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Sisters team wins mock trial competition

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Mock Trial participants celebrated an upset win. *photo by Charlie Kanzig*

The Sisters High School Mock Trial team staged a surprising upset over Summit to win the 2009 Central Oregon Mock Trial competition held at the Deschutes County Courthouse in Bend on Saturday, February 28.

After competing against both the Summit "A" and "B" teams, Sisters faced Summit "A" a final time to clinch the competition.

The mock trial is sponsored by the Classroom Law Project and includes regional competitions throughout Oregon that culminate with a state competition set for March 13 and 14 at the Federal Courthouse in Portland.

Last year, with its first team ever, the Outlaws finished second at the regional competition behind Summit and qualified to state. This year only one team advanced since only four teams in the Central Oregon region competed, so the Sisters team was overwhelmed to have edged Summit for the one state slot.

La Pine fielded the fourth team.

"I was surprised a bit, but I realized once we got going the team was really ready," said Coach Mary Thomas. "To upset the reigning champs makes me so proud."

Each year, a fictitious case is developed with all the witnesses, attorney roles, and evidence laid out for the teams. Students then spend weeks preparing both the plaintiff and defense portions of the trial. In competition, teams don't know until minutes before the starting time which side of the case they will be performing.

In Sisters' case, the team took the plaintiff role against the Summit "B" team in round one.

The plaintiff, Kelly Simon, is suing the Eastside School District on the grounds of neglect after the death of her son Jordan from an overdose of the performance enhancing substance EPO, alleging that the coach and the athletic director/vice principal should have noticed the signs and symptoms of Jordan's use.

The competition offers students a chance to learn a lot about life in the courtroom and pushes them to use critical thinking skills, according to Thomas.

"No matter how well you practice and prepare, you still have to be ready to adjust and think on your feet," said Thomas. "You absolutely rely on every person on the team and they all showed a lot of poise and rose to the occasion."

Sisters took the plaintiff role against the Summit "A" team in the second round, and then met the same team again, this time as the defense, in the third and final round.

"It's challenging to learn the courtroom rules and procedures when playing the part of the attorney and equally tough to be a great actor as a witness," said Thomas.

Sessions are timed, putting unnatural pressure on the participants.

"I know I am biased, it's hard to be neutral as a coach, but I felt my team outmaneuvered the Summit team overall," she said.

As Judge Michael Sullivan read the results from fourth place up the Sisters team sat in disbelief as the Summit "A" received second place.

"They couldn't quite believe it," said Thomas. "I think it's hard for the kids to really see how well they do sometimes when they are in the thick of the court battle"

Team members include Jake Lasken, Ben Fullhart, Sam Fullhart, Claire Kanzig, Emi Conrads, Emily Rickards, Dylan Hicks, Benton Urquhart, Zander Albertson, Trenton Kropf, Jordan Rudinsky, and Dawson Hullis. Thomas is assisted by Darrell Doke.

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