

PRIDE IN THE PROFESSION by Bill Davis

I was about to deliver the opening lecture to the Fort Hays State University Talking Tiger Debate Workshop when I was asked to take a phone call from James Morrill. I was pretty pumped up because there were over one hundred students and coaches waiting to hear the outline to the topic. I was using an outline stolen from a list compiled by Mr. Morrill from Raytown South High School near Kansas City, delivered during the Midwest Debate Camp that had just concluded the day before. I wondered what James needed to tell me that couldn't wait. Maybe he needed to kid me about my lazy lecture notes.

He told me that Wayne Brown had suffered a heart attack and died.

Now, I had shaken Wayne's hand just two days before and bid him good-bye for another year, until the Camp met again in the summer of 1996. It would be my ninth year at the camp, held at Rockhurst University in the heart of K.C. Each year I would show up with my new campaign on how to debate, and the students, mostly from Missouri and Kansas, and the staff of Missouri High School coaches with grace would let me rave and let me deceive myself that I had a good idea until my own students could put me in my place. I would take reams of notes from other lecturers, which I would use again and again in my own classes. Every year I would steal the ideas of Randy Pierce and write a column or two. Eric Morris, as our college advocate, would listen to my brainstorming, quietly demonstrate they were nothing new, and then explain them to me. I would be enthralled by the brilliant spiels of Tim Gore, who I believe is the best lecturer I have ever had the pleasure to view. In short, two weeks of debate bliss. For

all this, I would be paid excessively, and go off recharged for the new school year. It's a cliché, I know, but I really should have paid for the privilege.

And all of this was the work of Wayne Brown.

There are many who can and did give eulogies to Mr. Brown at his funeral. They knew him much better than I did. They knew him as a teacher, a coach, a father and a husband. Wayne Brown brought even more lustre to the illustrious Coaches Hall of Fame.

But each life, as it passes, gives each witness a different view, and my perspective of Mr. Brown was, gained from the two weeks every year at his camp, his stand that high school coaches have the responsibility to raise their profession at the level to serve all students, not just their own. He believed, and he ACTED upon this belief, that this responsibility extends unto all twelve months of the year.

That was the principle of the Midwest Debate Camp. It is the principle of the Fort Hays camp also, founded by Gary Harmon, Richard Young and Roger Brannan about a decade ago, and where I was teaching when James gave me this news. Though each camp has been very successful, they remain the exceptions to the rule that summer camps for debaters are run by colleges and universities, and overwhelmingly staffed by university instructors and students.

The Midwest Camp began as a teeny-tiny venture -- I think it already had run a couple of years before I even heard of it and sent a student who returned quoting me chapter and verse of the scriptures of Randy Pierce. It then continued to grow until it reached a level of seventy students or more each year. We were crammed into the larg-

est classroom on the campus to listen to local experts on each year's topic, not just arguments and strategies. And each speaker pounded into us the unrelenting principle that debating is first a matter of honor, and then a matter of winning.

And Mr. Brown did all the work of organizing the camp, copying the evidence, and looking after the kids who inevitably go sick. He rarely gave a lecture, and when he did, he dressed up in a suit to deliver it, in spite of the Kansas City summer blast furnace. I asked him why he thought he needed to suffer to lecture (I, clad in my roly-poly shorts and tee-shirts) and he said "Because it's an occasion to respect." Shut my mouth.

And it was an occasion to respect; imagine, a room full of eager, motivated students and a good chunk of the best of your peers. To give a poor lecture to such an audience would be disgraceful. And so we worked hard to be scintillating. Some of the time, we could even be as good as Tim.

Mr. Brown didn't make much money; this year we teased him that we served as his tax write-off. The Midwest Debate Camp was a labor in support of the principle. If high school debaters deserved trained, certified teachers in December, they deserved them in July also.

I hope that the high school faculty that worked the Midwest Camp will somehow manage to piece together yet another Midwest Debate Camp. I hope that Mr. Harmon and Mr. Young will arrange yet another soiree in Hays, America. But what if we don't find the glue that Mr. Brown used to put it together?

Once again, the students on the Midwest will not have the option of choosing a camp run by the people who know their activity the best, and

who have the most to lose from having their training conducted badly. These summer students are obviously among the most motivated in the activity -- the high school coaching fraternity cannot afford to deny them the best.

No, I am not saying that college and university camps should not be in the business of educating; else what are they for? And it is because of a great lack of commitment by high school coaches that the opportunity for these college camps exists. After all, we have them nine geologic epochs a year, who needs 'em during the short, short summer?

Wayne Brown provided the answer to that. It is his example that I cite. There will never be another Mr. Brown, but it is our duty to continue his work.

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