



Georgetown District High School's Debate & Politics Club had a couple of its two-person teams finish in the top eight of the recent provincial high school debate championships in Ottawa. Pictured above (from left) are students Kylie de Chastelain, Dryden Bailey, Holly Kallmeyer and Chelsea Jackson.
Photo by Eamonn Maher

No debate, GDHS team is great

By **EAMONN MAHER**
Staff Writer

For argument's sake, let's just accept the notion of those who say that debating should be considered a sport.

If that's the case, then members of Georgetown District High School's Debate & Politics Club have represented the school's Rebel nickname just as proudly and loudly as any athlete wearing blue and red colours.

The only school in Ontario to send two teams to the recent provincial high school debate competition in Ottawa, both of Georgetown's two-person entries finished in the top eight out of the 32 entries at the event, qualifying all four students for the Canadian championships as well.

Holly Kallmeyer and Kylie de Chastelain were runners-up in the Ontario final, defeated 4-3 in the judges' split decision to Upper Canada College on the topic of the hypothetical existence of God, while the second GDHS team of Dryden Bailey and Chelsea Jackson finished eighth.

The accomplishments are made even more remarkable when considering that debating is an extra-curricular activity at GDHS and that the mostly male competition they engage usually have more resources and experience to draw upon.

"Particularly because in the debate community, there are a ton of private schools and they have really established debate programs in classes at school that start in Grades 6 or 7, so by the time they get to high school they've had a few years of practice," said Grade 12 student de Chastelain.

"That's not how it works in the public school system, so it's fun to walk into a tournament and really shake things up. I think by the end of provincials we had earned the respect of a lot of the coaches there. The final was really close and it felt like winning anyway. We were proud of what we brought."

de Chastelain was one of the first to sign up when the debate club was founded at GDHS four years ago by teachers Melissa

and Hugh Watson and there are currently about 20 students who meet after school from September to June.

The team is sponsored by the local law office of Richard T. Howitt and often travels to weekend tournaments through the year, having sent Kallmeyer and de Chastelain to the nationals in Regina in 2009.

This time around, due to exam commitments, the two GDHS teams weren't be able to attend last week's national championships they qualified for in Victoria, B.C.

A debate tournament usually consists of four rounds—two prepared topics and two impromptu sessions in which the participants have just 15 minutes to form their arguments without referencing print materials or electronic media, or they'll be disqualified.

"Sometimes when you get up there, you literally have no idea what they're talking about, but you have to get up and try to speak intelligently on a topic you don't know anything about for eight minutes and hope that the people on the other side don't know more than you do," said first-year member Jackson, a Grade 11 student.

The key to a successful two-person debate team, the students explained, is to be compatible and complement the partner's argument, even when defending an opinion on a subject that the debater may personally disagree with.

"We show up for a tournament and talk for eight minutes, but for that eight minutes it takes you hours and hours of preparing and studying," said Bailey, a Grade 12 student.

At the provincials in Ottawa, a sizeable crowd was in attendance at the Liberal caucus room on Parliament Hill for the impromptu-format finals that became boisterous at times, as arguments were lobbed back and forth.

There is a code of debate etiquette, however, that would put MPs down the street to shame.

"We'd like to think we're a little more classier than that. It's pretty formal," Kallmeyer said.

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