

Extra-Curricular

Bar Mock Trial

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As shoes clicked across the crowded court, an expectant silence fell upon the Bar Mock Trial team of 2023. This was the moment. The moment we had prepared for. The moment when we wondered if our 9 weeks of being shackled to our court cases paid off. The moment we realised it all came down to this!

until we knew them like the back of our hand. With the help of our loyal lawyers – Vikki Singer and Sev Kelley – we were on track and ready to win the Belfast Heat.

Despite our exhaustion and the impending doom of Miss McClelland's weekly countdown, I think of these small moments fondly: the cake rota, sitting on the grey

budding lawyers in Northern Ireland. (Catchy tagline, right?)

Our tightly knit team were stuffed inside the first court – Round 1 against the Royal School Armagh, a moment that was being inscribed into our memory as our barrister's opening speeches elegantly danced along the room, rehearsed to perfection. We were a long way from our audition speeches; once being dragged along like the weights of legality itself fell upon your shoulders, now striding along knowing this is where we were meant to be. Witnesses took their stands, our statements weaving intricate tales of our innocence (or avoiding our lack thereof) and dodging each strategic manoeuvre of questions from the rivalling teams, desperate to unveil the truth and catch us out; a game of cat and mouse where the victor was changing with every move.

The jury began to file out, one by one, deciding whether we were lambs to the slaughter or revered champions. In that moment time seemed to stretch, the air thick with anticipation, every heart in the courtroom pounding in our chests. The jury returned, taking their seats; a symphony of creaking wood and rustling papers, a prelude to the verdict that will resonate beyond these walls – did we really have what it takes? The elected speaker rose, the weight of a thousand silent conversations hung in the air.

And then we won the case.

And then, we did that 2 more times. Round 2 was against Belfast High School and Round 3 we were against Our Lady and St Patrick's,

Before our verdict was revealed, the memories of the beloved (yet exhausting) rehearsals flashed across all our minds. The gruelling audition process, sweaty palms, the hurried scribbling of messy annotations on our speeches, and dragging your feet along to the door behind which the 3 judges – who decided the future of your Bar Mock Trial hopes – sat.

A team of 16 was selected back in September and from the start it was a steep learning curve. Time was slipping through our fingers from the beginning (which Miss McClelland frequently reminded us of) as our weekly practices started. 9 weeks. 9 Wednesdays. That was all we had! 9 weeks to turn wide-eyed, enthusiastic students into budding barristers and theatrical witnesses who could deliver performances rivalling Oscar winners. 9 weeks was not a lot of time!

Nevertheless, we poured over our cases: a protest gone wrong, and a laptop being tampered with. The team quickly came together, laughs echoed throughout the room and – without realising – Bar Mock Trial became a world of its own. (Who wouldn't want Miss McClelland leading a little world?) In those first few weeks, our highlighters ran out of ink and our scripts were rehearsed

plastic chair in the front of the class as your barrister mercilessly and ruthlessly interrogates you into submission, and the knowledge that everyone in that room feels exactly how you do: at the cusp of our dream, soaring like the "legal eagles" we were. Months turned into weeks, weeks turned into days, and before we knew it – we were standing in front of the Belfast Magistrates Court (on a SATURDAY) as the November chill nipped through the fabric of our clothes. You couldn't help but glance around as each zealous and ambitious school arrived, hungry for the prize we all coveted: being the best



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Belfast.

I mention all this so I can bring you back to the beginning. The wonder if all this was worth it. Were we the Belfast winners? We won each case and did exactly what we were supposed to do!

So, imagine our shock when it was announced that we weren't winners.

Or second.

Or even ranked.

Our jaws dropped (and so did my trust in the legal system, but I digress) and this was the moment we realised the magnitude of the phrase, "The truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth".

And that truth is: we find the Belfast Magistrates Courts GUILTY of robbing us of our win.

On a serious note, it was a wonderful experience and we did learn a huge amount



through working with the barristers, working with each other and on the competition day, delivering the cases before real judges. Many of the team who participated this year plan to return to try again next year, with a renewed sense of purpose and a determination to do even better.

We would like to thank both Severina Kelley and Vikki Singer for their unfailing loyalty and dedication and for all the time and effort they gave over the months of practices; we couldn't do it without you!

