

Introduction

Why Debate is the Sport of the Mind

From hockey players driving toward the net to skiers gliding down a hill, athletes put their bodies to the test every time they compete. They do so in their thirst for victory. Some define victory as reaching their personal best, such as beating their scoring record from the year before or achieving their fastest ever racing time. Others see victory as rising above the competition and ascending to the top of the podium.

Can the same be said for debaters? At first, the comparison seems frivolous. Debate doesn't require physical prowess. A debater can't get injured in the heat of competition (at least we hope not!). And a debater doesn't put his or her body through a grueling physical test.

The sport of debate exists in the *mind*. It requires mental prowess, as opposed to physical prowess. Any injury is to one's intellectual pride and sense of being right. A debater exerts mental energy and uses the power of the voice, not the strength or agility of the body.

It's a sport of the mind because you play to reach a higher standard. Better arguments. Better counter-arguments. Better style and structure. Like any sport, you can always outperform what you did previously. There's a tougher opponent out there who will challenge you to debate more effectively than you once thought possible. No case and no argument will ever be perfect. There's always something greater to achieve. A debater never says, "That's the best I can do."

It's a sport of the mind because you have to think on your feet as the game goes on. Like most sports, debate isn't predictable. Adaptation is the name of the game. You come into it prepared to argue your case. But you're equally prepared to change on the fly. You're ready to pounce on your opponent's weaknesses and to plug holes that have been infiltrated by your rivals. There are no 'cookie-cutter' templates, and no rigid formulas. It's a game with simple rules and general strategies for success. The rest is up to you.

In the sport of debate, your equipment is your voice. It's equipment that must be honed and optimized for success. But your voice alone will not make you a top debater. A golfer's drive is enhanced by his or her choice of clubs, not accomplished by the clubs alone. A hockey goalie's pads help to stop shots, but the real test is one of reflexes and anticipation. Similarly, a compelling voice can only enhance what your mind produces, but it's no substitute for great ideas.

As you strive to excel at debate, you'll make mistakes along the way. And don't be too hard on yourself when you do. Not even the world's leading debaters perform flawlessly. Debate isn't a science that you can perfect. Like any sport, if you fall, your best bet is to pick up the pieces and move on.

So put yourself into the mindset of a competitor, and get set to tackle the sport of debate!