

Judge Obligations

Newcomers to judging often find themselves at a loss to understand what exactly is required of them, and more important, *why* it's required. Sometimes you feel as if they've forgotten all about you, abandoning you to the bitter coffee in the judges' lounge and never calling you to do what you signed up to do. Other times, it seems as if you're running all over creation, judging every round without a moment's break. And worst of all, there are times when they're making you to stay an extra day when your own team is no longer debating. What's going on here, anyhow? Are these people that bad at running a tournament?

The short answer to that last question is, probably not. It's just the way things are.

Sometimes Every Round, Sometimes Not

At the average tournaments, there are just about enough judges to make the thing run. If, say, 20 judges are needed, there's roughly 20 judges in the place to do the job. This is especially true of smaller, local high school events. In these situations, yes, you will judge a lot. While the tournament-running software does its best to spread things around, things can only be spread as far as the numbers allow.

At bigger tournaments, there are usually more judges than the absolute minimum. This means that you'll get more time off; occasionally, if the tournament is *really* big and has enough surplus judging, you'll only judge one or two rounds. You are not being forgotten or ignored; you're being given a fair share of the judging rounds.

By the way, some tournaments obligate judges for a certain number of rounds, rather than to cover a certain number of teams. That is, you might be in to judge 3 rounds or 4 rounds or 6 rounds or whatever, as compared to being available for all rounds. If you are at one of these tournaments, keep in mind that this burden is for prelims only; the number does not include elimination rounds. All judges are usually obligated for the elims regardless of how many rounds they judged, or were obligated to judge, in the prelims.

Lincoln-Douglas

This next applies to parents who get drawn into judging LD. Many tournaments have what is called Mutual Judge Preferences, where the teams that are debating rank the judges in advance. Most (but not all) teams want to be judged by college students or certain coaches, so parent judges are usually not highly prioritized. In these situations, the cold truth is that you might indeed spend much of your time in the judges' lounge. Later in the tournament, however, when the top priority judges are adjudicating the more difficult rounds determining who will make it into the elims, you might finally pick up a ballot or two among those teams mathematically

incapable of breaking. This does not mean your work is unimportant. All teams are due a serious judge who does their best to make a good decision, and those teams you see are going to be fighting just as hard as the undefeateds. And honestly, although you may not have been their first choice as a judge, you're probably in their second or third tier, which means that they determined in advance that you are the right person for the job. So, overall, as an inexperienced LD judge you might spend what seems to be an inordinate amount of time hanging around, but this means that the tournament is doing its job for the students, as are you. Your presence is appreciated both when you're standing by and when you're actively judging.

I Wanna Go Home!!!

The biggest question tournaments face from newcomer judges is why they have to hang around to judge elimination rounds once their school is eliminated. The answer is simple: It's the arithmetic.

Let's say that a tournament breaks to an octafinals round. That means 16 teams advance. Now if only their own judges were available, that would mean there would be 16 judges. The thing is, elimination rounds require 3 judges in each round. In this case, that would mean 24 judges. Where are those judges going to come from if everyone who isn't still in the tournament has gone home?

This arithmetic applies to every elimination round. Tournaments always need more judges than just the judges of the teams debating. Not only that, but given the possibility of no-shows for illness or the like, and the various strikes and preferences that usually apply in a tournament, they need more than just the bare overage. For the elims, tournaments need a lot of judges on hand, some of whom might not actually get an assignment.

The good news is that, at a big tournament, it is not unusual for the tab room to post a list of standby judges obligated for the elim rounds. In these cases, there actually are so many judges at the tournament that tab can safely allow some folks to call it a day. A responsible tab room will create this list with an eye on travel distance, and will factor in preference/strike prioritization. The tab room will do the best they can. But their first duty is to the students, not the judges.

So here's the rule of thumb. If you are signed up to judge a tournament, prepare to judge the whole tournament. The standard obligation is one round past one's own school's participation, although some tournaments vary. Make sure you know exactly what's expected at every tournament. Needless to say, if your students were in it to the end, you wouldn't be leaving early. And if your students were still in it, you would want the other judges at the tournament to fulfill their obligations to stay and judge them. If you are on the opposite side of the equation, your standing by to

judge insures that the other students at the tournament get the same treatment you would expect for your students.

And by the way, what about your students? After all, the tournament is for them, not for you. If your students didn't make it into elimination rounds, they most likely need to improve. And one of the best ways for them to learn to get better is to watch the students who did get into the elimination rounds. What are they doing that your students didn't do? What arguments are winning or losing on a given topic? Who do your students have to scout out to beat next time? Virtually every experienced coach in the country insists that their teams not debating in the elim rounds must watch the elim rounds. It's a given. Simply put, the students who go home early and skip elimination rounds can pretty much guarantee that their entire careers will comprise going home early and not being a part of the elimination rounds. You're doing your students a disservice by taking them home early.

To wrap things up, yes, judging a high school debate tournament can be a chore. But it is a chore in aid of one of the best educational experiences high schoolers can have. Thank you for giving up your time for your school, and for every other school, to enable this experience.