

Speech & Debate State Champions Take Away More than Trophies



University School's Speech & Debate Team captured the Overall State Championship title for the second year in a row, sweeping three of four team categories. In addition to winning the state team titles for Debate, Rhetoric and Overall, seven students were named state champions: Jonathan Stettin and Grant Ebenger won first in Public Forum Debate; Michael Fried, Saahil Jain and Joshua Tupler were declared tri-champions in Lincoln-Douglas Debate; Matthew Linn won

first in International Extemporaneous Speaking and Kalie Marsicano won first in Original Oratory.

Team co-captain Kalie Marsicano said that the rare repeat took every part of the team working together.

"It's really amazing because it is a group effort," Marsicano said. "People see us wearing suits and holding trophies, but tournaments are so much more than that. We all work together, come in on weekends and stay late after school. We travel together and we really are a family."

The strength of the team's friendships and peer mentorship efforts is perhaps most evidenced by the friendly competition between Marsicano and her fellow team co-captain and state champion Matthew Linn.

"When it was the two of us standing on the oratory stage, we literally just hugged because we've worked together so much this year," said the first place Original Oratory winner about accepting her trophy at the same time Linn accepted one for second place (Linn took first in "Extemp"). "Our speeches have so much of each other in them. Seeing him win is like seeing part of me win and vice versa."

Debate captain and state champion Joshua Tupler credits a large part of the team's success to the coaches' experience and perspectives. He notes in particular former coach Steven Schappaugh's contributions (now a USchool administrator) because he encouraged students to take on such leadership positions as peer coach.

"A lot of seniors and even some of the underclassmen have been stepping up and working with younger students," Tupler said. "We realize that instead of having individual strife, or trying to compete against somebody else on your team, if you work together you can learn more quickly and achieve a lot more."

The balance of competing while helping fellow teammates is repeated in the team's strong focus, but laid back approach to participation levels.

"[Speech and Debate] is one of the best activities that you can do in high school," Tupler said. "You can get as much or as little out of it as you want. You can go to one tournament a year, or you can go compete at 10-15 universities across the country. You can go see Harvard, Yale, Emory and all sorts of universities. No other activity in our school is going to allow you to compete on a national level and also walk through Times Square for fun."