

RAISE THE BLUE BANNER—THERE'S NO ROOM FOR ARGUMENT: KU'S DEBATE TEAM IS THE BEST IN THE LAND

(By Joe Miller)

While other Kansas seniors are enjoying spring break on beaches in Florida, Brett Bricker is in cold, damp Lawrence, his nose buried in books. He reads all day, every day, taking short breaks now and then to grab some food. And he keeps reading while he eats. At night he can't sleep, so he gets up and reads some more, plowing through thick, mind-numbing books about the global economy and farm subsidies, and dense articles culled from peer-reviewed journals.

It's grueling, but this is March—tournament time. Bricker knows he must give his all if he wants to bring the national championship trophy back to KU.

When he needs a break from reading, he trudges across an empty campus to Bailey Hall, downstairs to the basement, to meet with his teammate, fellow senior Nate Johnson. It's a messy place, with tables and study carrels stacked with books and photocopied articles, reams and reams of them, and accordion tile folders and pens and highlighters. And trophies. Lots and lots of trophies.

"There's too many trophies," he says. "Not enough room for all of them."

But Bricker, a math major, and Johnson, a double major in philosophy and political science, have spent four years doing all they can to add to the clutter. They first set foot in this place when they were high school students and were blown away by the winning tradition showcased on its walls, which are covered with banners: yellow and red for Final Four finishes, burgundy for ending the regular season ranked No. 1, and four KU blue ones for national championships: 1954, 1970, 1976 and 1983. "When you get here, you want to work as hard as you can to enshrine your name here," Johnson says.

Among the banners are several bearing their names, each for perfectly admirable accomplishments such as earning top seed in a championship tournament or finishing in the finals or Final Four. But those aren't good enough for Bricker and Johnson. The banners that bear their names aren't Jayhawk blue.

Folks sometimes compare KU's debate program to its storied basketball program. But that's really doing a disservice to debate. Over the past 50 years, the Jayhawks won the National Debate Tournament four times, made it to the NDT Final Four on 13 occasions, and have qualified for the tourney every year since 1968.

And, unlike basketball, they do it all without the benefit of full-ride scholarships. The Jayhawk debate squad, a perennial national top 10, is a team of walk-ons. "Our students debate because they love debate," says coach Scott Harris.

Despite its success, Kansas doesn't attract the nation's top high school debaters the way rivals do. Other top-ranked debate programs, such as Northwestern, Emory, Harvard, Dartmouth and California-Berkeley, reload every season with champion debaters from the best prep schools in the country. Kansas builds its success with in-state students who had little opportunity to compete at the national level.

"Kansas has a great tradition of taking kids who weren't especially good debaters in high school and making them into champions," Bricker says.

He and Johnson are perfect examples. Both debated in high school, Johnson in Manhattan and Bricker in Wichita. And though both qualified for the national championship tournament, along with hundreds of other kids, neither made it to elimination rounds, much less the Final Four or championship.

Yet now they're heading into the final tournament of their college careers, the storied National Debate Tournament, as the second-ranked team in the nation, having been edged out of the top spot by Northwestern in February after a season-long, neck-and-neck battle.

It would have been nice to finish No. 1, of course. But in the big scheme of things, it doesn't matter. All that matters now—in-deed, maybe all that ever has mattered—is the NDT.

Last year, Kansas got knocked out in the Elite Eight. Same thing the year before.

Now the Jayhawks have one last chance to win it for themselves, and for their coach, who, despite an outstanding record in his 18 years in Lawrence, has never won the big one.

Harris came to Lawrence in 1991, after a five-year stint as director of debate for the University of Louisville, where, truth be told, he was beginning to feel disillusioned with the game. It's a high burnout activity," he explains.

Observing Bricker and Johnson as they prepare for the NDT, it's easy to see why. Each works more than 40 hours a week on debate during the regular season, much more at championship time. This is in addition to school. And neither of them sloughs off their schoolwork. Both are graduating with honors and have shored up plans to continue their studies, Johnson in law school and Bricker as a master's student in KU's communication studies program.

Coaching is even more demanding. In addition to managing several dozen debaters and nine assistant coaches (grad students in the communication studies department), and traveling to 18 tournaments a year, Harris also teaches two classes each semester.

Yet he feels more excited about debate today than ever, he says, "because of the quality of students we've had here at Kansas. I really feel like I've been spoiled. We've had really good people. I don't know what it is about Kansas. Maybe it's something in the water that produces kids of high character."

Also, he gets a lot of help from the administration and alumni. Support for debate has always been strong. It helps, for instance, that the chair of the communication studies department is not only a former KU debater but also a national champion: Professor Robert Rowland, c'77, PhD'83, won the NDT in 1976 with teammate Frank Cross, c'77. But support strengthened in 2001, when Chancellor Robert E. Hemenway formed the KU Debate Advisory Committee, a group of faculty and alumni that raises funds for the program and builds community across generations of KU debaters.

Mark Gidley, c'83, c'83, who serves on the committee and helped win Kansas' last national championship, in 1983, says the effort has benefited the program and alumni. "We've had a number of reunions," he says. "It's been amazing to make connections between debaters from the '40s and '50s and the '80s and '90s and to see that we all had the same experiences."

RECOGNIZING THE MOUNTAIN VIEW LITTLE LEAGUE'S ALL-STAR BASEBALL TEAM

HON. HARRY E. MITCHELL

OF ARIZONA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, September 15, 2009

Mr. MITCHELL. Madam Speaker, I rise today in recognition of the Mountain View Little League's All-Star team, which won the

2009 Junior League Baseball World Series. I share the pride of from around my Congressional District and state that this inspiring and hard-working team hails from our community.

After a 24-game winning streak, the Scottsdale-based team claimed the World Series title, beating a team from Aruba. However, it is not just their impressive record or title that makes them an exceptional team. Their qualities of dedication, hard work and perseverance brought the team to victory. As a former teacher and coach, I know from experience the importance of these values, which are essential both on and off the field.

Therefore, I am truly privileged to celebrate the win of such a determined and good-spirited team. The team's heart and unity has paid off and should serve as an inspiration for all. I have high hopes for all members of the team and I am confident that they will continue to make Arizona proud, whether in baseball or any other future endeavors.

Madam Speaker, I am honored to enter into CONGRESSIONAL RECORD the names of the Mountain View Little League's All-Star team: Jake Anderson, Dylan Cozens, Michael DeRegis, Jimmy DiTroia, Cody Erickson, Lucas Jacobi, Zac Janikis, Grant Martinez, Duncan Morfitt, Ryan Riggs, Michael Salazar, Luc Trotta, Mo White; Coaches Jim DiTroia, Darin Trotta and Manager Steve Erickson.

TRIBUTE TO MIDLAND BERRYHILL AMERICAN LEGION POST 165 BASEBALL TEAM

HON. DAVE CAMP

OF MICHIGAN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, September 15, 2009

Mr. CAMP. Madam Speaker, I rise today to commend the team members of the Midland Berryhill American Legion Post 165 baseball team on winning the American Legion World Series on Tuesday, August 18, 2009. They have represented the state well with their perseverance and athleticism, and we are very proud of their national accomplishments.

Berryhill's 11-4 win over the Medford, Oregon Mustangs completed a five-game unbeaten run through the World Series. This is Berryhill's first ever national championship.

Additionally, Berryhill, a 19 and under travel team comprised of players from mid-Michigan and rooted in Midland, consistently outscored their opponents with strong hitting and solid defense throughout the series.

Team members include: Cole Martin, Kenny Babinski, Jordon Herman, Larsen Cronkright, Garrett Yatch, Nate Kuehne, Jordon Dean, Sean Hartman, Alex Rapanos, Eric Dawson, Matt Cresswell, Kenton SanMiguel, Ryan Longsteth, Kyle O'Boyle, Ben Singer, Eric Peterson, Chad Mayle, Max Yatch, and Jake Enszer. The team's coaching staff includes Dan Cronkright, and Patrick Dawson, while Steve Cronkright serves as the team manager.

I am honored today to recognize the Midland Berryhill American Legion Post 165 baseball team for their accomplishments, and congratulate them on their outstanding performance.