

When I went to Kentucky Debate Institute this summer, I did not know what I had gotten myself into. I had decided to go for one sole reason: to make myself a better debater. However, before the end of camp, I learned a lesson that I would never forget, "No pain, no gain."

During the first morning assembly, the introductions of my teachers blew me away. First, there was Cyndy Woodhouse, the debate coach of Iowa City West High School, who successfully sent students to the Tournament of Champions as well as the National Forensics League. Second, Patrick Mahoney, a recent high school graduate, not only had consistent success in numerous tournaments, but also won Greenhill Fall Classic, the Wake Forest National Earlybird, and the University of Texas Longhorn Classic championships. Finally, there was Jason Baldwin, unofficially known as "The Winningest," because he competed in almost every known tournament during his time and won them.

The sheer amount of brainpower in the room was truly astonishing. A question kept revolving in my head, "How did they rise to such heights?"

Two weeks later, I got my answer. Patrick had become furious with my group. Although he had reminded us time and time again to fix our cases and write rebuttal arguments, we hadn't. As a result, we lost our final round of debates miserably. Pacing back and forth, Patrick yelled into our faces, "You have to submerge yourself into debate. How do you think I won all those tournaments? It was not merely by writing a case and then saying, 'Oh, I'm done now.' I spent hours doing research. I spent hours perfecting my case. I spent hours writing rebuttal arguments. That's how I got as far as I did. With no pain, there is no gain."

Suddenly, everything became crystal clear. Initially, I had thought that good debaters had good coaches. I believed the lack of good debaters in our school was due to the lack of a good coach. Finally I realized that it was not the coach that made the difference. What made the difference was the time and effort a debater put in. Patrick had put in a lot of time and effort into his cases and rebuttal arguments. It was his hard work and persistence that allowed him to rise to the top.

My conclusion was further reinforced when I learned about Tom Geirn, one of the debaters attending the camp. He had been among the finalists in the National Forensics League Tournament and also had successes in other tournaments. While he had an excellent and devoted coach, Tom had gone every single day after school to discuss with his coach about anything related to debate, from current resolution to general philosophy. It was his devotion that has made him one of the finest debaters in the country.

So in the end, not only did I come out of debate camp with more experience, but I also came out with a valuable lesson. I realized that regardless of how intelligent you are, in order to reach the top, you need to put forth the best effort, fueled by the passion and drive for the subject. After all, "No pain, no gain."