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COACH PROFILE

TREY SMITH

- **How did you become involved in speech and debate?** I had just moved to a new city and was attending a large high school where I didn't know anyone. Even though I was shy and quiet, my freshman year English teacher recognized something in me and encouraged me to join the team. I quickly felt like I was part of something, and I tried every event I could: Lincoln Douglas, Policy, Interp, Congress.

go to for advice, even though he lives on the other side of the country.
- **What challenges do you face as a coach?** We all face the same challenge: doing more with less. I embrace this challenge, though. Even with the shaky economy, our team just had our best fundraising year yet. Community members really come through when they see the opportunities our students are given and how they succeed. When we were preparing to take eight students to nationals, I wrote a simple letter to the editor of some local newspapers discussing the importance of forensics and asking for donations of any size. Several large checks came in the mail, even from people who had no connection to the school. The other challenge is the time commitment. Speech and debate takes up more time than any other high school activity. I am always looking for ways to make tournaments and practices more efficient. My wife is very supportive of the fact that I spend many weekends at tournaments and leave for an entire week come nationals time. But sometimes we just have to stop, realize our limits, and maybe not spend every weekend at a tournament.
- **Why did you decide to become a speech and debate coach?** In college, I worked as an assistant coach for a couple different schools. As I helped them, I imagined how I would run my own program. Growing the activity was important to me, so I knew I wouldn't be satisfied with taking over an established program. When I was offered a faculty position at East Mountain High School, I finally had the opportunity to start a team from scratch.
- **Did you have a forensic mentor?** I learn something from every coach I meet, but I have three important mentors. Jack Nuzum was my high school coach who inspired me to go into teaching and forensics. Noel Trujillo is truly the “dean” of New Mexico forensics and has taught me how to be successful but still be likable. Mario Herrera is a great friend and the coach whom I
- **What is the most fulfilling part of your job?** I love the preparation

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process. Whether I am facilitating a philosophical discussion in Lincoln Douglas Debate, or if I am helping a student block a new Interpretation piece, the preparation is what makes me love my job. I never thought I could make a career of talking about big ideas and crafting performances with students all day. Coaching and teaching allows me to spend every day doing something I love.

- **Why is forensics important?**

What I love most about the activity is that there is something for everyone. Other high school activities cater to a specific skill set. In forensics, everyone can find an event at which they can excel. At our school, the baseball team's star pitcher is also a Humorous Interpretation national qualifier. Our top male track student is also the state champion in Lincoln Douglas. It's not just an activity for nerdy kids in suits; it truly is for everyone. Once parents and students realize that our activity teaches real lifelong skills, such as critical thinking, research, writing, and public speaking, they want to be involved.

- **How does forensics change your students?** Forensics changes everything—from academic performance to social skills to the way they dress. On one hand,

parents tell me their students now argue more with them at home. On the other hand, parents are impressed that their kids are wearing suits and hanging out with other smart kids. Forensics forces kids to mature quickly. My team knows that I expect more from them than the traditional high school student. They are young adults and should act as such. I have also heard from other teachers at our school that the speech and debate students are the top students in their classes. Once a student joins the program, they tend to take school more seriously and become the highest performing, most outgoing students in their classes.

- **How has coaching changed you?**

I think when you become a speech and debate coach, it becomes an important part of who you are. While I may not be leading a practice or running a tournament every day, I am thinking about arguments or possible pieces every day. I went into teaching because I wanted to coach. However, coaching has made me a better teacher. I am highly goal-oriented in my coaching, and I have applied that practice to the classroom. Coaching has also opened up new opportunities for me. I have met politicians, business leaders, and other community members

who are interested in what we are doing. I enjoy taking what we do in forensics and sharing that with others.

- **What do you want your students to take away from their experience on your team?**

I want students to feel that they have something important to say and have the confidence to share it. All educational experiences should empower students to feel that they can make a difference in this world. Humility is also a core characteristic of our team. Many successful programs are also known for being a bit pretentious. As our team becomes more successful, a gracious and humble attitude becomes more important. Teenagers also have the reputation of being unmotivated and apathetic. Being a member of our team requires a high level of motivation and some serious goal setting. Once students have been part of EMHS forensics, they understand what it takes to be successful. ■

Trey Smith is an NFL diamond coach from East Mountain High School in New Mexico. He also serves as President of the New Mexico Speech and Debate Association. He was recently named one of New Mexico's Top 40 Under Forty, the only educator to receive the honor.