

I think the most important part of Brad's post is, "We've done, frankly, a terrible job of working to forge the entire state of Illinois into a community where we can talk about computational math and anti-pyramidity as 'bad quizbowl.'" He's right, and as the longtime Chair of the Coaches Association, I probably am most responsible for our current condition. Our current condition is not horrible—we have a lot of very good tournaments and some very good teams in addition to some pretty good tournaments and pretty good teams. However, our problems are serious—a lot of matches played on very bad questions, a lot of students and teams that don't learn what they should be learning given their proximity to good quizbowl and the amount of their time spent, and a lot of debates that don't go anywhere. I want to summarize some of the issues that have been debated, and I am looking for suggestions as to how to move forward. For a variety of reasons, I may not be the IHSSBCA Chair much longer, but in the big scheme of things, I don't think my personal status is that important anyways.

Computational Questions: As far as I know, computational questions have always been a part of Illinois Scholastic Bowl. Math has always been 20% of the IHSA Series, and it historically was 20% of all tournaments in Illinois until recently, with most of the math and some of the other questions being computational. A few years ago, IHSA had a rule that computation was a maximum of 8 questions per round (out of 30) in the State Series. I proposed lowering the limit to 6 two or three years ago, and the coaches on IHSA Advisory Committee amended my rule to 4-6 and passed it. Most coaches are in favor of computational questions, and my proposal was amended to make sure it wasn't a sinister effort to eliminate computation math. Some coaches have criticized our Open Letter by saying it is a covert effort to eliminate computation even though the only mention of computation in the letter is an explanation of how it could be used under the improved bonus format.

A big reason I didn't want computation to be in the Open Letter is that I figured it would be too controversial and would strengthen the opposition to the other issues in the letter. I thought the four issues we agreed on were ones that would get wide support, though this was a miscalculation on my part—the letter has engendered more opposition than support for the four issues it raised. It probably would have gotten the same amount of support/opposition if it had included a clause calling for the elimination (or a significant reduction) of computational tossups.

The amount of computation in Illinois is a serious problem. As Brad mentioned, it is a problem some of us forget about during the year because we don't see it, and then we get to the State Tournaments. A lot of teams play most, if not all, of their matches on questions that combine computational math with bad questions in the other subjects, and those teams see no reason why they should learn literature or fine arts in particular and history and science as well. Four or so years ago, when Brad and some of his cohorts first started working on improving Scholastic Bowl in Illinois, they produced rounds that had lots of computational math so teams would play them along with good questions in other areas, and it was a significant step up over much of what there was before then. The best teams in Illinois now want to take the next step up, which means having less computation if any at all.

I encouraged some current college students to write an article explaining why computational math is bad as a way of starting the conversation, and they did a good job, and we put it in our newsletter. I also encouraged Matt Bardoe to write an article explaining why noncomputational math questions are better

than computational ones, which went into our newsletter this year. I'm not sure what the next step is. For a majority of invitationals in Illinois, the amount of computational math is 1/1 or less, with a significant number of them having none. Most conferences and the State Tournament have about 15% computation, and a lot of teams and coaches are happy with that.

Match Length: Almost all matches in Illinois are 20/20, with the big exception being matches in the IHSA State Series. In addition to IHSA, there is one invitational and a small number of conferences that play 30/30. The IHSA length is a major problem because there are several teams at each Regional, which is played on a weeknight. Also, it is difficult to suggest changes to the format of Regionals, Sectionals, and State, because each match takes over an hour. At State, they pretty much take all day to play four rounds. This was brought up at the IHSA Advisory Committee Meeting last year, but the coaches decided that they didn't mind playing straight from 4:30-8:30 on a weeknight. Part of the problem is the bonus format...

Bonus Format: This is the most controversial issue in the Open Letter. Many coaches feel very strongly that IHSA Bonus Format (most specifically reading all parts and giving teams 30 seconds to discuss them, but also allowing bouncebacks) is good. IHSA Format is very slow moving and lessens learning, but a lot of coaches claim it is good because it gives more time for collaboration and that it actually increases learning despite all evidence to the contrary. (Namely, teams that play mACF format get better than teams that play IHSA format consistently in a short amount of time.) If you are used to mACF format, watching IHSA format feels like you are watching a baseball game with a commercial break after each batter. IHSA Bonus Format is used in most conferences and a significant minority of invitationals. With odd modifications, it is also used in the Masonic Tournament.

Bonus Format was first brought up at an IHSA Advisory Committee Meeting about four years ago. Only four of the seven voters were present and it was a 2-2 vote, meaning that the status quo prevailed. IHSSBCA then commissioned a survey of all coaches, which found that coaches did not want to change the format. We later surveyed coaches attending a Kickoff, so it was only coaches who had at least seen one-part-at-a-time bonuses, and the result was about 50/50. A few years ago, some coaches started a petition complaining that I was pushing too hard to change the bonus format.

Miscellaneous: In IHSA, this specifically refers to Interdisciplinary, Journalism, Sports, Technology, Agriculture, Family Consumer Science, Drivers Education, Industrial Arts, Pop Culture, and Consumer Education. The Open Letter calls for the elimination of these questions, and that issue has been the 2nd most controversial subject in the letter. Several coaches think we are ridiculous for trying to get rid of these subjects when each one currently comes up less than once per match already—they are currently a combined 2/2 out of 30/30. I've been told that the worst tossup at State this year was in Driver's Ed, and I can't really blame the writers/editors for it. I have also been told that lots of students will quit Scholastic Bowl if we eliminate Miscellaneous questions. Miscellaneous is handled in a variety of way by invitationals, which doesn't really make Illinois unique from other states. There has been a proposal to eliminate Drivers Ed for at least each of the past five years and some of the other categories as well on a less consistent basis, and all such calls have been rejected by the coaches on the IHSA Advisory Committee. An IHSSBCA survey of all coaches about three years ago found that most coaches are happy

keeping all the categories in there. Few coaches want a lot of these questions, but a lot of coaches react negatively when you say we should eliminate X, no matter what X is.

Question Quality: A lot of coaches agree that question quality is a problem in Illinois, though I honestly wouldn't put much stock in it. For a lot of coaches, bad questions means questions that their team doesn't answer. Also, for many of them it means the questions are too long, and some consider NAQT questions as being too long. When a coach tells me that they want to keep Driver's Ed and Agriculture and also improve question quality, then I have trouble believing that the coach means the same thing I mean when I say I want to improve question quality.

Overall, Illinois has less of a question quality issue than some areas--pretty much every decent set that is produced during the year is used in Illinois. However, there are some very bad vendor sets that get used in a decent number of conferences and tournaments and in the Masonic Tournament, and the IHSA questions have some real issues caused by some of the writers and editors.

Pyramidality: Though a majority of coaches now want pyramidal questions and the state tournaments at the very least strive for it, this still remains a sticking point in Illinois. Some coaches still believe that matches are long because tossups are long, and some moderators have trouble reading long questions. (It's not because the questions are long, but the length makes the problem more obvious.) Some tournaments and conferences still use single- or double-line questions, though the number fortunately decreases each year. There are still coaches who want short tossups, and they may even make a proposal to IHSA this year to severely limit question length.

Language Arts: This accounts for 1/1 in the current IHSA distribution and is used similarly in a significant minority of invitationals and probably a majority of conferences in Illinois. Though it is possible to write an occasional decent question in this area, it's pretty much impossible to fill an entire tournament with such questions. When this came up at the IHSA Advisory Committee Meeting two years ago, the debate came down to 1/1 vs 2/2, and 1/1 was chosen on the basis of a 4-3 vote. The six active coaches on the committee were split 3-3. Many coaches want Language Arts and simply don't buy the argument that it leads to bad questions.

Venue: The IHSA State Finals were held at high schools until about fifteen years ago, when IHSA decided to move them into the Peoria Civic Center to coincide with the Boys Basketball Tournament. It was hoped that the move would increase exposure for Scholastic Bowl, though there is general agreement that it has not. Actually, one of the first times this was done, the Peoria newspaper ran an editorial calling for an academic competition to coincide with the Basketball tournament to showcase excellence in academics—they were not aware that they were calling for something that already existed.

About three years ago, the Civic Center was refurbished. Before then, a big problem with the rooms was that they were different shapes and sizes, so teams with large fan bases had trouble getting them into some matches. (Room capacities ranged from about 20 to about 200.) However, the rooms were further from the main gym and had thicker walls, so there was less sound pollution coming from the Basketball. The new configuration looks nicer and has adequate seating in every room, but the walls aren't as thick,

and that's a serious problem when there are 15,000 fans watching a basketball game downstairs replete with pep bands and halftime shows.

The food issue is a new issue this year. The vendors in the Civic Center have a deal that does not allow anybody to bring outside food into the building. IHSA used to negotiate to allow Scholastic Bowl teams to bring in their own food, but for reasons I am unaware of those negotiations did not go through this year. For many people, this isn't a big deal—it isn't the only time in your life that you overpay for greasy food.

Date: For many years, IHSA was able to hold the Finals on Saturday, but they had a lot of trouble getting hotel rooms for the moderators and teams. There were several cases of hotels agreeing to set aside rooms for Scholastic Bowl but then backing out at the last second, either because they overbooked assuming there would be some no shows or because somebody offered to overpay for the rooms until the hotels gave in. It basically is impossible for IHSA to host the Scholastic Bowl State Finals in either Peoria or Bloomington/Normal the same weekend as the Basketball Finals, and this is due to hotels rather than the Civic Center.

Matching Tops: This rule has been around for about fifteen years. It pretty much only applies to the IHSA State Tournament, though it is applied at all three levels. Ron McGraw has no interest in discussing the issue—he believes in matching tops. The Advisory Committee does not seem to have a problem with this. Before the matching tops rule was passed, there was a tradition that teams would get dressed up for the State Finals—most male competitors wore suits with ties, and the only cases of disrespectful clothing came after this rule passed. I have no idea why this rule exists aside from the fact that several IHSA Administrators think very highly of it.

Shorthanded Teams: If a team has fewer than five players in the IHSA Series, they are disqualified. This rule generally is only enforced in the IHSA State Series, though variations of it have existed in the Masonic Series and some other places. This rule dates back about 20 years, when the State Finals were in May and teams would sometimes show up shorthanded due to a conflict with Prom. It has not been altered since then. Each year, a very small number of teams from around the state show up for their Regional shorthanded and are told that they cannot compete, and another small number just doesn't bother to show up. I personally don't like this rule—my teams have played some invitationals and conference matches shorthanded. This rule does not seem to be near the top of anybody's list of stuff they would like to change.

Teams attending tournaments: Roughly one-third of Illinois teams play only their conference schedule and the IHSA Tournament, and that fraction goes up to over half if you count teams that only play at most their conference schedule and the two state tournaments. Some teams claim that money is a problem, but few teams have asked for money even though IHSSBCA makes it available. Many schools have a long tradition of not doing much, and nobody has been able to convince them to change.

Many coaches don't really know what's out there—they took the job because some administrator told them to, and they are in their first or second year of coaching.

Mirroring: Many of the good tournaments in Illinois are mirrors of tournaments from other states, but it's easy to forget how unusual mirroring is and how short its history is. Aside from one or two times that U of I fell short of its writing goals when it tried to write its own tournament and worked with other colleges to combine work to create a set, the first mirror in Illinois was Auburn's HFT in 2008-09. Though many very good Illinois tournaments use mirrors, for some reason this is the one phenomenon that seems confined to North of I80, including the region north of I80 that is not part of Chicagoland. There is a decent amount of good quizbowl taking place south of I80, and it is on the rise, but they don't yet mirror for some reason.

Avoiding single elimination and all teams returning after lunch: Another practice that seems well established now but is actually fairly new to Illinois Scholastic Bowl is avoiding single elimination and having all teams play at least eight matches. These practices started becoming common during the 2008-09 season and just became a standard part of Kickoffs and Turnabouts this year. There are still several invitationals that use a single elimination afternoon, though this probably is the first year that such invitationals became a minority.

IHSA Advisory Committee: The committee is selected by the IHSA Administrator in charge of Scholastic Bowl, and they generally just try to find people who are interested in going to the one meeting each year. Historically, that very small commitment has been too much to ask for some people, though attendance has been good in recent years. Some of the committee members attend a small number of tournaments if any and do not see any need for changes.

Overall Philosophy: To some extent, many of the differences on the issues I have listed above come down to a difference in philosophy over what the point of Quiz Bowl/Scholastic Bowl is. Many coaches do not believe that studying specifically for Scholastic Bowl should be rewarded, and many do not believe it is important to be familiar with names and descriptions of historically important writers, artists, and composers. Many coaches do not believe it is helpful to hear lots of clues and questions during a day of academic competition, and many believe that a question is good as long as it is unambiguous and the answer is correct. As long as they believe that, there will be major disagreements on all of the issues.

Now that I've listed many of the controversial issues in Illinois, let me return to Brad's point that, "We've done, frankly, a terrible job of working to forge the entire state of Illinois into a community where we can talk about computational math and anti-pyramidity as 'bad quizbowl.'" IHSSBCA has tried to improve the dialogue through our newsletter and website, and we have tried to set a good example with our own tournaments, though we certainly haven't been perfect, and a lot of coaches don't attend our tournaments or read our newsletter or just disagree with us. Part of the problem is that we are dealing with a long list of issues, as you can see above, so it's difficult to focus on one of them, and another part of the problem is that coaches haven't bought into our vision for a variety of reasons—some aren't familiar with the changes we want, some haven't really tried them out, and some have tried them and not liked them.

Our November issue had articles on computational vs conceptual math, improving as a player, and Subapalooza. Our September issue had articles on preparing for a non-IHSA format tournament, the difference between academic material and trivia, and a description of SCOP. We can't write about too much each issue, because articles like those are included along with tournament dates and results, encouragement to apply for Grants, descriptions of All-Sectional/All-State, etc.

Our website now has a Members Only Section that has a lot of good articles about a variety of issues, though I'm not sure how often they get read. Our links are pretty good, and other than a hiatus for a few months last year, we've linked to this site for several years.

Part of the problem is that there are a lot of coaches, and they have a wide variety of experiences and opinions. The first reply I got from the Open Letter was a coach telling me that we should put Fine Arts on an equal footing in the distribution with the major categories. The coaches who reacted negatively to the Open Letter varied widely in their responses, some saying that they agreed with some of the points, and others disagreeing with everything. Many coaches have been exposed to what we consider to be good quizbowl and have decided they don't like for a wide variety of reasons, some of which are idiosyncratic, and many just have no idea what we're talking about.

Part of the problem is that there is a disconnect between the IHSSBCA Leadership and its Membership. When a majority of coaches state that they want to keep Drivers Ed, I cannot endorse that opinion. There's just no way. Some coaches are upset about that and criticize me for not making more of an effort to determine and implement majority opinions, and that kind of conflict makes the conversations uncomfortable.

To a large extent, it's difficult to get too upset about our circuit, since the teams that want to play good tournaments have lots of easy opportunities to play good tournaments. Then we reach this time of year when everybody plays under the same rules and conditions, and we play some tournaments we don't like and get frustrated about it. Part of the frustration is just a natural reaction to being put in a bad situation, and part of it is a realization that we are seeing what a lot of students and coaches experience as Scholastic Bowl and wishing that they would put themselves in the same situation into which we have placed ourselves. It would be better for the students.

There are also an increasing number of conflicts between students and coaches. In addition to the obvious case last year where a student kept playing after quitting his team, there are more and more cases of students dragging their coaches to good tournaments or finding other ways to play in them.

I am not sure where we go from here. I've now written a lot, and I still haven't really addressed , "We've done, frankly, a terrible job of working to forge the entire state of Illinois into a community where we can talk about computational math and anti-pyramidity as 'bad quizbowl.'" I wish I could just lay out a plan and explain how we get from where we are now to where we want to be. I am open to suggestions.