

# **A Coach's Notes<sup>1</sup>**

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## **Connecticut Debate Association**

**Newtown High School and Stamford High School**

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**Resolved: The United States should boycott the 2008 Beijing Olympics.**

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## **Introduction**

This is the first edition of the 2007-08 CDA season. If you would like to receive the Notes from last year, please email me and I will send them to you. Accompanying this document is a transcript of my notes from the final round in two formats: transcript and flow chart. I email a similar package along with a copy of the packet distributed at the tournament to CDA-registered and CDA-interested coaches usually within two weeks after a tournament.

These are intended for your benefit in coaching your teams and for the students to use directly. I hope that you will find them useful teaching tools. Please feel free to make copies and distribute them to your debaters.

I appreciate any feedback you have, good and bad. The best comments and suggestions will find their way into subsequent issues. I would also consider publishing signed, reasoned comments or replies from coaches or students in subsequent issues. So if you'd like to sound off on some aspect of the debate topic or the CDA, send me an email.

## **Arguing Values**

I observed four rounds on Saturday. The Affirmative cases in each round were similar in their statement of harm: basically, China is engaged in human rights violations. Each case then went in a slightly different direction. The Affirmative teams in the second and third rounds simply gave three variations on wrongs committed by China, and state such

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wrongs are positively reinforced with the award of the Olympic games. None of these contentions give a specific reason for a boycott or for any particular action at all.

The Affirmative teams in the first and final rounds did a bit better. The teams began with a statement of principle that is assumed by the other two Affirmative teams: human rights violations are against US policy and are generally unjust. The Affirmative team in the first round doesn't take this any further, other than to suggest that progress by China on human rights is unlikely. The Affirmative team in the final round argues the boycott is a remedy, putting pressure on China and its actions, presumably to improve compliance with human rights.

<b>Round</b>	<b>Contention 1</b>	<b>Contention 2</b>	<b>Contention 3</b>
<b>First</b>	The US cannot support countries with bad human rights records	The US cannot support a history of repression	There is no hope for progress in a country that steps up repression after being awarded the Olympic games
<b>Second</b>	The Chinese government has failed to fulfill its promises to the IOC	China has prevented or impeded cooperation on human rights issues	China has used the Olympic games as an opportunity to oppress and abuse its citizens
<b>Third</b>	Chinese policies show no signs of change for the better	The Olympics are a perfect time and place to express sentiment	China's policies goes against the IOC charter
<b>Final</b>	It is immoral to condone human rights violations, and participation in the Olympics would condone those violations	A boycott of the Olympics would put pressure on China	A boycott of the Olympics would draw media attention to China

The suggestion in all of these cases, borne out by the way each Affirmative team subsequently argued, is that a boycott will actually help solve this problem by improving Chinese performance on human rights. This takes the Affirmative into policy territory, which may be a difficult argument to make.

### **Traditional Policy Debate**

Traditionally, a policy argument has three parts: harm, inherency and solvency. Harm is the statement of a problem. Inherency argues that the problem exists because the status quo cannot prevent or cure it. Solvency argues that adopting the resolution will cure or ameliorate the harm.

Establishing a harm for this resolution is relatively easy: there is much evidence that China does not respect human rights. However, showing that China will not respond to the traditional remedies of protest, publicity, the courts and diplomacy seems difficult, and the cases we reviewed above do not present an inherency argument. This leaves them open to the attack that there are many other ways to change Chinese practice on human rights. Carrying the solvency argument is also hard: will an Olympic boycott really make a significant difference in China's human rights compliance? The most

important fact that any Affirmative case has to deal with is that the only two examples of Olympic boycotts were both seeming failures.

Given that the four Affirmative teams only discuss harm and solvency, ignoring inherency, none has a classic policy case. As we will see below, there arguments also have a value component. Being neither fish nor fowl is more likely to hurt than help a debater, because it is unclear what needs to be done in order to win the debate.

## **Value Debate**

One alternative is to argue a case based on values, not policy. This, of course, is what Lincoln-Douglas (“LD”) debate is supposed to be about. Value debate isn’t used much in CDA debate, largely, I believe, because students don’t know how to apply it. While this month’s resolution seems to be a pure statement about policy (“Boycott the Olympics!”) I believe that it can be argued on the basis of values.

A value case would begin not with a statement of harm, but a statement of the value to be championed, in this case human rights. In an LD debate, one would start with a value premise, say “justice,” and then a criteria, “human rights.” The argument would be that actions which promote human rights promote justice, and one can compare various actions ability to promote justice by how much they contribute to the promotion of human rights. The Affirmative would argue that adopting the resolution promotes justice through advancing the cause of human rights.

The opposing team might accept this value premise and criteria, but argue that rejecting the resolution would do more to advance human rights and promote justice. Alternatively, the Negative might propose a different value, such as economic development or world peace, take priority over justice and argue that rejecting the resolution should be judged based on it’s impact on these.

Note that the burden here is a bit different than the policy case. In the policy case you have to show that adopting the resolution solves the problem. In the value case you have to show the resolution supports the value better than the alternative.

## **A Value-Oriented Affirmative Case**

The LD jargon might be a bit much for CDA, so I’m going to present a case which I will call “value oriented.” I hope the choice of names will become clear as we go on. Let’s start with the following first contention:

*Promoting human rights is an important goal of US foreign policy.*

One might claim that this contention is obvious, but a reference to the Bill of Rights and US initiatives over the years would support it nicely.

The next two contentions are simple:

*A boycott of the 2008 Beijing Olympics is consistent with and supports this important US policy goal.*

*Attending the 2008 Beijing Olympics is inconsistent with and harms this important US policy goal.*

Much of the material in the packet having to do with China seeing the Olympics as a validation of their growing status in the world, and with the IOC award being conditional on China's promise to improve its human rights practices can be applied directly.

Now, at this point you may be thinking, "Isn't this what all four Affirmative teams were arguing? How are these contentions any different?" Certainly there are similarities, but there is one big difference. In each of the Affirmative cases above the point of the boycott was to put pressure on China to change its policy on human rights. In the value-oriented case the boycott is chosen to be consistent with a goal of US foreign policy.

Let me say that another way. In the four cases above the debate turns on whether or not the boycott will have an impact on Chinese behavior. In the value-oriented case, the debate turns on whether or not the boycott supports a US foreign policy goal. Therefore, the boycott need not have an immediate effect on Chinese policy. To counter the Affirmative, the Negative must show that a boycott is inconsistent with or harms the US policy goal of supporting human rights. This is significantly more difficult for the Negative to do than arguing simply that a boycott will not improve Chinese policy towards human rights.

The Affirmative must be aware of what it is doing in order to argue this case successfully. The Negative will try to pull the debate on to the more favorable grounds of whether or not a boycott will be effective. The Affirmative has to resist that move and insist that the debate is whether or not a boycott is consistent with the US policy goal (the value) of human rights. The boycott need not improve Chinese policy in the near term; it may improve Chinese policy in the long term, though how long that term may be the Affirmative will not say and does not have to say.

### **An Historical Footnote**

Before you conclude that the value argument above is too abstract to be worthwhile, consider another way of interpreting it. Why do we have values anyway? There are any number of philosophical reasons, but the practical one is that we believe that in the long run upholding certain values like human rights leads to a better society for all. In that sense, a value argument is simply a policy argument for the long run.

Consider the US boycott of the 1980 Moscow Olympics. As one who lived through the event, I recall that the immediate impact on the USSR was minimal. It certainly had no effect on the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan.

But looked at in a longer term context, especially of human rights, one might see the boycott differently. The Helsinki Accords had been signed in 1975. They were initially seen as a political pact to reduce military tension in Europe by boosting Soviet prestige and validating post-war borders. However, those accords included a human rights section that gradually began to overshadow the rest of the agreement in importance. The human rights section was eventually used to pressure the Soviets to open up their society. The invasion of Afghanistan, followed by the Olympic boycott, occurred around the time that this shift was taking place. After the boycott, in September 1980 the non-communist

labor union Solidarity was founded in a Polish shipyard, and though suppressed by martial law in 1981, continued to strengthen through the 1980s, eventually toppling the Communist regime. And of course President Reagan was elected and gave his famous “evil empire” speech around this time.

There were, of course a great many other factors in the eventual Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan and fall of the Berlin Wall—US military aid to the Afghan rebels, the Soviet’s inability to compete with the escalating costs of the “Star Wars” missile defense system, the obvious technological backwardness of the Soviet economy. But considering the course of events, can you really conclude that the 1980 boycott was not a part of the eventual overthrow of the Soviet bloc? It’s certainly debatable.

### Exercise

A number of last year’s resolutions could have been argued from a value or a policy perspective. Create a value and policy case for each of the following resolutions<sup>2</sup>, and compare their merits:

<b>Tournament</b>	<b>Resolution</b>
December	In the U.S. a student’s race is an appropriate factor in admissions policies & practices at public elementary and secondary schools.
January	In the United States the keeping of animals in zoos should be banned.
February	In the U.S., public high school athletes should undergo mandatory random drug testing.

### Cross-Ex: Open or Closed?

CDA extemporaneous debate permits “open” cross-ex: both members of the opposing team may question the speaker and the end of his or her constructive speech. Yet, if you noticed, both teams in this month’s final round had only one member ask questions after each speech, alternating so each debater was responsible for one cross-ex period. This is “closed” cross-ex, and while CDA does not require it, it does not forbid it either.

Closed cross-ex has a number of advantages. The most obvious in the final round was that it simplified the mechanics of sharing a single microphone. It’s much easier to pass the microphone from questioner to speaker and back again than to juggle it among three people, though this isn’t an issue in most debates.

Less obvious and more important advantages include the ability to maintain a longer chain of questions and to better prepare the next speech. It can be hard to coordinate cross-ex between two questioners. Even if they don’t interrupt each other, and wait until their partner has gotten a full reply before asking the next question, they are likely at the very least to switch topics. Sometimes it takes several questions in a row to get to the intended answers, and it can be difficult to do this with two asking questions. A longer

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<sup>2</sup> I have PDF versions of the packets given to the debaters at these tournaments. If you would like a copy, please email me.

sequence of questions can also make your cross-ex performance look stronger to the judge.

I think the most important advantage to using a single interrogator is better preparation. When both team members are asking questions no one is taking notes or working on the next speech. If one team member asks the questions, the other, preferably the one who is going to speak next, can listen to the answers and incorporate them in his or her notes. So the Second Negative would question the First Affirmative while the First Negative listened, the First Affirmative would question the First Negative, the First Negative would question the Second Negative, and the Second Affirmative would question the Second Negative.

Often, when both teammates are asking questions, no one is collecting and using the responses. I'm often surprised when apparently useful answers go unnoticed and unused. Dividing the work with your partner (one questioning and the other one listening) could lead to a more efficient use of time and information.

When you get up to question the other team, you should have already agreed with your partner as to which lines of questioning you want to pursue. Some questions will set up your own contentions, and others will explore the consequences of your opponent's contentions. If you've done this, one person should be enough to ask the questions while the other tallies the replies and works on the next speech. Since it is open cross-ex, the last thing the questioner can do is turn to his partner and ask, "Is there anything I missed?"

Closed cross-ex may not work better for everyone, but it might work for you.