

2009 Montgomery Bell Academy Champion: An Interview with Matt Arons

Interview by Logan Scisco

The Montgomery Bell Extemp Round Robin is one of the most prestigious extemp tournaments in the country. Its unique, select field makes it an honor to be invited. The Ex Files was able to secure an interview with Matt Arons of Millburn High School in New Jersey who won this year's Round Robin against the best extempers the tournament could bring together in early January.

Note: This interview was conducted shortly before the Harvard Invitational.

Logan Scisco: To start I think I should say congratulations on your victory at the Round Robin last month and congratulations on your victory earlier in the season at the Yale University Invitational Tournament. Also, thank you for doing this interview for the extemp community.

Matt Arons: Thanks, and thanks for the opportunity to contribute to the *Ex Files*.

Scisco: What was your reaction to getting an MBA bid? What do you think helped you get it?

Arons: I was extraordinarily excited to receive a bid to MBA. As a freshman, I learned about the tournament, and attending it had always been one of my goals in Extemp. I received an invitation after winning Yale. I believe that my performance there, along with my past track record, was responsible for my bid.

Scisco: Going into the tournament, what was your preparation like?

Arons: I tried to give as many practice speeches as possible in the week or two leading up to the tournament. I either prepped a new speech or delivered an old one to work on my presentation skills. I also videotaped myself; it's really startling to see your presentational quirks firsthand, and it becomes far easier to eliminate them. I filed as much as possible for MBA and read much of what I put in my tubs in order to make sure that I could find the citations I wanted quickly.

Scisco: What round of the tournament made you feel like you belonged in the field/that you had a good chance at winning?

Arons: I got a feel for the tournament after the second round, and by that point I was pretty sure I could hold my own. I thought I had a chance of winning after the last round of the tournament. My competitors in that round were particularly strong, but I was really happy with my speech and thought it left me in a good position.

Scisco: MBA is famous for their graphs which tease competitors about where they are ranked in the tournament. Did you pick your line correctly or did you really care?

Arons: I fell victim to the notorious MBA graph. I was fairly sure that I had figured out my line – of course, I was wrong. Although I tried to guess my position on the chart, I didn't obsess about it too much or let it affect my performance.

Scisco: What was your most memorable experience at the tournament?

Arons: The most memorable part of my tournament experience was meeting some of the extempers on the circuit who I had never gotten to know before. Most of the tournaments my team attends are on the East Coast; it was great to speak to some competitors who I hadn't seen since Nationals and make some new friends. And of course, the Goo Goo Clusters are a memorable part of everyone's MBA experience.

Scisco: What is the best piece of advice you received at the tournament?

Arons: The best piece of advice I heard at the tournament is something that's fundamental to Extemp, yet easy to forget: answer the question. It's easy to beat around the bush with a generic answer or to only answer half of the question. But a good speech is tailored to the question asked. It's something that you have to consciously think about and analyze as you prepare your speech.

Scisco: Any advice to future competitors at the Round Robin who wish to have the success that you did?

Arons: MBA is longer than most tournaments, and it's important to be as alert in round one as you are in round ten. You have to perform well during the entire tournament in order to succeed. Also, it's easy to be misled by the chart, but you can't let it get to your head.

Scisco: Any other national circuit plans until nationals?

Arons: I'll be competing at Harvard this weekend and at TOC in May.