



TIM LAMORTE/RIVERTOWNS ENTERPRISE

Joshua Nobel and Henry Bedingfield prepare for their debate.

Ivy Leaguers set example for AHS debaters

By Julian Caldwell

Ardsey High School hosted two of the nation's most prestigious debate teams last Friday, Nov. 4, for the annual Yale-Princeton Westchester debate. Every year for the past two decades the Yale Westchester Alumni Association sponsors a debate at a Westchester school. For the 20th annual event — co-sponsored by the Princeton Club of Westchester — AHS was the chosen site.

The high school's debate club adviser, Brendan Buschman, teaches English. Citing the Ivy League teams' skills and diction, he said, "I can't ask for anything better than that for my kids to watch, and just soak up the quality."

This is the second year that AHS has had a debate club. During the 2014-15 school year, ninth-graders expressed interest in creating the club, filled out the necessary paperwork, and recruited a supportive Buschman as faculty adviser to start the following year.

The debate club challenges its 15 members to develop a new skill that can be uncomfortable for some.

"Most Ardsley kids are scared to death of public speaking," Buschman explained. "This is a high-performing school, the

kids here are smart, but they're still scared to go up in front of especially their peers and speak."

Buschman, 36, who's also an attorney with a degree from Brooklyn Law School, plans to introduce a public speaking class as an elective during the second half of the academic year.

As part of the Yale-Princeton event, six high school teams had their own debate

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Debate

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competitions following the collegians: AHS juniors Henry Bedingfield, 16, and Joshua Nobel, 16, who's a co-president of the club, represented Ardsley against The Masters School.

"In this school and many other public schools there isn't a big emphasis on public speaking, more on STEM [science, technology, engineering, math]," Nobel explained less than an hour before their debate. "So with the debate club we now have the ability to teach public speaking skills and skills of rhetoric."

For this debate, the students were given much less time to ready their arguments than at most competitions. Each team was told the topic the night of the event, allowing just over an hour to prepare in the school library. For a debate club program that's much newer than many of its counterparts, Ardsley welcomed the challenge of building a case in such a short amount of time.

"I think it definitely evens the playing field, because we go to other debates where the topics are released months in advance and that's when you really see the divide and the gap between [schools with more experi-

ence and those with less]," Bedingfield said. "It really brings the talent of the debater to the front of the stage rather than research and whatever coaching and resources they have backing them."

After the brief preparation, the teams filed into the auditorium to first watch the debate between Yale and Princeton. The auditorium was more than half full with parents and other high school students supporting their peers.

The college debate topic was whether or not to keep national borders open for trade or to close them.

"We say that what should have happened is that most of these countries are driven by sensible protectionism within governments with better national laws and infrastructure and regulations," Yale student Sophie Hyeon Park opened. "We say that what is happening now is excessive and exploitative and we say that we should have another system."

"The problem with their side — the most fundamental issue that they have — is that they fail to take into account what protectionism actually looks like," Sam Moore responded during his rebuttal for Princeton.

A few times during his speech, Park stood up to challenge Moore's points, but each time he pushed his hand to the side in rejection, drawing gasps and laughter from the crowd. After the third time,

Moore assured the crowd that he's not being rude, but that it's routine protocol for college-level debating.

After a roughly 30-minute debate, the three judges congregated and decided that Princeton had won.

Next, Ardsley faced sophomores Nicholas Moore, 15, and David Oks, 15, from The Masters School in the first of three high school debates. The topic was whether or not colleges should keep awarding merit-based scholarships or solely provide need-based scholarships.

Nobel and Bedingfield defended the side of continuing to award merit-based scholarships, arguing that it doesn't impede poorer students who are qualified to go to college. The Masters School team, less than a month removed from their sixth-place finish among 80 teams in a national competition at Georgetown University, was more emphatic and comfortable than the Ardsley team, which relied more on reading notes at the podium.

"I just love the activity," said Moore, who has been competing in debate club for four years. "I think it's fun, and because you get so many different resolutions you're covering all kinds of different topics. Not a year goes by where I don't learn something new or something insightful about an argument."

"I just love talking about policy and I

think it's a really great opportunity to do it," added Oks, in his second year of debate.

The judges commented on the difference in each team's delivery, but said the strength of Ardsley rhetoric made it a close call before giving Masters the victory. Ardsley expects to have another four or five debate competitions during the school year, with as many as six students competing in each one. Nobel believes that regardless of the outcome, every debate and every practice has a positive impact.

"I think that it's improved my confidence in interacting with others, and I think that I can now apply these skills to everyday life," he said. "It definitely helps me in school with my essay writing," he added.

"It's certainly still an intimidating realm," Bedingfield admitted. "We're still in the ring, but it's just nice to get out there and get some more experience and try to improve every day."

AHS Principal Rudy Arietta, who caught his first debate last Friday, was impressed by the resourcefulness on display.

"It's really nice for a principal to see when you have students who really have an interest and then pursue that interest and do all of that work to make it happen, and then to get a teacher along on board who can guide them with their knowledge," Arietta said.