



Despite Illness And A Snowstorm, UNH Students Take Top Honors At National Mock Trial Competition

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DURHAM, N.H. -- Not illness nor a snowstorm could defeat the Mock Trial Team from the University of New Hampshire, which took top honors recently during its first trip to the National Mock Trial Competition. And in a move you'd never see in an actual trial, one student acted as the attorney for both the prosecution and defense after a teammate became waylaid by a Nor'easter.

The Wildcat Litigators earned 2007 National Intercollegiate Outstanding Attorney and 2007 National Intercollegiate Outstanding Witness awards at the competition March 16-18, 2007, in St. Paul, Minn. They also took home an Honorable Mention trophy and received a high score for the Spirit of AMTA, which recognized teams for civility and good sportsmanship.

"What makes me the most proud of these young men and women is their resilience and their mutual support for one another as they faced down the challenges of illness, travel disruptions, quirky judging and fierce competition," said Charles Putnam, co-director of Justiceworks and faculty adviser for the UNH Mock Trial Team, which was formed in 2001.

Tom Faiella of Northwood took home the Outstanding Attorney award, and Joe Taylor of Londonderry earned the Outstanding Witness award. Faiella stepped in for a missing team member and acted as an attorney on both sides of the case. In the process, he earned both an outstanding attorney award as a defense attorney, and a high score on the plaintiff side.

On the plane flight to St. Paul, Faiella said he and his teammates had joked about what they would do if the teammate who was the plaintiff's attorney – and who was on a separate flight – didn't make it to the competition because of the storm.

"It was quite a challenge. Even the simplest things, such as whether to ask the jury to find for or against the police department in the case, were suddenly confusing. I was able to draw on some of my past experience as a mock plaintiff's attorney, and with a lot of coaching from my fellow teammates, I was able to avoid any major mistakes. It was somewhat surreal to be in front of three judges at a national competition and present an argument I was still mentally organizing as I spoke it," Faiella said.

"Our coaches have taught us how to think on our feet effectively and efficiently. And the credit belongs to the entire team. I could never have done it without their help -- everyone took time out from their own presentation preparation before and during each plaintiff's round to help me put together my arguments," he said. Faiella, a senior at UNH, plans to attend law school.

The Wildcat Litigators who competed were Caroline Lieder of Dover, Tom Faiella of Northwood, Joe Taylor of Londonderry, Michael Smith of Concord, Andrea Wakeman of Barrington, and Laura Thayer of Litchfield. The team's Honorable Mention reflects a final record of 4-4 after overcoming the loss of one witness due to illness, one of the top attorneys due to illness, and one attorney/witness due to the snowstorm.

The UNH team competes in one of the most difficult brackets in the nation, and went up against Brandeis, Yale, and the University of Hartford to get to the nationals. The team's bracket also includes Holy Cross, Brown, George Washington, Coast Guard Academy, and UMass Lowell.

"Students who participate in the mock trial program learn critical thinking skills that are extremely useful after they graduate, whether it's speaking publicly before a planning board, making a sales pitch or persuading their boss to give them a raise. This all occurs in a very intense intellectual setting. They know from the start that any argument they make is going to be countered by someone just as smart as they are, and they have to be prepared for that," Putnam said.

"For students who go on to law school, this is a great pre-law experience since 90 percent of legal education is premised on the adversary theorem, which tests my interpretations of the law against opponents interpretation of the law. They need to learn to talk like lawyers in order to be able to think like lawyers," he said.

HIGH-RESOLUTION PHOTOS AVAILABLE FOR DOWNLOAD:

<http://unhinfo.unh.edu/news/img/mocktrial/WildcatLitigators.jpg>

The UNH Wildcat Litigators took home several awards at the competition. Pictured, from left to right, are: Joe Taylor, Andrea Wakeman, Caroline Lieder, Laura Thayer, Tom Faiella, and Michael Smith.

<http://unhinfo.unh.edu/news/img/mocktrial/Faiella.jpg>

Tom Faiella won the 2007 National Intercollegiate Outstanding Attorney award.

<http://unhinfo.unh.edu/news/img/mocktrial/Taylor.jpg>

Joe Taylor won the 2007 National Intercollegiate Outstanding Witness award.