

# ALUMNI CONNECTION

Volume 3

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**How Forensics Inspires  
Public Service**

**Actress and  
NFL Alumna**

**Maria Thayer**

**Moves From  
Apple Valley to  
the Big Apple**

**More Than Just Teammates:  
Couples Who Met in the NFL**

**Diversity in Action  
Tommy Wells, President  
American Bar Association**

# Alumni Connection



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## What's Inside

**Page 3** - Alumni Membership Opportunities

**Page 4-5** - From Apple Valley to the Big Apple  
(and the West Coast!)

**Page 6 - 7** - di•ver•si•ty

**Page 8 - 9** - The Gatekeeper

**Page 10** - From National Champion to Nation-Changer

**Page 11** - How Forensics Inspires Public Service

**Page 12 - 13** - More Than Just Teammates: Couples  
Who Met in the NFL

**Page 14 - 15** - The Boy Who Found His Voice in the  
NFL Seeks to Give Youth a Voice Today

**Page 15** - Diversifying Programs & Partnerships

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# Alumni Membership Opportunities

## NFL membership continues long after your competition days end!



*Guests at the Dallas, TX alumni reception from left to right: Lori Baker (wife of NFL Alum David Baker) and their son, Evan Baker, with Glenda Ferguson*

Perhaps you ate, slept, and breathed speech and debate throughout your high school years. Maybe forensics was one of many activities you joined in high school. Whatever your experience in the NFL was, you will always be a member.

As an alumni, you have access to some great resources to keep you connected to the NFL. By regularly visiting [www.nflonline.org](http://www.nflonline.org), you can keep yourself up-to-date on the latest and greatest happenings at the League. You'll always find a fellow alumni featured in the flash section on the Web site, which makes for a lively read.

If taking a more active role suits your style, consider getting involved locally by checking for tournaments in your area under the "Calendar" section at [www.forensiconline.net](http://www.forensiconline.net). Take your significant other or your children to a meet and expose them to the activity that played a role in your own life. Better yet, contact your local high school and volunteer your talents to coach or

judge. An unexpected benefit will be the energy boost you'll get from being around high school students again!

Another benefit of lifetime membership includes networking with other alumni. If you enjoy getting together with your former high school counterparts, the NFL National Office staff is happy to assist you in planning an alumni reception in your area. We've hosted several successful receptions around the country already and have more planned for Spring and Fall. Contact us and we can help you build a list of NFL alumni in your area, as well as assist you in finding folks you attended high school with who have registered in our Alumni Association.

Our alumni are as diverse as the experiences they encountered through participation in high school speech and debate. Stay involved. Stay connected. It's your membership... for life.



*Guests at the Peoria, IL alumni reception from left to right: Debbie Ruzicka, Francesa Smith, and Scott Fenstermaker*

--Bethany Rusch

# From Apple Valley to the Big Apple

## (and the West Coast!)

### Actress Maria Thayer Talks Speech, Film, and What's Next

By Jennifer Billman

Talking to film and television actress Maria is like talking to an old friend. For one thing, she seems familiar to me because I have seen her in movies like *Accepted*, *Hitch*, and *Forgetting Sarah Marshall*. It's that familiar effect that happens when you recognize a celebrity and feel like they should know you, too. Equally important, she speaks comfortably and candidly despite this being our first live conversation (e-mails notwithstanding). The only thing that reminds me that I am talking to a Hollywood actress are small snippets of the conversation, like when she apologizes (unnecessarily, of course) for being a few minutes late for our phone call. "L.A. traffic," she tells me. If I had a dollar for every time someone told me that, I'd have... well, let's see... a dollar.

While Thayer might grapple with L.A. traffic from time to time, her career is moving full speed ahead. In addition to roles in the high-grossing films noted above, her impressive resume includes *30 Rock*, *Lipstick Jungle*, *Nip/Tuck*, *The Colbert Report*, and the series finale of *Will & Grace*, as well as a plum role in the upcoming feature *State of Play* (anyone ever heard of Russell Crowe? Ben Affleck?! Helen Mirren?!). Still, this NFL alumna was friendly and down-to-Earth as



Photo by Adrienne Fodor  
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we talked speech heroes, movie-making, and forensic education.

"I always wanted to keep busy, and I was always very curious," Thayer explains of her teenage self (a self which, she asserts, remains largely unchanged). As a student at Apple Valley High School in Minnesota, she channeled her energy into myriad activities including student council, choir, and theatre. Still, speech held her focus. "I have never worked harder," she remembers. "Pam Cady [Wycoff] was a very driven lady!" She excelled in the interpretation events, even earning a state championship in Dramatic Interpretation. Thayer also found kindred spirits in her

teammates. "There was a lot of camaraderie," she notes. "I didn't do sports, so this was my team. I am still friends with a lot of the people I did speech with."

Despite her proclivity for acting, Thayer explains that she had no immediate plans to pursue it. "I think I hoped I would be a doctor, and my mother hoped I would be a doctor. But my heart was in performing when I was in high school. By the time I was done with all of the extras, there was no time for homework. It would have been a long road to med school," she quips. Turning serious again, she explains, "I don't think I even knew I was going to be an actor until I got



# di • ver • si • ty

**a. The fact or quality of being varied; difference.**

**b. A point or respect in which things differ.**

By **Bethany Rusch**

Within all levels of our membership – our students, coaches, and leadership - the NFL has clearly defined its commitment to diversity. But beyond definitions, our commitment must grow, expand, and thrive through action. We must acknowledge that extending forensic opportunities to every student in the nation by expanding access to such vital programs will be an on-going journey. We are inspired to shape every student through forensic education and, in turn, the communities around them and the professions to which they will contribute. The NFL is blazing a bold new path that moves our organization from embracing diversity in all its definitions to strategic action.

Our 93,000 students pledge to uphold the Code of Honor, which speaks directly to the NFL’s vision for diversity in our honor society. Diversity is captured best under the tenet of Respect, described as, “An NFL member respects individual differences and fosters diversity. He or she promotes tolerance, inclusion, and empowerment for people from a variety of backgrounds.”

Our students are already gaining valuable life training in the area of diversity by building relationships with a multifaceted peer group - both their teammates and competitors. NFL students come from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds and geographic areas, injecting debates and speeches with their unique outlook on life. Our 3,000 member schools include both

public and private, urban and rural. Even students who come from high schools with a relatively homogenous population become increasingly exposed to young people from different walks of life through their participation in competitive speech and debate. The essence of debate itself embodies diversity, as students present their case, then respectfully listen and respond to the viewpoints of the other side. Being a member of the forensics community broadens the horizons of both students and coaches alike in our global society through speech and debate activities. It is our aim to do even more – our vision for the future demands it.

The NFL is dedicated to diversity, as captured in a portion of our Vision Statement, “As an organization, the National Forensic League embraces diversity,

interconnection, and visionary leadership.” For eighty-four years, we have empowered youth across the nation to find their voice through speech and debate. With a renewed commitment to branch out and direct resources into underserved communities, we will bring this valuable skill set to a wider audience than ever before. The NFL provides coach support and education, as well as scholarships to schools struggling financially. Additionally, the NFL remains focused on the continued creation and strengthening of innovative programs that engage our diverse membership. We are dedicated to supporting efforts both inside and outside of the classroom that ensure universal access, such as the development of additional free print and online resources.



Our 1.3 million alumni serve as living, breathing testaments to diversity in action through speech and debate, acknowledging that forensics acts as a pipeline to a variety of professional careers. From diplomats to CEOs and attorneys to English teachers, our alumni have continued on the path to success in a wide number of fields. One NFL alumnus in particular stands out for his efforts in diversity, Mr. H. Thomas “Tommy” Wells, Jr. Wells, who is a partner and founding member at Maynard, Cooper & Gale, P.C. in Birmingham, Alabama, has served on numerous committees and in leadership roles in the Alabama State Bar, the Birmingham Bar Association and the American Bar Association throughout his career. Most notably, Wells currently serves as President of the American Bar Association (ABA). Like the NFL, the ABA commits itself to all facets of diversity through a continuum of initiatives and resources that include diversity summits and publications, as well as several councils, commissions, and action committees. The ABA addresses diversity with a three-pronged approach: pipeline issues, legal profession issues and social justice issues. This ensures real progress is made that will continue to place the ABA as a national leader in diversity issues.

As a result of Tommy’s commitment to diversity and in recognition of his accomplishments, the NFL is honoring him with the Communicator of the Year Award at the “Stars Fell on Alabama” Nationals in Birmingham, Alabama on June 17th. Former recipients include media mogul Ted Turner, CSI creator Anthony Zuiker, and Bickel & Brewer partner William A. Brewer III. The Communicator of the Year Award showcases alumni who utilize their speech and debate talents in ways that profoundly impact the lives of others. In this vein, Tommy’s support



**WELLS**

of diversity initiatives within the ABA has generated a national impact. Not only are attorneys supported by the ABA’s commitment to diversity, but the communities around them and their future workforce – many of whom will be lifetime members of the NFL.

Our students and coaches embrace diversity every day by engaging their speech skills to build relationships, craft respectful debates, and celebrate the uniqueness of those around them. Our alumni, like attorneys David Singh of Weil, Gotshal and Manges, LLP in New York and Michael Arton of McDermott, Will and Emery, LLP in Washinton D.C., are giving generously to ensure the NFL can continue on its bold path to empower youth in underserved communities through targeted diversity efforts. David and Michael know the impact of participation in speech and debate and desire that students in every community benefit. Tommy Wells



**SINGH**



**ARTON**

oversees one of the largest professional membership groups in the nation that has made diversity one of its primary initiatives. Now, the NFL needs everyone - parents, students, coaches, alumni, judges, and concerned community members – to get involved at every level to make certain that no child is denied the benefits of a forensic education. We must strive to ensure that diversity is alive and well within not only the current levels of the NFL, but every community in this nation through access to speech and debate programs.

The NFL is committed to moving our diversity efforts beyond definitions and into strategic action. Diversity participation and programming must and will remain an active part of our tradition of honor and our vision for the future. Join us on our journey...contribute today or contact Cherian Koshy at the National Office at 920.748.6206 to get involved.

## Fullerton Joint High School coach Sal Tinajero opens doors for minority youth in California.

By Jennifer Billman

Coach Sal Tinajero is multitasking. “Can you hold on for thirty seconds?” he asks. “I’m cutting a piece, but I’ll be done in thirty seconds.” I hear the shuffle of papers and a coach’s calm instructions to a student before, true to his word, he picks up the receiver about thirty seconds later. “Sorry about that,” he says. “It has been really busy around here.”

Tournament season is busy for any coach, but Tinajero’s situation is unique. His program at Fullerton Joint Union High School not only serves as an educational vehicle for team members, but – as is often the case – a form of intervention for students who otherwise might slip through the cracks. Tinajero’s affiliation with NFL began three years after he started the program at Fullerton,

a school situated in Southern California just a few miles from the Mexican border. He remembers that “when I called the NFL, I was so relieved when a human being answered the phone. They were willing to stay on the phone as long as necessary until my questions were answered. I knew this was an organization I wanted to be a part of.”

In only a few years since then, the Fullerton program gained national prominence in the NFL. The squad has travelled nationally, recently earning top honors at the prestigious George Armstrong Invitational, hosted by Tinajero’s alma mater, Bradley University. They have also qualified students to the state and national tournaments, advancing several to elimination rounds. The Fullerton roster has

swelled to 160 members – about 8 percent of the school population – and several team members have gone on to compete successfully at top forensics programs across the country, including Bradley and Western Kentucky University.

However, Tinajero does not mention his team’s past success. Instead, he focuses on how the team is working to close the gap in minority achievement. “If you look at the five largest states – California, Texas, Florida, New York, and Illinois – they have an emerging minority population. Also, the Latino population has surpassed the African American population,” he tells me. “What studies have found is that when children go to kindergarten, they have a 1000 word vocabulary if their parents attended college. They have a 600 word vocabulary if their



parents are working. If their parents are non-working, they have a 300 word vocabulary. And this doesn't take into account students whose first language is Spanish."

Quickly impacting these figures like a skilled debater, he notes, "You get labeled. Teachers do it. They don't mean to, but they do. The kids who are thriving, they get to be leaders of the group. And others are told that they aren't smart." Tinajero explains that he was one of these students. Dismissed

by educators as a child, he joined forensics and quickly learned to access an expansive vocabulary. His talent and hard work enabled him to compete at Orange Coast College and later Bradley University, earning a college degree in the process. Now a respected professional, he works to give his students the same springboard that speech and debate provided for him.

"We recognize that our students aren't going to have the vocabulary of children of college-educated parents," Tinajero explains, "so we immerse them in rhetoric."

The process requires more than in-classroom instruction, he notes. "They don't get one on one attention in the regular classroom. In speech, they get the vocabulary, and they learn through practice." Even with the added attention, he admits that students with from non-English speaking homes may require more time to grasp new language skills: "English is where the problem is. If

it takes an hour to explain something to someone whose first language is English, it takes an hour and a half to explain it to someone whose first language is something else. But once they have it, they have it forever."

Tinajero's careful mentoring has yielded outstanding results. Squad members' academic achievement has skyrocketed, which has buoyed the entire student population: As a school, Fullerton's standardized test scores have gone up eight to ten points each year for



*Fullerton team members brave the cold at the Armstrong Invitational.*

the last three years. "And we're a Title I school," he adds. The school district and the City of Fullerton have recognized the forensics team as one of the main reasons that test scores have improved.

While academic success is a clear priority of the Fullerton Union High School team, Tinajero also believes that a complete education involves more than vocabulary and communication skills. "When I was in school, I had no concept of leaving my surroundings," he says. "I didn't go to L.A. until I was 18 years old. People told me I was

from the Valley – I didn't know what that meant." Mindful of his own experience, Tinajero ensures that Fullerton students have an opportunity to leave their community and experience a different lifestyle. He cites as an example the time when the team attended a tournament in New Orleans, witnessing firsthand the parishes devastated by Hurricane Katrina. "They would have never gotten the opportunity to see that," he explains. "That in itself is educational."

Tinajero says that NFL helps extend speech and debate education to deserving, but often underserved students. "NFL goes to different regions. It gives low-income schools in those different regions the chance to participate and see people from all across the country," he explains. "The other thing I like about the NFL is that there are leaders in different parts of the nation

that believe in incorporating all students. I've never heard anyone say that NFL is elitist," he says. "NFL is an inclusive organization."

I ask Tinajero what he wants his legacy to be after the tournaments end and the travelling ceases. "I want to open the door for students to get into a 4-year college," he tells me. "And I want my students to realize that it's not about the championships or the trophies. It's about friendships, experiences, and the doors that opened because of it."

# From National Champion to Nation-Changer: NFL Alumna Presents Asylum Case in Front of the Supreme Court

By Jennifer Billman

After advocating policy changes for years as an NFL Policy debater, former national champion Lindsay Harrison presented a landmark case in front of the nation's highest court. Harrison, now an Associate at the Washington D.C. offices of Jenner & Block, addressed the Supreme Court on January 21, 2009 – at only thirty years old.

I had the privilege of speaking to Harrison recently, shortly after her Supreme Court debut. I was already aware that she had sown the seeds of a standout career at the Greenhill School in Dallas, Texas, but she expanded the story by explaining that Greenhill Coach Aaron Timmons had mentored her into a skilled debater and pernicious opponent. With his help, she and partner Dustin Marshall won Policy at the 1996 NFL National Tournament – an accomplishment she proudly noted to me during our conversation. After high school, the next step was clear: “I always knew I wanted to be an attorney,” she explained. “It was the closest thing to being a grown-up debater.”

After high school, Ms. Harrison attended the University of Southern California, graduating *summa cum laude* and with Honors with a B.A. in Political Science, Gender Studies, and Cinema-Television. She then switched coasts to earn a J.D. from Harvard Law School, graduating *cum laude* after serving as Executive Articles Editor of the *Harvard Civil Rights-Civil Liberties Law Review*, Executive Technical Editor of the *Harvard Women's Law Journal*, and as Co-President of Harvard Lambda. Despite a stint as a Law Lecturer and Visiting Scholar at the University of Miami Law School, her heart remained in the nation's capital. Harrison cited the city's people as a factor, explaining that, “Celebrities here are judges and senators. It [Washington, D.C.] has some substance to it – sort of like L.A., except the actors and rock stars are the people who try to get things done for the American people.” She found a professional home in Washington at the law offices of Jenner & Block, alongside several other debate aficionados. “One of my best friends in the office is Anjan Choudhury, an NFL alum and coach at Walt Whitman High School.”



Even before her recent presentation to the Supreme Court, this former debater was an accomplished attorney. Harrison's impressive vitae notes that she has represented the recording industry before the Copyright Royalty Board and also participated in appellate litigation matters before the federal appellate courts. Then in December 2008, Jenner & Block filed a brief in the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals on behalf of a pro-democracy advocate from Cameroon who sought asylum in the United States after being detained, interrogated, and beaten for his nonviolent support of free political elections. He had been denied asylum by a lower court and subsequently faced deportation. Despite the gravity of his appeal, Harrison was not confident that the Justices would review it. At that time, Harrison explained, “[his asylum case] didn't appear to have any consequence for the Supreme Court.” However, Harrison moved to temporarily stay his deportation pending the appeal. In denying the stay, she explained, “the 4th circuit ruling was in conflict with other circuits that applied a different standard in determining whether an immigrant can be deported while his case is pending. Harrison filed a brief asking the Supreme Court to hear the case, which the Supreme Court granted.

The firm celebrated after learning

that the appeal would be heard, but pressure mounted for Harrison, the counsel of record. “This case can literally mean life or death for my client,” Harrison noted. Moreover, she had only three weeks to prepare the brief for *Nken v. Mukasey* (No. 08-681), which she compared to “drafting a 1AC, except the court is asking the questions instead of the other side.”

The oral argument took place only two months after the Supreme Court agreed to hear the case. Harrison described the process of arguing in front of the Supreme Court: “Each side gets 30 minutes – one lawyer for each side. You get about a minute, then the justices start asking questions. You try to turn answers into affirmative sides. Since I was a petitioner, I got to save time for a rebuttal.” Several supporters from the world of forensics watched as Harrison argued, including Harvard debate coach Dallas Perkins; Gordon Stables, the current coach at her alma mater, USC; and two debaters from the USC debate team. Her forensics friends might have observed familiar tendencies during the proceedings as Harrison drew on her Policy background: “[Debate] definitely prepared me to always think offensively,” she explained. “Whenever you get a question, you always want to turn it into a reason you win.”

At press time, the nation's highest court was still deliberating *Nken v. Mukasey*, but Harrison is already affected by the experience. “My confidence as an attorney has grown, because if you can prep and argue a case in two months, you can do more,” she explained. It also provided an opportunity to reconnect with friends from the NFL: “Lots of debaters, students from camp, adversaries have e-mailed me.”

So what's next for this standout NFL alumna? “I have a hearing in a death penalty case in Georgia next month, and I'm serving on a grand jury for 6 weeks.” Do they really want an attorney on their grand jury? “In D.C. it's hard to move without touching a lawyer,” she explained (before reminding me that there are no strikes on a grand jury). On that note, I asked if she had any plans to venture into politics while in the nation's capital. “No...” she wryly replied, “I think I'll stick with this law thing.”

# How Forensics Inspires Public Service

How DOES the NFL inspire public service? It's written all over our Code of Honor:

**INTEGRITY** – Elected officials are there to represent their constituents, so they must adhere to a strong moral and ethical code. They must accurately represent their constituents without letting their own personal agenda cloud their judgment.

**HUMILITY** – Let's face it: elected officials will not always win their case on the floor or in public opinion. But they have learned from the NFL to defer gracefully when their proposition fails and try all the harder the next time around.

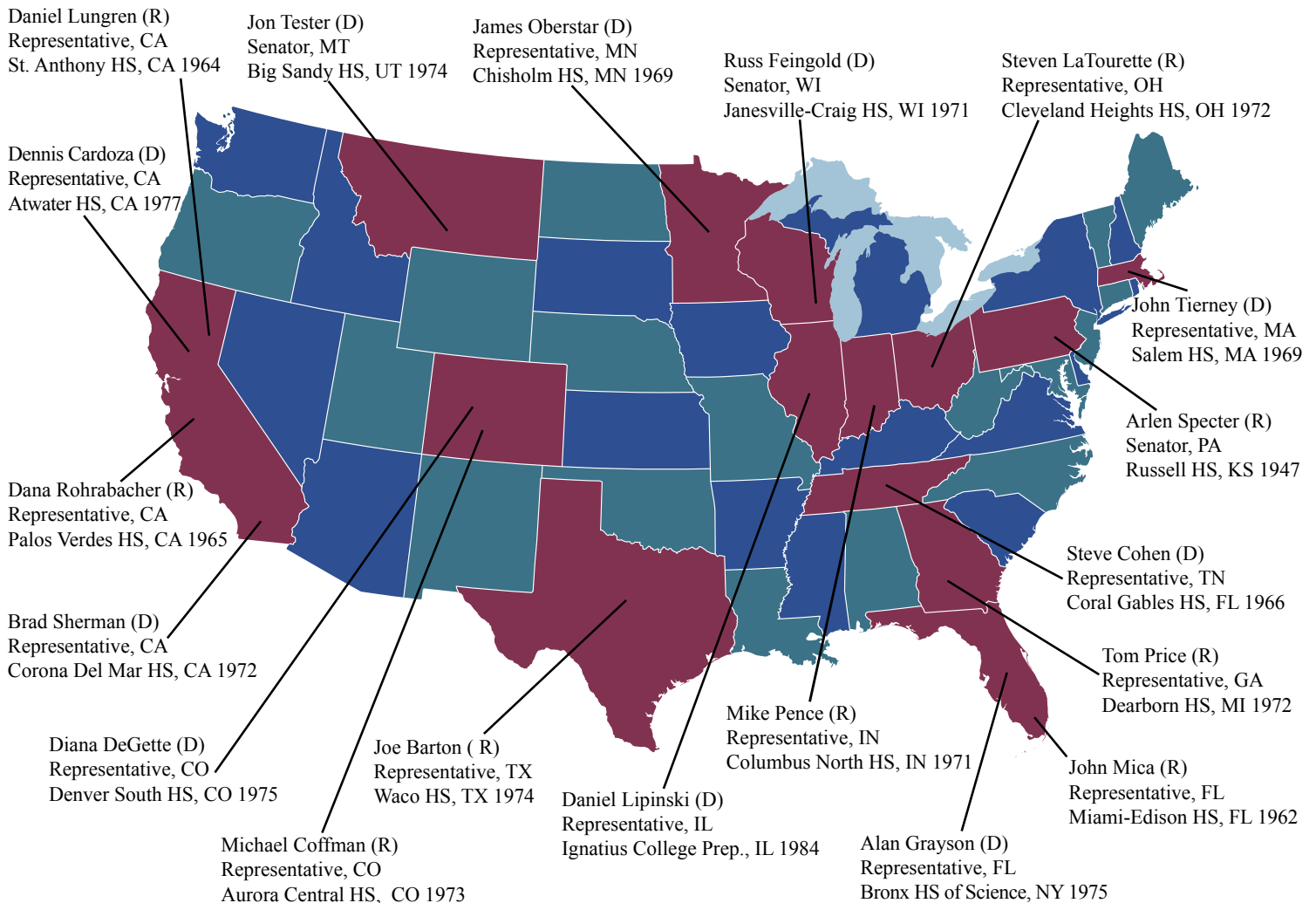
**RESPECT** – Any relationship is based on two overarching principles: trust and respect. An elected official must earn the respect of his or her constituents by listening to their queries and effectively communicating them to others. Likewise, they earn the respect of their colleagues by working hard to create change.

**LEADERSHIP** – Elected officials face challenges head on and willingly take the lead on projects where many people would hesitate. They have developed a sense of self-confidence where they are willing to take risks, and because of this they are seen as leaders in the eyes of their colleagues. Men and women in public service are dedicated to their constituents and pursue their causes relentlessly.

**SERVICE** – While it applies to all elected officials, those who have experience in the NFL have a unique drive to leave the world in better condition than when they found it. They strive to right the wrongs in their communities, from drugs to environmental reform. They seek to give back to the communities that have given them so much.

--Amy Dorman

Check out the map below to see just how many U.S. Congressmen and women developed their skills in the NFL.



*If we have inadvertently missed any of our alumni, we apologize.*

*Please contact us if you are aware of other members of Congress who are NFL alumni at [alumni@nationalforensicleague.org](mailto:alumni@nationalforensicleague.org)*

# More Than Just Teammates: Couples Who Met in the NFL

By Amy Dorman

The NFL has always served as a place to meet people and forge relationships. For a few lucky individuals though, the friendships that they made grew into love, and what started out as a simple speech relationship turned into a lasting marriage. Here are just a few of those couples who found love, loss, and ultimately their perfect life-long debate partner.

Paul Bloss and his wife Julie Lanier Bloss barely knew each other during high school, but have hardly spent a day apart since. Paul attended Hillcrest High School in Dallas, Texas, while Julie attended Cypress Fairbank High School in Houston, Texas. Both participated in debate, so their paths crossed frequently, but they never took the time to get to know each other. When they graduated in 1976, they both independently chose to attend Baylor University. With Paul, it was love at first sight. Julie, however, was initially reluctant to get to know Paul because of his reputation of being abrasive and high on himself as a debater. Even with her reluctance, their college debate coach decided to make them debate partners early into their first season. They paired well together in debate rounds, but fared even

better personally. After dating for several years, they married each other after they graduated.

When asked if there were any challenges to maintaining their relationship while competing, Paul responded with a resounding no for two reasons: first, debate in college was more time consuming than high school, so there wasn't time for other things, including dating. In that respect, it was very convenient to date his debate partner since they were around each other constantly and he was madly in love with her, which he still is to this day. Second, his coach warned him at day one that Julie was the Beauty, he was the Beast, and to never forget that women are the more deadly of the species, so he knew his place with her right from the start.

Currently, Paul works as the Director of Sales and Marketing for Countdown, Inc. in Texas. Julie is a former attorney. Their son, Brian, also had a long career in the NFL, competing in debate and Extemp with Coppell High School in Texas and continuing on at Western Kentucky University. Paul and Julie are extremely proud of his accomplishments, including a third place finish in LD Debate at the 2008 NFA Collegiate Nationals. They continue to stay involved with the NFL by judging for

high school and college tournaments. The Bloss family is grateful to the NFL because it taught them how to work with others and be part of a vibrant community, as well as serving as a vehicle for giving back to others. They believe they are still winners when they attend tournaments because of all the spectacular talent being displayed and that they can still add something to the NFL community.



*The Jeffries*



While it took the Blosses time to nurture and cultivate their relationship, Paul and Ruth Jeffries knew practically from the start that they would end up married. Their relationship began at Air Academy High School in Colorado, but their friendship began long before. Their families were friends, so Paul and Ruth grew up around each other, attending each other's family picnics and church functions. In high school, they were in the same science classes and Paul was even best friends with Ruth's brother, Dale Watts.

Their introduction into high school debate was very much a trial by fire. Since Paul and Dale would constantly argue and fight for who presented the best evidence, they decided to partner up and join their school's debate program. Their coach at the time was new to debate, so Paul and Dale

taught themselves the principles of debate, often stopping in the middle of rounds to ask the judge, "Ok, what do we do now?" To prepare their cases, they would try out their arguments on Ruth and solicit her opinion on whether they were sound or not. That year, Dale suddenly became ill right before a tournament, and Paul needed a substitute - fast. Since Ruth was familiar with the cases, their coach was willing to put her in Dale's place. To say she was nervous would be an understatement, but Paul was patient and encouraging and after a shaky first practice speech in her mom's kitchen, Ruth got the hang of it. Paul thought that for her, a shy person by nature, to go through with competing in debate, she must be a pretty special person. He asked her to prom and they began dating that spring.

Dale was a year older than Paul, so when he graduated, Paul knew right away who he wanted for his new debate partner. It was Paul's senior year, Ruth's junior year, and by that spring they were unstoppable, winning virtually all of their debate rounds. Ruth worried what would happen to the team if they broke up. But not only did they stay together, they fell in love as debate partners and have been debating each other ever since. When Paul graduated in 1976, Ruth still had a year left. They maintained a long distance relationship while she finished high school and he started college at Colorado State University. When she went to attend college at Denver University, they gave one another the opportunity to date other people, but neither felt the need to. He knew right away that he wanted to marry her, but it took studying abroad in England for her to realize that Paul was the one. They finally married after Ruth finished college in 1981.

Twenty-eight years later, they are still happily married. While their involvement with the NFL is limited these days, they carry fond memories of their days in debate. Paul used to coach debate while teaching at Bethel College in Minnesota, but has since moved on to teach Philosophy at Ripon College. His involvement in debate helped him to broaden his interest in subjects ranging from religion to philosophy to ethics. Ruth's involvement in debate helped her to open up as a person and feel confident speaking in front of people. She also feels that all of her work preparing arguments has helped her to understand literary analyses better, which comes in handy working jobs such as a grant writer, writer for ACT essay passages, and working with international students. Ultimately, their relationship has succeeded because of their joint experience

in debate. They have both learned more effective ways to communicate. They allow for alternative viewpoints, and in turn don't have explosive fights as most couples do. They've learned to argue together, and as Paul says, "I taught her to argue and haven't won one since."



### *The Longs*

It would seem that debate is the ultimate way to forge a strong relationship, but Jaime and Eric Long would beg to differ. Jaime attended Riverdale High School in Illinois and frequently competed against her spouse Eric Long, who attended Freeport High School. Jaime primarily competed in interpretation events, whereas Eric competed in just about everything. Initially, she thought he was cute and affectionately nicknamed him "Acronym Boy" for all of the acronyms he used in his speeches. Their paths officially crossed at one tournament their senior year when Eric was the only member from his team to attend. Seeing that he was lonely, Jaime invited him to eat pizza and hang out with her friends. The next morning, Eric left his phone number and email address under the windshield wiper of Jaime's school van. As if that wasn't embarrassing enough, Jaime's coach was also her mom! She didn't call him because she was going off to college, so why even think about starting a relationship?

Unbeknownst to her, they both had enrolled at Bradley University. They ran into each other at a welcome event and began dating one month later. They continued competing together on Bradley's forensic team and were engaged in the fall of their

senior year. One of their favorite memories from competing was at NFA Nationals their senior year of college. Jaime won 2nd place in Individual Sweeps and went to sit on Eric's lap in celebration, only to have them announce that she should let Eric stand up so he could receive 1st place.

For Eric and Jaime, there weren't many challenges to maintaining their speech relationship. The most important part was not turning couple drama into team drama. They also had the special challenge of

when one would break into finals and the other wouldn't, the one who didn't would instantly have to switch into cheerleader mode instead of venting to their favorite person in the world. Dating a fellow forensicator had its perks, though. There was always someone

to help with speeches and being invested in the other person's events helped them to feel like they were competing together for the greater good of the team. Even when they were forced to compete against each other, they were rooting for each other.

Currently, both Eric and Jaime are collegiate speech instructors; Eric works at Elgin Community College and Jaime at Kishwaukee College, both in Illinois. They still judge local high school tournaments from time to time and have taught NFL students at various national speech camps. For Jaime and Eric, their participation in the NFL had a profound impact on the people they became. They learned valuable life lessons, such as how to travel, conduct oneself in a professional atmosphere, and how to appropriately honor colleagues. Jaime feels that high school forensics not only prepared her for the rigors of college speech, but taught her to love the activity.

The bonds forged during competitive speech remain strong long after the tournament ends. These bonds transcend high school affiliation and team allegiance. Whether these relationships result in marriage or even just friendship, what matters most is that we have created these relationships. Forensics is about more than just competition: it's about connecting with others and staying connected.

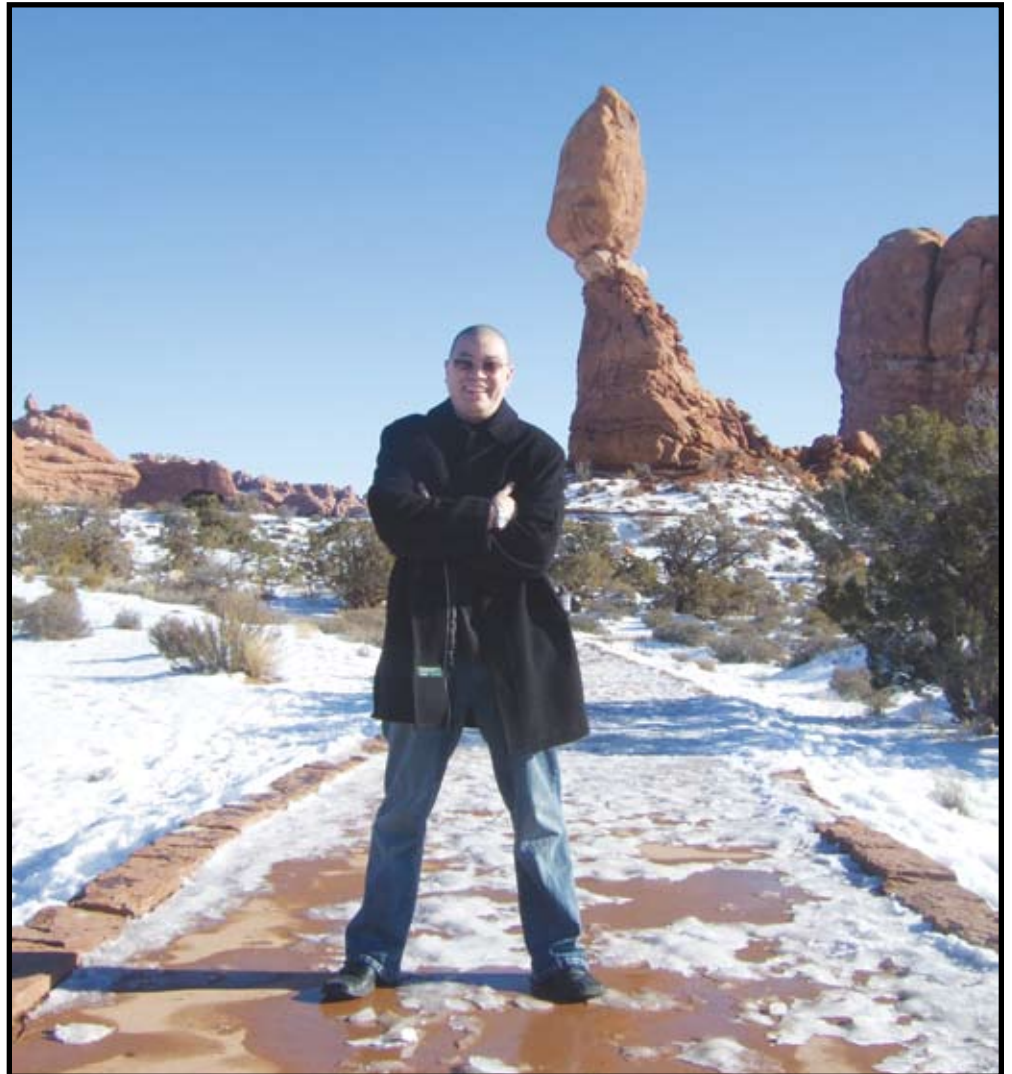
# The Boy who Found his Voice in the NFL Seeks to Give Youth a Voice Today

By Bethany Rusch

With so many charities that deserve support - especially in the current economic climate - why choose to give to the National Forensic League (NFL)? For Joseph Tung, an NFL alum from Plano Senior High School in Texas, that question brought a simple answer. Joseph attributes much of his success in life to braving the fear of judgment and critique in a structure that forces you to try: the world of NFL debate.

A self-described awkward adolescent whose voice cracked when he spoke, Joseph was immensely uncomfortable speaking in public. He notes, "With speech and debate, there is nowhere to hide. The judges are rating you on what comes out of your mouth and mind. There you are – totally exposed – competing in a suit that you don't even have the confidence to wear yet." Joseph wisely recalls what a transitional time high school is for teens as they struggle with self-image, hormones, and peer pressure. He credits debate with forcing him out of his comfort zone and building his communication skills, although he acknowledges that he didn't see the fruits of his labor until well after his high school days. "I didn't make it to Nationals or have a shelf full of trophies and plaques at home. I was a late-bloomer in that regard. I didn't really excel in advocacy until law school. But those early days in the NFL – that's where I began developing those skills. That's where the foundation was built."

To say Joseph is humble would be a vast understatement. While some of us recall our high school days with rose-colored glasses, Joseph describes his high school self, "I was an awful debater surrounded by a talented team. I had no natural talent. I was so scared that I'd literally carry a vomit bag with me when I competed." But Joseph forced himself to get through his nerves



and overcame his initial fears. He began debate his junior year and approached the activity with a trial and error method, as each competition highlighted his strengths and weaknesses. In retrospect, Joseph's NFL days could be summarized by the following quotation from Thomas Edison, "I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work."

What did work for Joseph were the intellectual dynamics of his speech and debate team, which he described as "feeding our nerdiness." He comments, "Being on the team at Plano Senior High School gave us a chance to socialize and develop in a comfortable, nurturing environment. Here was this diverse group of people and we were immersed

with each other, pressing the issues of philosophy and politics. It just felt like home." And when you are in the throes of adolescence, there is truly no better feeling than that.

Joseph took the confidence and skills garnered from his NFL days to the University of Texas, serving as a member of a two-time national championship debate team and receiving a bachelor's degree in Business Administration. Joseph also won numerous Moot Court and advocacy awards in law school at Southern Methodist University, including being named to the National Order of Barristers and Outstanding Advocate by the International Academy of Trial

Lawyers. Now serving as Senior Legal Counsel for Schlumberger, a global oilfield services company, Joseph believes he could not live without the speaking skills he honed in the NFL. He certainly couldn't have survived law school, where professors employ the Socratic Method in class and students are forced upon center stage. The difference between law school and forensics? "Law school is meant to be a torturous experience, to break you. Speech and debate give you the chance to try, to learn – the chance to find your voice." Now, Joseph wants to help give other youth that same chance to find their voice just as he found his in the cracking, awkward tenor of a teenage boy.

When Joseph walked into the NFL's Texas alumni reception in Dallas last October, fifteen years since his high school graduation, his NFL experience came full circle for him. "I guess I'd taken it for granted that the NFL was

always there providing the complex structure that supports schools, students, and tournaments all over the nation. While students compete locally, the NFL offers something bigger – the chance to compete nationally. It hadn't occurred to me that, as a non-profit organization, it depends on member support to make that happen." Within forty-eight hours of attending the Texas alumni reception, Joseph sent a generous donation to the Bruno E. Jacob Youth Leadership Fund. His goal? Not for youth to have the same experience he had, but to have their own, unique experience that will someday reach far beyond competitive forensics and into the world of politics, law, activism, or entertainment. In addition to his financial support, Joseph has actively contributed to the League by serving as a debate coach and tournament judge over the past ten years. He has offered his talents through several assistant coaching stints at Plano Senior High School (Plano,

TX), St. Thomas More (Lafayette, LA), The Kinkaid School (Houston, TX), and Bellaire High School (Houston, TX).

Like Joseph Tung, each of our alumni has a story to tell. Perhaps you have a stash of forensics trophies and medals that serve as a testament to your high school success. Or maybe your success is exemplified in other ways, such as your confidence and ability to articulate yourself. The 93,000 student members who participate today are walking in your footsteps – living the experiences that shaped your life. Join Joseph and show them your support by making a contribution to the Bruno E. Jacob Youth Leadership Fund today and let your voice continue to be heard.

## Diversifying Programs & Partnerships: Taking the League to New Levels

Founding Executive Secretary Bruno Ernst Jacob loved to espouse the primary value of belonging to the NFL: the honor of lifetime membership. That primary value continues to live on in 93,000 active student members and nearly 3,000 schools the NFL's Programs office supports. Since the turn of the millennium, the NFL has taken strides in new directions to diversify the menu of experiences we offer students and coach-educators.

Among these exciting developments are the following offerings:

- Staff at the national office dedicated to supporting coaches, developing curriculum and assisting district-level leadership.
- Lesson plans, fundraising ideas, drills, management and team-building exercises and an online community, including an interactive calendar where alumni can browse tournaments.
- Complimentary DVDs of final round performances for new coaches.
- Publication information and authors of all 600 literary interpretation selections performed at several past national tournaments.
- Local, regional and national coach clinics, as well as coach mentoring.
- Online professional development tutorial courses for continuing education units and/or graduate credit through Minnesota State University, Mankato.
- Professional coach/educator accreditation to honor expertise and experience.
- Resources to help coaches and parents advocate for their programs.

Partnerships with outside contests and organizations, such as:

- The People Speak Global Debates - Students research the selected topic and prepare clear, persuasive arguments for a public debate to engage the community. Top participating schools send two two-person teams to the United Nations Foundation Global Student Leadership Summit.
- National Public Policy Forum - Sponsored by New York University and the Bickel & Brewer Foundation, students participate in oral and written debates on issues of public policy, culminating in final debates in New York City before prestigious legal and academic minds.
- Now Debate This - Students converge on a unique online social network to creatively explore humanities and sciences by using research, critical analysis and communication skills to challenge and inspire our society to resolve contemporary issues.
- Rising Powers - The advent of India, China, Brazil, and others on the world stage as increasingly more powerful actors is causing a major transformation of the global political system. The Stanley Foundation's work on Rising Powers and U.S. security looks at the ramifications of this systemic transformation.
- Summer Coach Workshop Scholarships - The NFL has arranged for coaches to attend premier forensic summer institutes/camps, learning from the nation's top speech and debate experts.

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If you are in the Birmingham, Alabama area this coming June, chances are you won't be alone! That's because nearly 3000 high school students and their 900 chaperones will descend on Birmingham for the 2009 "Stars Fell on Alabama" NFL National Tournament, June 14-19. Top competitors in ten main, four supplemental, and two consolation events will vie for titles and bragging rights as the nation's top performers. Also on the line: the chance to impress the nation's best collegiate speech and debate coaches, and best of all - over \$130,000 in college scholarships.

So if you are in Birmingham when we are, stop by and see us! While the faces and the venue may have changed, you will find that the thrill of competition and the excitement of performance aren't altogether different from when you competed in the NFL.

By making a contribution online, you aid the National Office in conserving valuable resources by reducing paper use. You can also save paper by electing to give through regular automatic withdrawals from your checking or savings account. The elimination of checks and envelopes assists the NFL's efforts to be good stewards of our environment.

We value the support of our alumni, coaches, and friends and encourage you to give green to give youth a voice today by making your tax-deductible contribution. To make your green gift, contact Director of Development, Bethany Rusch, at [bethany.rusch@nationalforensicleague.org](mailto:bethany.rusch@nationalforensicleague.org) or call 920.748.6206.

