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30+ Rounds judged this topic
2nd Year Coaching at MSU

My fiancé, Mike Eber, describes me as follows: “Alison is a 2A at heart. That being said, the negative block speaks for 15 minutes, and the 1AR only gets 6 to answer it...and, well, the ink just doesn’t match up on her immaculate flows. Things get dropped or mishandled and Alison votes neg.” While it’s true that I’m probably more of a “neg hack” than an “aff” one (a trait I’ll thank Will and Biza Repko for), it’s not categorically true, and I’ve decided this year to dedicate the bulk of my judging philosophy to ways you can win on *either side* in front of me.

First and foremost, **I tend to approach all debate arguments in terms of offense and defense**, and unless I’m given explicit instructions to the contrary, the team winning the most offense will generally win the round. So note to affs: TURN the DA, critique, theory arguments, etc. Offense wins debates. That doesn’t mean that all that matters are turns—in a situation in which you’re winning a huge case impact and are making large defensive inroads to the neg arguments, I’ll likely vote aff. But as a general rule, the more offense the better.

Topicality is always a voter. Affs need to run a counterinterpretation and be tight on reasons why that interpretation is better for ground, education, etc. Negs should be able to provide lots of examples of cases that meet their interpretation and be able to articulate warrants for abuse. Grammatically incorrect interpretations or ones in which specific areas (i.e. child welfare) are excluded are not very persuasive.

Disadvantages are my favorite arguments to judge, especially if they are timely and have good evidence to support them. Negs can seriously benefit from impact assessment why the DA turns the case. Also, in general, I tend to consider the link portion of the debate more important than the uniqueness level. So, for example, if the uniqueness debate is close, but the aff’s are controlling the direction of the link, I’ll vote aff on that argument. 1ARs often mess this up by dedicating too much of their speech to reading new uniqueness cards that aren’t distinct from ones previously read, and then undercover the link debate.

Counterplans are also pretty popular with me. I tend to be pretty neg leaning on counterplan theory, but I’ve still voted aff on it many times. In theory debates, negs need to win offensive reasons why PICs, dispo, etc are good in order to win. Impact assessment on theory is also important. Teams need to make comparisons on why competitive equity is a better framework than education, etc. I think that the only theory argument that is really an end-of-round voting issue is dispositionality/conditionality, and all other theory arguments are just a reason to reject the counterplan. In those circumstances, I’m persuaded by “reject theory not team” arguments. If a counterplan is in the 2NR, however, and the debater thinks that she/he might lose the theory debate on a non-dispo type argument, the 2NR needs to tell me if I should revert to the status quo under those circumstances. My default is “no.” Affs should read perms unless there’s a strategic reason not to, and add-ons that the cp can’t solve for are generally helpful. And don’t forget to invest time in reading offense to *all* the net benefits. Make sure both sides are aware of what those are early in the debate so time can be allocated appropriately.

Critique/Performance based affs are things I have mixed feelings about. I think that affs should read a plan or some stable advocacy statement that provides fair and reasonable ground to both sides. I’m very much in favor of switch-side debate, and I think that sometimes teams have to defend things that they don’t necessarily agree with. That doesn’t mean that anyone needs to or should say “racism good,” but that’s an extreme example that never needs to be reached with the literature on the topic. Affs can find plenty of strategic cases on this topic and still run a plan or stable advocacy. And you can do pretty much whatever you want on the aff, provided that you defend reasonably topical action.

Critique/Performance on the neg: I recognize that critiques can be incredibly strategic and am certainly willing to vote on them, especially when the links and impacts are well-developed and explained with specific applications to the aff case. Please try to keep in mind that I do NOT read a lot of critique literature in my spare time, so I will NOT be familiar or have many predispositions with the theories of Lacan, Foucault, Spanos, etc. I don’t spend time outside of debates pondering “being” so I won’t have that stuff figured out before I come to the round, but if you do a good job explaining it to me, I’ll be able to make a reasonable decision even without my critique secret decoder ring. I like framework debates, but tend to view them much like topicality debates. If the neg advances a framework-based critique for how to decide the round, merely winning that the framework is bad isn’t enough to win on the aff. Aff’s should provide a counter-framework of some sort. I also tend to vote neg in instances where the aff mishandles (usually in the 1AR) the claim that the negs can agree with the entirety of the case except for the one part their critique links to. Affs need to win offense on why such “floating PICs” are bad.

Other things you should know: I can flow pretty well if you’re clear. I’ll try to let you know if you’re not. Dropped arguments by either side generally get full weight, but I’m not a great judge for total cheap shot voters that aren’t developed. I tend to read a lot of cards in most debates, and you’ll be in good shape if your evidence is well-warranted and well-applied to the debate. On the flip side, reading lots of bad cards won’t be much of an ethos booster. I’m pretty strict on new arguments in the 2AR—if you’re making them you need to articulate reasons why they’re justified or set them up well and predictably in the 1AR. “Big picture” is everything. Affs often lose in front of me because they fail to recognize in the 1AR what arguments are going to be the round-winners and losers later on and subsequently misallocate their time. Take a moment to think about the arguments and their importance rather than treating all arguments equally. And most importantly, have fun. The time we invest in this activity wouldn’t be worth it if we didn’t enjoy it.

If you have any specific questions at all, please don’t hesitate to ask.