

The Bar Mock Trial 2015 – 2016

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In September when the announcement for the Bar Mock Trial was read out in form class, none of us expected the adventure that was to follow. We had no idea that we could make it to the Belfast final, let alone win and appear in London to represent Northern Ireland!

The journey to the Belfast regional heat began with being appointed to a role. We were provided with two different cases and were required to prepare both the prosecution and defence for each, with no idea what we would have to present on the competition day. The team was made up of: barristers, witnesses, jury, court usher and court clerk. Four people took the role of barristers (yes that did mean that they got to wear wigs!). This involved preparing questions, firstly for the examination in chief and then for the cross-examination, all within a strict time limit. The cross-examination is perhaps the most difficult, as you can only question a witness on evidence they have already presented to the court; this requires you to think fast and create new questions on the spot if necessary! We also had to prepare opening and closing speeches, which is an opportunity to really convince the

jury that the defendant is guilty if you are prosecution, or indeed innocent, if you are on the defence side.

The witnesses were: Louise Beckett, Ella Diamond, Laura Keating, Jack Flanagan, Christopher Burns, Anna Fleming, Beth Gardiner and Rachel Denny. Each had a detailed packed statement to memorise and they all had to prepare for questions from both the prosecution and defence. It was essential that the witnesses got into character and really understood their roles, as you had to be mindful of the exact detail to avoid the opposite team picking up on any contradictions and gaining points for this. The remaining team members taking on additional roles such as court clerk and court usher were Megan Donaldson, Clara McNeill and Hazel Black.

After weeks and weeks of practice in Miss McClelland's room every Monday after school and in various lunchtimes, the day of the Belfast heat arrived and we travelled to the Royal Courts of Justice. There were mixed feelings of excitement, nerves and relief that this was the final time that the words, "Hardeep Braza" would be heard. (Hardeep Braza was the defendant in

Case 2 and was accused of the theft of a cup and leaving a restaurant without paying). Despite the hours of work we put into preparing for the competition, we really didn't know what to expect from other schools.

However, it soon became apparent that all our hard work was going to pay off, as after three rounds, we were in the final against Antrim Grammar who coincidentally we faced in our first round. After we presented the case, there was a nerve jangling five minutes to wait as the judge counted the scores and decided who was the winning school. Both schools performed to a very high standard but we were victorious, which meant a plane ticket to the National Final in London!

We decided to postpone preparations until after the January exams and we came back refreshed and ready for the challenge in February, when we were ready to get our legal minds in action once more. For the London heat, we were given one new case to prepare as well as continuing the case of "Hardeep Braza". Preparations were intense and with the help of two past pupils who are now real-life Barristers, Severina Kelly and Vikki Singer, the weeks flew by and on the 22nd of April we jetted off





to London. As we had a spare afternoon and in an attempt to calm our nerves, we embarked upon a brisk 13 mile sight-seeing walk around London that not only trained us for a half marathon, but also showed us the main sights and tourist hot spots of London. This was an amazing experience for those who hadn't been before and we saw all the sights including the Houses of Parliament, Trafalgar Square and Buckingham Palace (mostly from under umbrellas as the rain was persistent!). That evening we spent some time going over a few last minute details and ensuring we were thoroughly prepared for the daunting day that lay ahead.

Bright and early next morning we set off for our venue for the day, the Old Bailey, which added extra pressure due to its historical significance and the fact that it is the most famous court in the UK and has played host to many high profile cases over the years.

In Round 1 we faced Henrietta Barnett School from London. Overall both teams were fairly evenly matched, although due to some sparkling performances our team emerged victorious and surprised the team that we were up against. An exciting element

of the competition is that everything is performed before actual judges and in this case Justice Lady Rae from Scotland adjudicated our case.

Round 2 saw us pitted against Chelmsford School for Girls from Essex and again we were pleasantly surprised to see that our standard was as good if not better than our opponents. This gave us massive confidence going into Round 3 against Birkenhead Sixth Form College and this proved to be our best performance of the day, in the impressive surroundings of Court 1 of the Old Bailey.

Our spirits were high after the three rounds and we felt that there was a chance that we could be placed in the final. This would have been far beyond our expectations as this was our first trip to the National Final, while many of the other schools were regular heat winners. Due to the intricacies of the judging system however, we narrowly missed out on the final but we were awarded 5th place overall in a competition. This was a magnificent result and one we were completely delighted with. The overall winners of the competition were the only other NI school in the final, Dalriada and they

travel on to the international final in New York later in the year.

Dreams came true for some of us as we met ITV star Judge Rinder who was friendly in real life and happily posed for some photographs with his admirers!

The whole experience has taught us a greater understanding of the Judicial system as well as team work, commitment and hard work. We must thank the real Barristers, Severina Kelly and Vikki Singer who came in every week in their free time to help us to prepare for the competition. Furthermore, without Miss McClelland and Miss Carson the experience wouldn't have been possible and we can't express our gratitude enough for the time and energy they put in from September to April.

Many of the Year 14 students who participated are now planning on Law degrees and Law careers and the Year 13 who took part plan to return next year with the aim of reaching the final again. We would urge anyone interested in Law to get involved as it will be a unique experience that will bring many opportunities!

