CONTEMPORARY ARGUMENTATION AND DEBATE
21 (2000): 22-32

A Quantitative Analysis of Eight Versus Six Rounds of Preliminary Competition

Kelly M. McDonald and Jeffrey W. Jarman

Tournament competition has become a common experience for academic debaters in the later half of the twentieth century. Match competition, the prevailing debate format in the early 1900s, gave way to multiple school tournaments by the late 1940s (Freeley and Steinberg 19). While the manner in which debate competition occurs has become uniform, there is less agreement on the format for individual tournaments. Notably, most tournaments now use either six or eight preliminary rounds of competition.[1]

Several considerations go into the format of a tournament. A tournament host, for example, has numerous criteria that affect the decision to use six or eight preliminary rounds of competition. Some tournaments use six rounds in order to accommodate a "full service" schedule, offering individual events as well as multiple forms of debate. Some tournaments occur over fewer days requiring the use of fewer preliminary rounds. Some tournaments have fewer entries necessitating fewer preliminary rounds for ease of scheduling, while other tournaments have significantly larger entries allowing more preliminary rounds for greater differentiation among teams.

In addition to concerns that hosts may have when scheduling preliminary rounds, coaches and debaters make travel decisions based on the number of preliminary rounds. Some schools, especially those with smaller travel budgets, may opt for fewer rounds (and therefore fewer days of travel-related expenses) in order to save money. Furthermore, the grueling nature of tournament competition affects the desired number of preliminary rounds. Some students want as much competition as they can get. One student commented that

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[1] While some tournaments may employ a 7 preliminary round model, a review of the tournament calendar in the *AFA Newsletter* reveals an overwhelming majority of tournaments ascribe to either a 6 or 8 preliminary round format.

"given the amount of time we spend at these tournaments, I want to debate a lot" (Engstrom n. pag.). Other students have echoed this thought as well (Hernandez n. pag.). By contrast, some appreciate a more relaxed schedule to compensate for the intensity of the experience. As one coach recently noted, "Going to six round [tournaments] is one of the most important factors for the University of Louisville in deciding future travel schedules. . . . I want to coach for thirty years and be an academic. The only possibility for this occur requires radical change in the CEDA/NDT debate community" (Warner n. pag.).

Concerns by tournament directors, coaches and debaters are not easy to resolve. Each program evaluates the various tournament options and selects tournaments based on several factors, including the number of preliminary rounds. The purpose of this study is not to pass judgment on the superiority of one system over another. Instead, we attempt to address a separate and relatively unconsidered question: Does the addition of two preliminary rounds significantly change the competitive outcome of the tournament? In order to understand this question, we look at two important measures of tournament outcome – final tournament seeding and the teams advancing into elimination rounds.

Discussions of tournament format are not new. Several authors, both in published journals and online discussions, have commented on the strengths and weaknesses of all relevant options. Gow and Mills each noted the overall negative impact of tournament debating on students' learning and ethical presentation practices, Petelle and Petelle and Olson focus on the impact of practices related to tournament administration, and Klopf reviewed the variety of events and practices during tournaments. While each of these articles highlight important considerations about the evolution of tournament debating in this country, most focus on broad concerns about the pedagogical benefits or determinants of students' competing in win-loss debating competition. More recent online discussions illuminate more clear discussions of tradeoffs over tournament format models. Mancuso noted how one of his debaters remarked that a six round tournament over four days was too much time away from school for the number of rounds of competition, and Newnam noted a benefit to a six round tournament might be to step back from the "professionalized pressure and draining experience" of eight round tournaments (n. pag.).

In most cases, the authors provide anecdotal evidence in support of their position. What is missing from the discussion is firm empirical data to distinguish between competing alternatives. As Church has argued: "We need some empirical research on 6 vs. 8 and other

round number (sic) and perhaps time limit alternatives to study what is talked about so easily and without evidence on the listserv" (n. pag.).

Church's clarion call for empirical research is not unanimously accepted. Zompetti, for example, argues against the use of empirical evidence, questioning "the faith in empiricism," asserting that "empirical research hardly seems to be the answer," and opining that individual comments concerning tournament experiences are "insightful" (n. pag.) However, empiricism does appear to be appropriate in this case. First, the "experience" to which Zompetti refers is inherently anecdotal, and thus an invitation to hasty generalization. Empirical studies neither displace nor devalue qualitative research, and they certainly represent a mode of inquiry that needs no defense. In fact, it seems more presumptuous to reject the objective examination of collective experience in favor of individual encounters. Second, there are two concerns to be addressed here: those matters of personal preference called into being by individual experiences not subject to empirical investigation, and the factual evidence of collective experience that is *best* illuminated by empirical research. Pedagogical and personal preferences have been debated through the various threads of the listserv discussion. Church's appeal is for that discussion to be informed by empirical investigation. His point is that anecdotes and subjective intuition are, taken alone, insufficient and should be linked to empirical investigation. It is at this point that this study enters the discussion.

One empirical study has examined the effects of the number of preliminary rounds on tournament outcome. Kemp and Marr investigated whether moving from six to eight rounds changed which teams cleared to elimination rounds and whether it allowed teams to participate in the final round. They concluded: "The data gave little support to the premise that the addition of two rounds affects the eventual winner of that tournament" (Kemp and Marr 15).

While this investigation certainly has merit, it falls short of providing a complete analysis of the effects of two additional preliminary rounds. First, Kemp and Marr provide no data regarding changes in seeding. Since seeding alters elimination round competition, it is important to consider this change. Second, the Kemp and Marr provide an incomplete analysis of the effect on teams clearing. While focusing on the eventual winner is interesting, two additional preliminary rounds could affect many other teams. A complete analysis would include analyzing the effect on all teams clearing and failing to clear based on the additional two preliminary rounds.

Methodology

Hypotheses. In response to these considerations, we propose two hypotheses to test the impact of number of rounds of competition on tournament seeding and elimination round participation.

H_1: Two additional rounds of preliminary competition significantly changes the final seeding order for the tournament, and

H_2: Two additional rounds of preliminary competition significantly changes the composition of the list of teams advancing to the elimination debates.

Data Collection Procedures. Results from five tournaments were collected and analyzed in this study. All tournament data were taken from the Open division of the Baylor University Glenn R. Capp Debates.[2] Each tournament involved between 54 and 61 debate teams, and held eight rounds of preliminary competition.[3] The Baylor tournament uses Richard Edward's tournament tabulation software, and the computations for this study were performed on data taken from the tabulation software databases.

Data Analysis Procedures. Results sheets were printed for each tournament after six and eight rounds of competition. Four data points were collected on each team: seeding after six rounds, seeding after eight rounds, win-loss record after six rounds, and loss record after eight rounds.

The seeding data were analyzed in three ways: First, seeding pairs for the entire division were created with each team's seeding after six rounds compared to their seeding after eight rounds. The resulting data pairs were then correlated by calculating the Spearman's rho (ρ) rank-order correlation coefficient. Second, the top sixteen seeds after six rounds of competition were selected out of each set and compared to their seeding after eight rounds. This limited comparison of the top sixteen teams is particularly useful. The top sixteen teams represent a "clean" octofinals break. Many tournaments use the top sixteen as a breaking point for advancing teams to the elimination debates, and sixteen teams is considered a conventional level for beginning the eliminations. Also, there was a

[2] The data for this project is taken from tournaments held in 1993, 1995, 1997, 1998, and 1999. The authors would like to thank Dr. Karla Leeper and Dr. Richard Edwards for providing access to the tournament data.

[3] Computer data revealed that the tournaments were paired with three initial pre-set rounds, and then alternated high-low and high-high debates for the remaining preliminary rounds of competition. High-low matching was used in the even numbered rounds and high-high matching was used the odd numbered rounds.

need to find a common denominator for the five tournaments used in this study. Each of the tournaments involved a different number of teams, and the tournaments advanced different numbers of teams to the eliminations. A comparison involving only the top sixteen teams provided a consistent and clear measurement for analyzing the seeding changes. The seedings of the teams in the top sixteen teams list after six rounds was compared to their seeding after eight rounds. The resulting data pairs were again correlated by calculating the Spearman's rho (ρ) rank-order correlation coefficient. Finally, the seeding pairs of the top sixteen teams after six rounds were analyzed to determine the difference in each teams' seed after eight rounds. This difference was used to calculate an average change-in-seed score measuring the effect of the extra two rounds for the teams in the top sixteen sample.

The win-loss record data were analyzed by identifying those teams for whom an additional two rounds conceivably could affect the opportunity to advance to the tournament elimination debates. For each of the five tournaments, a 4-2 record would have been required to advance to the eliminations following six rounds, and a 5-3 record would have been required to advance to the eliminations following eight rounds.

Significance Levels. The alpha level for H_1 and H_2 seed correlation analysis was set at a conventional .05 level. The alpha level for H_2 win-loss analysis was set at an arbitrary 20% of the population.

Results

Seeding Analysis. The results of seeding correlations for all competitors and for the top sixteen teams for each tournament are reported in Table 1. The Spearman's rho (ρ) calculations indicate that no significant change in seeding occurred following the two additional preliminary rounds. Each of the five tournaments shows a strong correlation between the seeding after six and seeding after eight rounds, with correlation values ranging from $\rho = +.909$ to $\rho = +.954$. All five correlations surpassed the threshold of statistical significance. The strength of the correlations are lower when only the top sixteen teams are analyzed, but are still quite strong, ranging from $\rho = +.609$ to $\rho = +.715$. Once again, all five correlations were statistically significant. Based on the seeding rank-order correlations for both the list of all competitors and the top sixteen teams, H1 is not supported by our data.

The results of the average change in seed show a slightly different picture of the effect of two additional debates, however. The average change in seeding between round six and round eight is -2.04. In other words, the average team slips two places down in seed with

the addition of two extra debates. This overall change in seed appears slight. Indeed, it would seem that dropping two places for the vast majority of teams in the top sixteen would not result in their failure to qualify for the elimination rounds.

Table 1
Correlation Coefficients
Seeding after Six and Eight Rounds of Competition

Tournament	Number of Entries	All competitors (ρ)	Top 16 (ρ)
1993	60	.949	.624
1995	54	.927	.715
1997	57	.925	.609
1998	54	.909	.712
1999	61	.954	.650
Cumulative	286	.935	.656

Note: All correlations were significant at the .01 level (2-tailed), except the top sixteen for 1997, which was significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).

Win-Loss Record Analysis. The teams conceivably affected by two additional preliminary rounds were those "on the bubble" (teams with a 3-3 or 4-2 record after six debates). Any team with three wins after six rounds could conceivably qualify for the eliminations with wins in rounds seven and eight, even though their record after six debates would not have been sufficient. Likewise, any team with four wins after six rounds could conceivably fail to qualify by losing both rounds seven and eight, even though their record after six debates would have been sufficient. Teams with fewer than three or more than four wins after six debates were not affected by two additional rounds; either they already had the five wins necessary for advancing, or it already was impossible for them to achieve the five win plateau.

Our data analysis indicates a significant change in the list of teams eligible to advance to the elimination debates after two additional preliminary rounds. At the five tournaments analyzed in this study, there were 138 teams on the bubble after six preliminary rounds, or 48.3% of the total population. Of those teams, 77 had a 3-3 record after six debates and would not have been eligible for the eliminations. However, 19 of those teams won their final two debates, giving them the 5-3 record required to advance after eight rounds. In

addition, there were 61 teams with a 4-2 record after six debates, which means they would have been eligible for the eliminations. Of those teams, 10 lost both rounds seven and eight, which means they no longer were on the list of eligible teams.

The net result of these two comparisons suggests that having two additional debates does affect the tournament experience, as defined by whether or not teams advance to the elimination debates and compete for the tournament championship. In this study, holding two additional debates affected nearly one of every two teams entered in the tournaments. Of those teams, 29 (21%) had their tournament experience changed – 19 positively and 10 negatively – by holding the extra two debates. This represents a change of just over 21 percent in the composition of the list of teams eligible for the elimination debates based on win-loss records. Thus, based on our analysis of win-loss data from the five tournaments, H_2 is supported.

Discussion

The purpose of this study is not to provide the final word on tournament format for directors, coaches and programs. Rather, it provides some useful and important insights on the empirical effects of additional preliminary rounds. Personal testimonies, however moving, should not be the only evidence used to assess the strength or weakness of a particular tournament format. These anecdotes should be combined with empirical support on the issue. This study provides data on the effect of two additional preliminary rounds on tournament outcome. There are several conclusions that can be drawn from the results:

The hypothesis that two extra preliminary debates affects the overall seeding of teams was not supported, as reflected in statistically significant rank-order correlations for the total population, all of which were at the +.90 level or higher. Although the rank-order correlations for the top 16 teams sample were much lower, none were so low as to generate support for the hypothesis. The change-in-seed analysis, however, somewhat belies that finding. In fact, an analysis of the average change in seeding suggests that some change does occur. The average team loses two places in seeding as a result of two additional preliminary debates. While this change is not statistically significant, in the context of a debate tournament it can be very important. On the average, four teams per tournament are affected by the change-in-seed in a consequential fashion – two teams lose a slot in the elimination debates and two other teams replace them. Furthermore, for the teams in the middle of the bracket, a change-in-seed can affect the likelihood of advancing to the next level of eliminations, since higher-seeded teams win significantly more elimination debates

than do lower seeded teams.[4] Accepting that there are few upset victories in elimination rounds, they still do occur. The upset victories tended to be larger, rather than smaller. That is, 10 of 14 upset victories involved teams of a half-bracket or greater difference in seeding. These victories are significant for the winning teams and as a finding about the impact of seeding and rounds of competition.[5]

The hypothesis that holding two additional preliminary debates changes the list of teams clearing to elimination rounds, was supported. Some may argue that the teams clearing are at the bottom of the bracket and therefore unlikely to influence the ultimate outcome of the tournament. That is, substituting one team at the bottom of the bracket for another is unlikely to alter the outcome of the first elimination debate. On its face, this view seems to have merit. However, lower-seeded teams sometimes do win elimination debates. Furthermore, as we just indicated, the change-in-seed affected teams at the top of the bracket as well as teams at the bottom. Most importantly, however, the value of the debate is larger than the decision. Teams gain experience, confidence, enrich their education and earn team sweepstakes points by just participating in elimination rounds. The psychological rewards for advancing (or not advancing) to the eliminations rounds in a given tournament transcend the final results. Winning the championship debate is not the only measure of success in a tournament.

While these conclusions are important, they should not be extended too far. It might be easy to read the results as suggesting that eight debates should be the preferred format for debate tournaments. On the contrary, it is important to note that this study only proves that there is a difference in tournament results, not that one result is better than another. For

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[4] At least, this is a widespread assumption in the academic debate community. This assumption is supported by a quick analysis of the results of the 2000 CEDA National Tournament. Of the 63 total elimination debates, 49 (78.8%) were won by the higher seeded team. The authors would like to thank Dr. Gary Larson for access to the CEDA tournament data.

[5] The results of elimination rounds from the CEDA National Tournament are illustrative, but potentially limited in their application. First, given the entry size of the tournament, the brackets are much larger than for invitational tournaments, hence the fact that 71% of the elimination upset victories involved a half-bracket or greater. Second, this represents only one tournament, unlike the five analyzed in the current study. Third, the anecdotal experience of the authors and the conventional wisdom of the activity suggest that higher seeds win more than lower seeds, and exaggerated differences in seeding only reinforce the likely success of the higher seed.

example, the results demonstrate that different teams break with two additional debates. This discovery reveals only that there is a trade-off in which some teams advance while others do not, arguably enhancing the tournament experience for one team while diminishing the tournament experience for another.

In addition, some may read these results as justifying even more than eight preliminary debates. That is, if eight debates produces important changes over six debates, why not have ten preliminary debates? In fact, the number of preliminary rounds may be limited only by arbitrary constraints such as time, space, and economic resources. However, this too would be an inappropriate conclusion. Our point is not that holding additional debates produces a superior outcome, only a different outcome. It is up to individual tournament directors and coaches to determine which outcome they prefer.

It is important to note a few limitations of this study. First, the data are taken exclusively from one tournament. While the Baylor tournament provides a good mix of "regional" and "national" competition, it certainly does not mirror all tournaments. In fact, it is possible that the list of teams tends of over-represent some groups while under-representing others. Future studies should attempt to draw on a larger variety of tournaments. It might be helpful to consider analyzing data at several regional tournaments, national tournaments, and national championship tournaments.

Second, the data were taken from five tournaments of similar size – each of which was far larger than the typical intercollegiate tournament. The current study provides no basis for predicting whether or not the substitution effect holds in smaller tournaments where round seven and eight pairings are substantially constrained. Using tournaments of different sizes might yield useful results about the impact of division size on the dynamics of tournament competition.

So, is more better than less in terms of the number of rounds of preliminary competition? Obviously, this is the question that fuels the current controversy over tournament format. This study, rather than providing a definitive answer to the question, instead offers empirical data that can be used in reaching personal conclusions. Our argument is not that eight rounds of preliminary competition are better. Nor is our conclusion that six preliminary rounds are better. In some cases it might make sense to have more than six rounds of preliminary competition, while in other cases it might make sense to only have six rounds. Remarking on format differences between regional and national tournaments, Smith makes the point, "All tournaments do not need to be alike" (n. pag.).

There is no inherently more valuable model for tournaments to follow. However, it is important to know that adding two additional rounds of competition does significantly alter the tournament experience for a large number of teams by altering the list of teams clearing into elimination rounds, affecting their seeding, and thereby influencing their opportunity to win the competition. This knowledge can be useful when making decisions about tournament format.

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CONTEMPORARY ARGUMENTATION AND DEBATE
21 (2000): 33-52

A Preliminary Study of the Relationships between Social Support, Self-Esteem, and Perceptions of Sexual Harassment in Intercollegiate Debate

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Perceptions of sexual harassment have received considerable research attention in intercollegiate debate. Szwapa, for example, surveyed female debaters and female coaches at an NDT tournament and found that the majority of her respondents reported that they perceived they had experienced some form of gender harassment (43). In a replication and extension of Szwapa's study, Stepp, Simerly, and Logue added male coaches and male debaters as respondents and queried the CEDA community (36). Their findings were consistent with Szwapa's results. In both studies, subjects perceived high levels of gender harassment, seductive behavior and sexual imposition in intercollegiate debate. While these studies highlight the clear perception that sexual harassment exists in the debate community, none were specifically designed to examine the effect that perceptions of sexual harassment have on self-esteem. These studies were not also constructed to investigate the relationship between social support and reports of sexual harassment. To fill this research gap, we explore the relationships among sexual harassment, self-esteem, and staff support. The ultimate goal of this line of research is to identify the behaviors that decrease the perception that sexual harassment exists in intercollegiate debate.

Background

Greenstreet et al. report that perceptions of sexual harassment in forensics result in feelings of lost control and loss of self. "Women in the field report being confronted with sexual harassment, sexism, employment discrimination, a lack of collegial support (or even collegial awareness that these events constitute a problem), and gender-based aggression from other females – all of which are behaviors which exclude them and which label them as 'different'" (17). They continue, "Harassment makes the victim feel isolated and

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