

National Tournament Psychology

By Omar Qureshi¹

Nowhere will you find a bunch of 250 extempers more competitive than at the NFL National Tournament. There is not a competition that matches its size, depth, or prestige.

With emotions running high, there is no better piece of advice than to just relax. Regardless of how many people are there, the goal is still very much the same: to give the best extemp speech you can give every round. It is prudent to consider the tournament as something outside of you. It exists outside of your paper, pens, boxes, and the prep room. From the time you pick your topic to the time you give your speech, all that exists is the event. In that zone nothing else matters. It matters not how good the speeches were in your room. It matters only that yours is a dedicated reflection of your ability as an extemper.

Nationals often gets the best of people. People tend to want to analyze their competition and think more about the gravity of the round than they are walking into. To do this is to be sucked into the tournament and not into extemp. Every round it is just you and your judges. In between rounds, talk to people and make new friends- it's a great opportunity. Do anything besides think about the tournament itself, and just focus on what got you to nationals- giving great speeches.

Of course, with such a big tournament, it is easy to think your judges down. This is an enormous psychological barrier. Blaming the quality of judging after a bad speech only brings you down. More importantly, dwelling on a rough speech is completely counterproductive. Remember, the way to give a good speech is to stay actively engaged in your preparation. Thinking about rough patches last round is not the way to do this. On this issue, I remember a conversation I recently had with extemp wonderkid, Dan Rauch (2006 TOC champ and NFL IX Runner Up), at the APDA (Parliamentary Debate) national tournament. He told me that his mentality was that even if he was the best in the round, it did not matter whether he won or lost because any performance that was less than **his** best was something that could have been improved. If you think that in the round you did the best you could have done, there is no reason to doubt yourself or try to find out how good your competition was. If you think that you had room to improve from your best, next round you should relax and get into your speech rhythm.

I have already mentioned it before, but it is crucial that you just relax. Whether you are in prep waiting for your draw time to come up or back at the hotel, all worrying will do is give you premature wrinkles and take focus away from your speech. Just relax and breathe. You earned the right to compete at the national

¹ Omar Qureshi was a competitor at Monett High School in Monett, Missouri. While not entering the national circuit due to travel restrictions, Omar won over twenty championships in Extemporaneous Speaking in the state of Missouri. He was runner up at the Missouri State Tournament in Extemporaneous Speaking as well as the Missouri State Lincoln-Douglas Debate Champion. As a national qualifier in Lincoln Douglas Debate and three time national qualifier in International Extemporaneous Speaking, Omar chose to attend the National Forensics League National Tournament in Extemporaneous Speaking for his three qualifying years. After a becoming a national quarterfinalist in International Extemporaneous Speaking in 2006, Omar was a national semifinalist in Extemporaneous Commentary in 2007. He was the Runner-up in International Extemporaneous Speaking at the NFL National Tournament in 2008 as well as an NFL All-American. Omar is currently a freshman at Johns Hopkins University and will be studying Economics and International Studies.

tournament- people have just as much reason to fear you as you do to fear them. Of course, relaxing is more easily said than done. My best advice here is one that most coaches probably do not appreciate me giving: go into the tournament with a swagger. I mean like Tom Cruise in Top Gun swagger. Go in believing that you have everything under control and that you really are the real deal. Your performance is enhanced when you have full confidence in yourself. It will help eliminate insecurities that you have. Just to be at the national tournament entitles you to have a rapper like swagger. Do not, however, use this as a justification for you to devalue your competition. Use it to realize that you really are good enough to do big things at the tournament.

Respect your competition, respect your judges, and believe in yourself- these are the keys to succeeding at a national tournament. Every round is just you and the judges. Every round involves getting the opportunity to deliver a speech in the format of the event you love. Every round you speak in is a culmination of the work that you have put in all year round. No one can take that away from you. To believe in yourself is the way to success at the national tournament.