, where casinos will allow you to bet on which mosquito will bite first, provided the house gets a percentage of the take. When casino betting on debate tournaments started, no one expected it to take over from the way more

remunerative field of sports betting, or any other kind of betting. But surprisingly, within a few months, there was a dedicated betting following for the activity. Book could be made on any tournament with COC limbs. The quantity of players was small, given that a general feel for outré philosophy, critical theory and general rhetoric was required to learn one's way around the competitors, but the quality of their betting was high. The minimum buy-in for any tournament at the Rickroll Casino was \$10,000. And that was just the starting point.

Stats McGillicuddy was at the center of this phenomenon. Like the folks who got rich in the gold rush not by searching for precious metal but by selling supplies to the searchers, Stats made his stake by selling his tip sheet. Today a subscription to The Conqueror, an online service, costs \$1000 a month. Players willing to drop \$10K on any given tournament on any given week didn't give a second thought to such an expense. Not subscribing to The Conqueror was like going to the track without buying a copy of the *Racing Form*. It just didn't make any sense.

The Combat of Conquerors is the tournament that draws the most interest in the betting parlor. For one thing, it is the least random of the majors at the end of the year. Debaters can come out of nowhere for the Catholic Forensic League or Non-Catholic Forensic League finals, whereas competitors for the COC might run every week. The amount of data available on them should be enough to make decent predictions, meaning that a pari-mutuel pool is a natural. Stats's The Conqueror isn't the only analysis tool available to the players, but even the Rickroll Casino, debate's primary home on the Strip, considers it the best.

Which is why we turn now to the special COC edition, to hear what Stats has to say. After all, nobody does it better.

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Stats sez:

*First of all, scratch **Alice B. Alice**. Affluent Geek's lead debater would be going into the COC as the top seed at 1 to 5 for the early money. Without her, the game becomes an odds player's dream. Or nightmare.*

*The **Luce Triplets** from Franciscan Jesuit Academy remain the most likely pig in the python. The creators of Crapaud Theory have broken at least 2 out of 3 at virtually every tournament they've attended, but their sheer number makes them hard to pick among. Any one, or even two, can and no doubt will meet in a coachover. So who goes the furthest? Lou, Lu or Lulu? You guess is as good as mine. If you could play them as the Field, 3-1. But you can't. Which means our money is on Lulu at 2-1, with Lou and Lu at 5-2 each. Sorry about that one. Hold your money until you see what they run in the early rounds. If it's not Crapaud, then the French will be coming. But if it is Crapaud, what are they holding back?*

*North South Central's **Der Wilson** has lost some momentum with his race material the last few months as the best opponents are just as likely to claim*

the judge is a racist as Wilson is, or even to claim that Wilson is a racist. Still, Wilson knows how to debate out of the tightest paper bag. 4-1.

*The Petunias are riding in on their rape narratives, but the judges are starting to suspect that there may be an element of fiction in their harrowing tale. Still, it's powerful stuff, and **Marcy Mann** and **Liz Giuseppe** know how to spin it. Stats sez 5-1 on both, but once again, what are the odds of a coachover?*

*Nighten Day's **Haley Millstein** is the classicist's choice. Her record is almost as strong as Alice B. Alice or Kim Kim, and her performance at Round Robins has been remarkable. She'll be hard to beat in the early going, but does she have the stamina for Day 3? The lack of a strong team to work with her over the weekend might begin to show in the stretch. 5-1.*

Which gives you seven choices for the top 4. After that, it's a little more of a horserace.

*Manhattan Lodestone is a sure bet to break with GBLT star **G Elliot**. No one ever knows what side of gender G will come out on at any given tournament, and the need to prep every possible variation usually leaves most of the less-than-top people in the dust. 8-1 for getting into the Octa Giants.*

*Veil of Ignorance continues its machinelike march of interchangeable cogs, with six—count 'em, 6—LD qualifiers. We look at **St. John Rivers** as another 8-1 candidate. He'll break, but we don't know if he'll get much further than the Octa Giants.*

***Kim Kim** from Cahoots High is a knock to break, given that he comes to the starting gate with more individual tournament bids than any other player. Not a weekend has passed since Labor Day when KK wasn't debating somewhere and earning another COC limb. 10-1 for winning it all, but a virtual guarantee for breaking. The name alone will win him half his rounds on rep.*

And those are our top 10. Figure out your combo on the top two double, and given the lack of an odds-on favorite, you've got a good chance. We bet the farm that all of these will hit the octafinals round running. If you want to run a full octas bet, picking all the top 16—there's big money in that one—we've got you covered in our next edition, due 5:00 EST. We'll have information on the other big players, including Affluent Geek, Monteverdi, and Algren-on-the-Beach.

Game on, debate fans!

Will Max Klarr Klarr the judges in every round of the COC?

Will Affluent Geek bring back any trophies?

Will Alice B. Alice survive the mumps?

Will Stats McGillicuddy correctly predict the winner of the tournament?

Is there really a debate book betting room at the Rickroll Casino, and do they serve debate ziti there?

We're too busy putting down our money for the Octafecta bet on the 16 debaters breaking into COC elims to answer any of these questions in our next episode: "There's one Pixar movie I refuse to let you have, Or, Never gonna give you 'Up'."