

Mock Trial Team Finishes Third in the State

Will Robinson, Mar 15 2011

Marcus Bailey '11 kicked off the St. Andrew's School Mock Trial team's first contest of the 2011 State Tournament against Archmere Academy with an opening statement that showed both poise and intensity. He argued persuasively that his client, Castle College, had not acted improperly when they expelled student Dakota Skyy. The expulsion was the result of the discoveries made by one of Dakota's rivals, the well-connected, legacy student Morgan Pettigrew serving as a witness for the defense and played by Omololu Babatunde '11. She told the court that Dakota Skyy had hidden both her identity as well as the fact that Skyy killed her mother years earlier when eleven years old. In spite of repeated attempts to rattle her, or paint her as biased or vindictive, Omololu was able to keep her cool. She presented herself as motivated by fear and concern, rather than spite. Omololu was awarded Best Witness in this trial.

Adrienne Fernandez '11 and Annie Imbrie-Moore '12 joined Marcus as attorneys for the defense. One of the key points Adrienne tried to make was that Skyy failed to present herself honestly when completing her college application. Adrienne repeatedly directed the jury to notice the specific application responses and omissions that concealed Skyy's criminal past as well as her unstable psychological condition. Adrienne showed particularly strong mastery of the facts of the case when she was able to point out several ways in which witness testimony was in conflict with other evidence. She argued that Skyy was not only dishonest, but also, a danger to the community, due to her psychological problems. In order to help substantiate this argument, Megan Hasse '14, a new member of the Mock Trial team, took the witness stand, playing the role of a psychiatrist who worked closely with the plaintiff. On cross-examination, the plaintiff tried to suggest that Hasse's psychological assessment was unreliable and inconsistent with the facts. However, Hasse had no trouble turning each question into another opportunity to repeat her own talking points—emphasizing Skyy's strange behavior and Skyy's failure to follow guidelines for managing several psychological disorders.

Jiani Chen '13 played the part of the college president. In part because of her excellent preparation, and in part because of Annie Imbrie-Moore's masterful use of the rules of evidence, Jiani was able to thwart the attempts to prove slander. This was a particularly difficult witness role, because the president had given a sworn statement that strongly suggested Pettigrew had slandered Skyy. The trial concluded with Adrienne giving a closing argument that was as rich in detail as it was focused and clear.

After observing such a well-fought battle, the plaintiff's side of the SAS team ate a hasty lunch and returned for the second round of the competition. This time, Dakota Skyy (played expertly by Maya Cave '11) was our client. Chaitanya Singhanian '12 gave an intense, emotional opening statement. He painted Skyy as acting in self-defense against an abusive mother and portrayed the college as prejudiced against those with mental illness. He was also quick to perceive objections. His cross-examination was forceful and effective, causing the college psychologist to admit that Skyy had not exhibited many of the symptoms of the disorders claimed. Annie Imbrie-Moore played an attorney role for the plaintiff as well. Her cross-examination was sharp and clean. She dealt swiftly and decisively with all attempts to derail her.

Bella Lilly '13 gave an amazing performance as Skyy's personal psychiatrist. She was asked particularly difficult questions about the diagnosis, symptoms and treatment of bipolar disorder. She conceded the points that couldn't be denied, such as the fact that Skyy had this disorder, but would not admit that Skyy had any of the symptoms.

Wearing a bright orange bow-tie, Daniel Maguire '14 gave an award-winning performance as the college admissions director. Daniel was careful never to step out of character. Even after leaving the witness stand, he strode back to his seat in the courtroom with the same self-assurance he showed during direct and cross-examination.

Finally, Will Rehrig '11 gave the closing argument. He had rehearsed his closing countless times, refining it each time. But, rather than give a memorized speech, he tailored his address to the facts elicited during the trial.

In what was surely a difficult decision, Annie Imbrie-Moore took home the Best Attorney Award at the end of this trial.

In the third round, the Saints' defense team set out to repeat the approach they used to defeat Archmere in the first round. However, our third-round opponent, William Penn High School, pursued some novel arguments. Most notably, they argued that college administrators violated the expelled student's due process rights. The task of defeating this unexpected argument fell primarily on the shoulders of Jiani Chen and Annie Imbrie-Moore. Annie objected that the case materials failed to supply information on the expulsion process. And so, Annie argued, the college president, should not be required to answer such questions. Although Annie lost this objection, Jiani, playing the role of the college president, fought tenaciously to steer the jury's attention back to well-supported facts that favored the defense. Megan Hasse, in the role of an expert psychologist, then took the stand. She was attacked by a cross-examining attorney who tried to interrupt and speak over almost every attempt Megan made to explain her responses. Megan was never intimidated. Indeed, she was so convincing and effective in this role, she won her first gavel-shaped Best Witness Award for this trial. Adrienne Fernandez has collected more than her share of gavels over the past four years. In this trial, the last of her SAS Mock Trial career, she won Best Attorney one more time. Her crisp, confident closing argument refocused the jury on the plaintiff's dishonest and dangerous behavior, giving the SAS team a 3 and 0 record heading into the semifinals.

Unfortunately, the semifinalist teams do not find out until after the semifinal round that they are vying for the finals. Still, when the SAS plaintiff's team squared off against Wilmington Friends School, the strength of the Friend's team made us suspect that our team was in the semifinals. Chaitanya Singhanian gave his most impassioned opening statement yet, putting the jury in a highly sympathetic frame of mind from the very start. Chaitanya, Will Rehrig and Annie Imbrie-Moore fought hard to limit the testimony offered by the defense. Using repetition in the structure of his cross-examination Chaitanya was particularly captivating. Will Rehrig also shined giving the last and strongest closing argument of his four-year Mock Trial career. Daniel Maguire's eccentric portrayal of the college admissions officer earned him the Best Witness Award in this very close trial.

After the fourth round the SAS team had won six of the eight possible trial awards—all four Best Witness Awards and two Best Attorney awards. Still, the competition organizers are tight-lipped about the team rankings. And so, together with twenty-eight other teams, the SAS team waited anxiously on the courthouse steps to hear the finalists announced. It came as no surprise that the Charter School of Wilmington was selected to compete in what would become their sixth-consecutive state trial. But when it was announced that Friends would be Charter's opponent in the finals, the SAS team realized how close they had come. In the end, the SAS team took third in the competition. Although the Saints believed they could have fared at least as well as Friends in the finals, they were thrilled to take home the third place plaque. This was the best team rank in the history of the SAS Mock Trial program.

Looking to the future, Annie Imbrie-Moore and Chaitanya Singhania hope to inspire the same level of dedication and excellence as the departing seniors. Veteran attorneys Will Rehrig, Marcus Bailey and Adrienne Fernandez have built this program through four years of hard work. The quality of the team they leave behind is markedly higher than in the program's early years. Likewise, seniors Omololu Babatunde and Maya Cave have been outstanding leaders among the witnesses. Not only have they worked with creativity, insight and dedication in crafting their witness performances, but also have engaged deeply with the arguments and helped steer the attorney's efforts. I hope you will congratulate these seniors and the whole team, including rising stars Jiani Chen, Megan Hasse, Bella Lilly and Daniel Maguire.

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- Dan O'Connell, Faculty Advisor