

Speech team: A force to be reckoned with

Written by Elizabeth Barrett
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Members say alumni, community and student support, more contribute to success.

Reasons vary for why the Swede speech team has developed into a powerhouse the last decade.

During a visit to the advanced speech class at Gothenburg High School, students and speech coach Dan Jensen talked about the ingredients of their success.

“We love what we do,” said junior Roman Schmidt.

Jensen said the team also has a mind-set where older students, and speech team alumni, have a responsibility to give back to the program.

Alumni return from college on weekends and breaks to judge meets and/or coach local students.

Support from parents, the school, the community and peers is also critical.

“The students have to know that what they’re doing is okay to be doing, that it’s something cool,” he said.

Unlike some schools, where coaches choose scripts and speeches for students, senior Abbie Mazour said the Swedes pick their own and work to make them successful.

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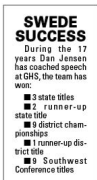
“That makes it yours and not something the coaches assign to you,” said Betsy Potter, a fellow senior.

At some schools, senior Ashley Wilkerson said students are forced to participate in speech competitions.

That doesn't happen at Gothenburg High School although all freshmen are required to take a semester-long speech class.

Jensen described the class as giving kids exposure to public speaking, adding that it's a great recruiting tool for the speech program.

Confidence is crucial to success.



“I think it has to be developed and it needs to be built up by coaches and teammates,” Mazour said.

Swede confidence shows, according to senior Carlin Daharsh.

“When we walked into the Gering meet, all eyes were on us,” Daharsh said. “The other towns realized we'd arrived.”

Potter said there's a fine line between confidence and arrogance. She doesn't think the Swedes

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cross it.

Another reason the Swedes do well is because the team is like a big family, said sophomore Gage Taylor.

Mazour said it's difficult not to be close to teammates when "you get up at 4 a.m. and are with these people all day and dog tired at the end of the day."

Jensen also talked about accidental success that grows from success each year.

"Sometimes it's hard to visualize the younger students stepping into the shoes of seniors who have had great success.," he explained. "When the next year comes, those younger kids do step up and expect to be just as good as or better than those who came before."

He described the process as an amazing phenomenon.

"It's like they never even considered that they might not be able to," Jensen said.

For example, Jensen's first state championship team was in 2004 in C1 and in subsequent years, the team has moved to stiffer competition in Class B.

"It's been a ripple effect and you've got to have a taste for that," he said.

What also helps is a winning attitude, Jensen said, pointing to how the kids don't make excuses for their performances and are hungry to accept constructive comments from judges.

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“They take ultimate responsibility for the results of competitions,” he said.

However success, especially from year to year, can bring on stress.

“There’s an expectation to maintain that competitive edge,” Jensen explained. “A team that everyone holds in high regard is a big deal and it’s stressful to keep that up week after week.”

A challenge for Jensen and the other coaches—teachers Angela Piper, Lori Long and Heather Franzen—is helping students keep material fresh.

“We constantly make changes to keep the students from going on autopilot,” Jensen said.

SWEDES HOST INVITE SATURDAY	
<small>The public is invited to watch the Swede speech team compete this Saturday at Goshensburg High School.</small>	<small>Spectators are asked to enter contest rooms between speeches and make sure cell phones are turned off so competitors are not interrupted.</small>
<small>Rounds begin at 8 a.m. in the high school and in Dudley Elementary. Each round lasts an hour and 15 minutes with the cycle continuing throughout the day until 3:30 p.m. Awards will be presented at approximately 3:30 p.m.</small>	<small>Competitive events include extemporaneous, persuasive, informative, entertainment speaking, humorous and serious prose, poetry, duet acting and oral interpretation of drama.</small>
<small>A list of local competitors, their events and times is available in the media center. Twenty-four schools are expected to compete.</small>	<small>For more information, contact Jensen at danzonem@swedesdes.org or by calling the school at 537-3651.</small>

The Swedes also compare themselves to students and performances considered out of their league such as those from Class A schools.

“We decide we’re going to be the best and they go after it,” Jensen said.

Although they celebrate after each meet, Jensen said students then get to work for the next week’s meet.

“We want to help kids with their mental game so they want to get better when they’re already doing well,” he said.

The Swedes will host their home meet Saturday at the high school and want the public to

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attend.

“You’ll be utterly astounded,” said senior Drake Brand.

Schmidt said everyone will learn something.

“You’ll be entertained or see something from a different perspective,” he said.

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