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COLOPHON

ABOUT the LAW WEEKLY

Undergraduate Mock Trial Team Captures National Championship

By Law Weekly
Staff

U.Va. Law students regularly clerk for Supreme Court justices, get hired at big firms nationwide, and compete in advocacy competitions to the chagrin of their opponents. Earlier this month, however, something happened for the very first time: a law student coached a team of undergraduates to a National Championship.

The University of Virginia undergraduate Mock Trial Team, coached by first-year Ryan Faulconer, recently defeated Harvard University in the final round of the Collegiate Mock Trial National Championship Tournament April 7-9 in Des Moines, Iowa.

"This is an enormous achievement for the University," said third-year undergraduate and team co-captain Daniel Young, a two-time All-American in the activity. "Our intense preparation led to this win, and it wouldn't have been possible without [Faulconer's] help."

The activity, organized by the American Mock Trial Association, involves over 600 teams that compete nationwide throughout the year at invitational tournaments. The National Championship Tournament involves the top 64 teams that have emerged from a rigorous regional qualifying process.

This year's case, *State of Midlands v. Tyler Perry*, involved the kidnapping of a thirteen-year-old child for a \$250,000 ransom. In competition, students put on a trial from start to finish, delivering opening statements and closing arguments, presenting witnesses, entering exhibits, conducting direct and cross examinations, and arguing objections under the Federal Rules of Evidence.

Faulconer, the head coach of the organization, coaches two teams that each have between six and eight undergraduate competitors. The process begins with a rigorous tryout process in September that narrows a field of over 60 students through evaluation of speeches and personal interviews.

"Some of the students make me wonder how I ever got into law school," joked Faulconer. "The talent level, both in oratory and in pure charisma, is simply unbelievable."

The team meets on a regular basis throughout the entire academic year and practices nearly 10 hours each week. When competitions draw closer, meetings occur every night, sometimes requiring



For more information, photos, and video footage, see www.uvamocktrial.org.

Lauren Park CLAS '05

even more one-on-one time outside of practice.

“My first year of law school would not have been the same had I not worked with these kids,” said Faulconer. “Being able to see others reach their potential with my help is more rewarding than anything I’ve ever accomplished individually.”

The team attended five invitational tournaments throughout the year, winning the Great American Mock Trial Invitational in Washington, D.C. and the Quaker Classic in Philadelphia, Pa. U.Va. also won its Regional Tournament in February, qualifying for the National Championship that it would ultimately win.

In the weeks leading up to the National Championship, the team met on a daily basis for practices that lasted between five and seven hours. The preparation included taping numerous run-throughs — in full trial dress — and then watching the videos to spot errors in presentation and legal argument.

“There’s something about arguing every imaginable hypothetical a case has to offer for hours on end that really brings people together,” said second-year undergraduate Sean Hamidi. “If [Faulconer] weren’t there to guide us in the right direction, we wouldn’t have been able to turn those hypotheticals into a National Championship.”

Faulconer will coach the team throughout law school to try and keep the National Championship trophy — so big the team had to ship it back since it couldn’t be carried on the plane — in Charlottesville. Next year, Faulconer will be joined on the coaching staff by Benjamin Sachs, a current fourth-year undergraduate member of the championship team and future first-year at U.Va. Law. He currently receives assistant coaching guidance from David Cross, an associate at Weil Gotshal & Manges in Washington, D.C. and member of the national Board of Directors for the activity.

“Being a part of something so special as winning a National Championship has been the most rewarding experience of my life,” said second-year undergraduate Jamar Walker. “But what made it so special was [accomplishing it] with my teammates and coaches there by my side every step of the way. The bond we formed this year [and] the love we have for each other is something that will never be replaced.”

“I’m not usually an emotional person, but I cried when we won, and I cried when I told the team how proud I was,” said Faulconer. “An accomplishment like this, done with such an amazing group of people that haven’t had time to become stressed out by law school, really puts things like grades, reputation, [and the job search] into much-needed perspective. I wouldn’t give up this experience for anything.”

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