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The Debate

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The Debate

Cody Rodriguez

Cody is Junior Industrial Design Major at Cedarville University. He lives in Middleville, Michigan where he enjoys basketball, friends and time with his family. The Debate is story about learning the valuable lesson of adequate preparation and humility.

“Well...he won't think of that,” I said in confidence.

“How do you know?” my brother questioned, sitting directly across the dinner table from myself. “You should prepare for it just in case.”

“No, trust me,” I laughed under my breath as I shook my head, “He won't think of something that smart.”

I continued to construct the greatest debate I had ever created, ignoring the foolish thoughts of my older brother. I might lose in a debate to him, but there is no way I lose to my partner, Jack Harris. Good move, Jack. I gathered my notes and papers and continued, discussing my main points of debate. Pacing around the dining room, running one hand along the wooden top of the table and using the other to hold my endless supply of stories and research on teen driving, I pondered what my partner would prepare - knowing that I could handle anything, of course. As I reviewed, the amount of ease and simplicity presented to me a week before when the project was assigned, repeatedly surfaced in my thoughts.

“You all will be participating in live debates in front of the class in the next few weeks,” Mr. Boswell announced one Thursday morning.

After a mixture of deflated moans, celebratory squeals and excited murmurs from the class, he proceeded to explain how we were to debate one on one with a peer on an assigned topic, with the ultimate “winner” being decided by our class and teacher. As he walked toward my table, I prepared for the routine partnering by turning to my best friend who sat across from me. But as I turned,

I was overcome with a wave of shock. As I sat there staring at an empty seat, I could feel my stomach drop and my eyes widen as the realization that I was alone began to sink in.

“Cody,” called my teacher from a few steps away. “I’m going to have you work with Jack for this assignment, since Raydeer isn’t here today.”

I cringed at the idea. How was I supposed to work with Jack Harris, the laziest and most careless student in our grade? However, after a few minutes of worrying and complaining, I suddenly realized my hope for this assignment.

“Mr. Boswell!” I called with a little more excitement and hope in my spirit.

As his head turned back, and I knew I had his attention I began to ask my question, “Is this graded individually?”

Even though he went into detail on the grading of our debates, I heard none of it. After his first affirmation that our grades were separately given, my ears stopped working and my mind relaxed to let out a breath of relief. I slowly allowed a smile to slip across my face as I began to realize that I was free. Instead of being held down by the lackluster attitude and little effort of my partner, I was free to ignore it and even use it to help boost my work. From that moment on, anything I did was already miles ahead of whatever my partner could throw together. I turned to face my new partner with a fresh energetic attitude and eagerness like that of a child on Christmas morning. As we unfolded the slip of paper with our topic on it, I could already see the brutal domination that would take place in the near future. We both carefully read the material and looked at each other.

“Which side do you want to take?” I asked, already knowing the obvious answer. To no surprise, his response came just as expected. He leaned back in his chair, smirked, and with a slight smug huff he answered, “I don’t care.” Good move, Jack. I looked back at the piece of paper, re-reading the subject: Should the legal driving age be changed from 16 to 18?

“Okay, I will take the stance that it should change,” I proposed, as ideas began to surface in my mind.

A week later I strolled into class, binder in hand and confidence being advertised in my walk and sly smile, ready to impress my class with the dominance I would display before them. As student after

student debated their respected subjects, I considered the humorous case my partner threw together. When I heard the applause fall to a slow silence after the finish of a classmates debate and my teacher rustling through his papers, I knew we were next to go.

“Jack and Cody.”

The reading of our names signaled that we were to take the floor and prepare for our debate. I looked over at my partner as he slowly grabbed his few papers, shifted his weight in his chair and slowly strained to push himself out of his seat. Good move, Jack. Between the arrival at our podiums and the official nod of our teacher, signaling to begin, we suffered through the awkward several seconds of what seemed to be 4 billion eyes staring us down in pure silence. I made the occasional eye contact with the previous debaters, cute girls, and my close friends whom I shared an involuntary smile with until we both looked away. Finally, my teacher looked up from his pool of papers and gave the all-powerful nod. I took a deep breath, glanced at my notes, turned to my classmates and began.

“In the past year,” I began my organized and beautiful debate. As I was discussing and analyzing facts and stories, I looked over at my partner and noticed an odd site. I don’t know how I missed it before. He stood there in his usual manner, leaned back, scraggly hair, and clearly his mind somewhere other than school. Good move, Jack. But one thing was different today than any other day. Today, he wasn’t wearing his normal skinny black jeans, skater shoes and skull-covered shirt. Today, he was dressed up. Not in a suit or even tie, but in a polo shirt, khakis and hair relatively groomed. Compared to any other student it was unimpressive, but for him this was new. Good move, Jack. Puzzled I advanced my case, presenting my flawless case for why the legal driving age needs to be changed to 18 years of age. As I concluded my side with a catchy finishing line and dare for Jack to try and challenge my thinking, I grinned knowing I had to simply sit back and watch as he struggled to comprehend, let alone respond to everything I discussed. His job at this point was simply to rebuttal with a concept of his own in contest to mine, then leaving me one last response before we switched roles for him to plead his side. As I said my final words and took a step away from my podium, I began to slowly organize my papers from the rush of brilliance I had beautifully presented to my partner, my class, and my teacher. Jack looked up, finally realizing it was his turn

to make some sort of statement. He looked back down at his paper. Then, back at me. I began to think he forgot how to speak, until he straightened up, cleared his throat, and began to read his main point from his paper. The words didn't flow out like a pleasant stream, in fact they were choppy and scratchy as if I had awakened him from a deep sleep and he was just attempting to put together some sort of sensible sentence. Once again, a good move Jack. However it's not how it sounded that mattered, it's what he said. As the words began to come together I slowly came to the understanding that this debate was over. I was finished. As he near perfectly quoted my brother from earlier that week, I froze. There was no way. How did he produce such an idea? He found the one, same flaw my brother found in my case.

“It is not simply that more crashes happen within the first year of driving due to age, but instead because of inexperience.”

Yes, he may have just read this out of an article that he happened to stumble across that very morning. But that didn't matter. What mattered was that I had to somehow reply to this dismantling statement. My stomach dropped. My mind raced. My heart stopped. I looked out at my classmates and teacher to see every eye staring right back, awaiting a response. But I had no response. I stood there, froze in disbelief. Looking over at my partner I could see the calm, empty stare in his deep blue eyes, oblivious to the chaos he had unleashed in my mind. The debate was over, no matter how great of a case I made on the following subjects or topics. It was already over. My mind flashed back to my brother nudging me to prepare for such a moment. I could have focused, researched and now responded, but instead I stood there, mind empty and all pride demolished. It was over. Good move Jack, good move.