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Contact: Bob Aaron, 309/556-3181

Illinois Wesleyan Debate Squad Scores Victories in Rookie Season

Editor's Note: *Ashwin Kapur, a freshman math and economics double major born in New Delhi, India, is one of the Illinois Wesleyan University students profiled in this story.*

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.--In its rookie season, Illinois Wesleyan University's debate squad scored two first place finishes in tournaments at Illinois State University and Augustana College.

With the 1994-95 debate season barely over, the six-member team and its coach, Political Science Professor Bob Leh, are setting their sights on next year and a run at district-level or national competitions.

Spearheading the junior varsity division victories were freshmen Derrick Eihausen, a business administration major from Belleville, Ill., and Ashwin Kapur, a mathematics and economics major from New Delhi, India.

Eihausen debated for four years at Belleville East High School. He and his partner won the Illinois High School Debate Championship and qualified for the National Forensic League Debate Competition finals for two consecutive years. Eihausen debated issues ranging from space exploration and housing the homeless, to national health care and protecting the environment.

"My partner and I became known as a regional powerhouse in high school," Eihausen recalled. "We won 70 percent of the tournaments we entered."

Kapur also debated for four years at Doon High School in New Delhi, winning four all-India debates. He began his debate career by getting into a tussle with a teacher. "My teacher thought I did something wrong," Kapur recalled, "and I argued with him over it. I convinced him he was wrong, so he said, 'Why don't you go out for debate.'"

The IWU debate squad scored its first victory at the Redbird Classic, hosted by Illinois State University in Normal. The January tournament

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attracted 15-20 campuses, including Northwestern University, Miami University (Ohio), Wayne State University, University of Louisville, University of Iowa, and Augustana College.

"We didn't expect to win at ISU," Kapur said. "We were going against some schools with experience in 25-30 debates and it was our first season."

The second victory came this month at Augustana College, where the competitive field included Case Western Reserve University, John Carroll, Southeast Oklahoma University, and other campuses.

"By the time we got to Augustana," Eihausen said, "Ashwin and I knew our debate styles much better--we knew what to expect from each other and we functioned as a team and went undefeated. That in itself was a serious accomplishment.

"We learned," Eihausen added, "that hard work and preparation can get you over almost any barrier."

Debaters across the country squared off last season over federal judicial procedures with regard to sentencing and pre-trial detention procedures.

The debate squad got off to a shaky start in October at the Motor City Classic in Detroit, where IWU fielded two teams:

"Each team," Leh said, "debated eight rounds. One team lost all eight rounds. The other team won one round. But we learned what it was like to compete in an intercollegiate debate tournament. We lost because we didn't have enough evidence" to support our affirmative and negative positions.

The team regrouped, building a highly organized and indexed evidence file that filled two large rubber tubs and a bankers cardboard box file. The squad searched for evidence in periodicals, newspapers, books, and the Lexus/Nexus computerized database. Tactics were overhauled, especially their negative arguments, which are tougher to fashion. Kapur also convinced Eihausen to join the debate squad.

While an experienced debater, Kapur had to adjust to the U.S. style of debate. In India, debating is based on an English model, which places a premium on logic. U.S. debate style stresses evidence to support affirmative

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and negative arguments.

"We got a lot of evidence," Kapur said, "about 3,000 pages of information. We filed and organized it. We had to know where everything was" to be able to pull it out quickly in the midst of debate.

The students built their research around quotations and statistics, Leh explained, adding: "The idea is to make a framework for an argument and fill it with as much evidence as possible. It's as though the amount of evidence is the key to victory."

Because of the evidence emphasis, the debate squad has set a goal of recruiting more members. "You can't win a debate without good evidence," Kapur explained. "It's very difficult to get good evidence with just a few people doing the research. We also need to develop a debate lab, equipped with computers, Lexus/Nexus, reference books on debate policy and strategy, and forensic journals, as well as a room to practice debating."

Eihausen pointed out the squad competed in the junior varsity category because of the newness of the IWU debate program. Leh added that IWU was in the junior varsity category because the team was made up of freshmen.

"Until about 15 years ago," said Leh, who was a debater as an undergraduate at Lafayette College, "IWU had a debate team, but it was abolished with the Speech Department.

"IWU's old debate team," Leh added, "would go right down the line in tournaments, winning a lot of first and second place finishes. We always did well. We had a trophy case in Shaw Hall and it was full of trophies students had won in debate and speech going back to the 30's. I'd like to see a new trophy case with some of the old trophies and new ones that we're going to win--that will link our past and present success."

Leh believes debate helps train students to think quickly on their feet and marshall large amounts of information, which is useful in business, legal, medical, and education situations. However, it does not sharpen students' public speaking skills, according to Leh, since "debate is jargonesque" and filled with terms that don't communicate easily with the general public. Debate also stresses a "sprint" style of talking--a rapid-fire

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speaking style that is antithetical to normal communication, Leh explained, pointing out that the average faculty member or student couldn't understand it.

The rigid debate format--with its affirmative and negative presentations, rebuttals, and cross examinations--generally takes about two hours. Judges compare evidence and analyze presentations for about 30 minutes and generally give the debaters a 15-20-minute critique. The arcane traditions surrounding debate include students speaking from a podium fashioned from a 20-gallon rubber tub crammed with files and evidence designed to support their position or demolish an opponent's case. Debaters time each other with a West Bend kitchen timer purchased at Wal-Mart. Leh pointed out that debate competition is strong, but so is cooperation, with teams sharing evidence cards.

Kapur believes top-notch debaters should be able to understand an argument quickly and have the ability to speak quickly to present as much evidence as possible in the shortest time. Good debates, Kapur explained, should be able to work in a team to divide up work and be able to think many steps ahead.

Eihausen puts a premium on strong research skills and the ability to analyze issues from multiple angles to see correlations and distinctions. You also must be able to argue a case, Eihausen said, regardless of personal preferences.

"It almost takes a fearlessness in competition," Eihausen explained, "to find yourself saying things you don't believe in--but you do so to win."

Debate strategy, Eihausen said, hinges on putting your opponent in the weakest possible position, while allowing yourself the greatest credibility in your arguments.

"Your initial move should be a death blow," Eihausen said. "Go for the heart in the first couple of speeches, pointing out the ludicrousness of your opponent's positions compared to your truth."

The IWU debate squad is looking forward to July, when the national debate topic for the 1995-96 season will be fixed and they can start to gather evidence.

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Other members of the IWU debate squad are:

- Ann Marie Anandappa, a freshman international development studies major from River Forest, Ill.
- Ron Provine, a freshman economics major from Buckley, Ill.
- Anurag Sanyal, a senior mathematics major from Wooster, Ohio.
- Ali Zaidi, a freshman biology major from Hanover Park, Ill.

IWU, founded in 1850, enrolls about 1,800 students in a College of Liberal Arts, College of Fine Arts, and a four-year professional School of Nursing. In recent years, the university's endowment has grown to more than \$92 million; a \$15 million athletics and recreation center opened in the fall of 1994; and a \$24 million science building will open in 1995. The Carnegie Commission for the Advancement of Teaching promoted Illinois Wesleyan to a "Baccalaureate I" institution in 1994, a classification that places it among 164 highly selective National Liberal Arts Colleges in the annual *U.S. News & World Report* rankings. *U.S. News* ranks IWU the second most efficient national liberal arts college--a key gauge of the campus' quality academic program and relatively reasonable cost. *Barron's Profiles of American Colleges*, another respected college guide, rated IWU "highly competitive (+)" in its latest edition. IWU's 1994 freshman class scored an average 27.9 on the ACT exam, compared to the national average of 20.7.