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American Debate Association Crowns National Champions for 2025

[Houston, TX/US] – The University of Houston hosted the American Debate Association (ADA) National Tournament the weekend of March 8-10, 2025. The tournament was attended by 86 teams total – 56 in the open division, 12 in the junior varsity division, and 18 in the novice division.

Debaters from across the country were asked to debate both sides of the season-long resolution about decarbonization. The full wording of the topic is “Resolved: The United States Federal Government should adopt a clean energy policy for decarbonization in the United States, including a market-based instrument.”

Students who participated at the tournament debated half of their preliminary debates in favor of the resolution and half of their preliminary debates in opposition to the resolution.

At the conclusion of the preliminary debates, the tournament seeded teams in all divisions based on their win-loss record and speaker points. Elimination debates were single elimination for the top 9 teams in the novice division, top 6 teams in the junior varsity division, and the top 28 teams in the open division.

In the open division, teams from California State University – Long Beach, Emory University, the University of Kansas, the University of Kentucky, Liberty University, Michigan State University, the University of Michigan, Northwestern University, the University of Southern California, and Wake Forest University advanced over teams from Emory University, the University of Houston, the University of Kansas, the University of Kentucky, the University of Michigan, Samford University, the University of Texas – Dallas, and Wake Forest University in a partial double octafinals.

In the octafinals, team from California State University – Long Beach, Emory University, the University of Kentucky, the University of Michigan, and Northwestern University advanced over teams from the Georgetown University, the University of Kansas, Liberty University, Macalester College, Michigan State University, the University of Michigan, the University of Southern California, and Wake Forest University.

In quarterfinals, teams from California State University – Long Beach, Emory University, and the University of Kentucky were bested by teams from Emory University, the University of Michigan, and Northwestern University.

The University of Michigan and Northwestern University advanced to the championship round after defeating teams from Emory University. Eleanor Barrett and Jiyoong Park from the University of Michigan defeated Akash Deo and Veronica Rubin from Northwestern University to be named Open Champions of ADA Nationals.

The novice division is typically for students who are in their first year of competitive debate, and junior varsity is for students competing in their first two academic years of intercollegiate debate.

In a junior varsity partial quarterfinals, teams from Emory University and George Mason University advanced without debating. Teams from California State University – Fullerton and Liberty University advanced over teams from George Mason University.

In semifinals, a team from California State University – Fullerton defeated a team from George Mason University, and a team from Liberty University defeated a team from Emory University. Kalani Wineman and Nova Koenig from Liberty University won the final round against Samantha Catapang and Israel Dominguez from California State University – Fullerton to be named Junior Varsity Champions of ADA Nationals.

In a novice division partial octafinals, teams from California State University – Long Beach, George Mason University, the University of Houston, Liberty University, and Wake Forest University advanced without debating. A team from George Mason University advanced over a team from the University of Houston.

In quarterfinals, teams from California State University – Long Beach, Liberty University, and the University of Houston advanced over teams from George Mason University, Liberty University, and Wake Forest University. In semifinals, two teams from Liberty University defeated a team from California State University – Long Beach and a team from the University of Houston. Liberty University closed out the final round with Liberty LT (Landon Lugo and Elijah Tooley) and Liberty FH (Ethan Fritz and Cole Heckel) being named co-champions.

Debaters participating also receive speaker points for each of their preliminary debates. In the novice division, Elijah Tooley from Liberty University was named top speaker and Amira Shananier from George Mason University was named top speaker in the junior varsity division. In the open division, Jiyoong Park was named top speaker.

In addition to the awards related to tournament competition, the ADA presents several other awards recognizing individuals at the national tournament. Mikaela Malsin from Emory University received the Excellence in Coaching Award to recognize the excellent performance of a coach, whether a director, assistant or graduate assistant at an ADA school. Carly Watson from Michigan State University received the Outstanding New Director Award to recognize a new director who demonstrates outstanding achievement in scholarship, service, community building, or competitive success. Gabe Lewis from Georgetown University was given the Founders' Award for Service to recognize someone in the ADA that goes above and beyond the requirements of their job.

To recognize teams with season-long success, the Front Royal Cup is awarded to two-person teams in each division with the strongest tournament results during the invitational season. The award is named for the site of the American Debate Association's founding meeting in Front Royal, Virginia.

In novice, Southwestern College (Sanchez & Flores Palacios) placed third, Samford University (Alexander & Bush) placed second, and Liberty University (Aziz & Satterfield) were awarded the Front Royal Cup. In junior varsity, Emory University (Cheng & Wang) placed third, Liberty University (Foos & Sanders) placed second, and Emory University (Pelli & Stearns) were awarded the Front Royal Cup. In varsity, Michigan State University (Bennett & Shehzad) placed third, Michigan State University (Miklovis & Montford) placed second, and the University of Kentucky (Rimpson & Stockstill) were awarded the Front Royal Cup.

In a balloting process that included participants at the tournament, Hayla Aziz from Liberty University was named Novice Debater of the Year, Kathleen Silkes from Indiana University was named Junior Varsity Debater of the Year, Akash Deo from Northwestern University was named Varsity Debater of the Year, and Ben Biggs from George Mason University was named Judge of the Year.

The ADA also presents the Julia Burke Award annually. The Julia Burke Award recognizes the ADA debater who most closely upholds the combination of characteristics that Julia Burke displayed in her love for the activity. These qualities include excellence in and passion for debate, a commitment to helping others, love and respect for the debate community and dedication to maintaining friendships despite the pressures of competition. This year's recipient was Lauren McBlain from the University of Kentucky.

About the American Debate Association

The American Debate Association began in 1985 as an intercollegiate debate association. It uses the resolution selected by the Cross Examination Debate Association and the National Debate Tournament. Currently they have 44 member schools. The ADA's mission is increasing participation, maintaining a balance between education and competition, and ensuring an equitable and fair activity for all programs, regardless of their size or experience.

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