

PRESS RELEASE

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JHHS Speech Team Produces 13 National Tournament Qualifiers

The Jackson Hole High School Speech and Debate Team found incredible success this past week at the National Speech and Debate Association District Tournament, held online March 15-20. Qualifiers from the JHHS Team will represent the Wind River NSDA District this June at the National Tournament which will be held virtually for the second year. This is the twenty-fourth consecutive year and the thirty-fourth overall year the team has qualified students for the national meet. In order to earn a bid to compete at the National Tournament, students must place in the top four of their event at the district tournament. The team is coached by Londe and Peggy Gagnon.

Team captain Joshua Hansen found incredible success at the tournament by qualifying in all four events that he entered into. He started the week off with Big Questions Debate. Junior William Aepli also entered the event where they argued both sides of whether or not mathematics was invented or discovered. The two Jackson debaters quickly rose to the top of the field and found themselves undefeated after the third round. This meant that they were paired against each other in the fourth round. The entire tournament is based on a double elimination model. With any loss considered a “down,” and two downs being the basis for elimination, a student must be at the top of their game in order to qualify. After the round four match-up, Aepli emerged as the winner but Hansen remained in the hunt and the two debaters found themselves paired against each other again in round six. This time Hansen emerged as the winner which meant the debaters were forced to debate each other once again in round seven to yield the qualifier. Ultimately Hansen was crowned the champion in the event.

Luckily, the two competitors were then able to combine their debate skills to team up as partners in Public Forum Debate where they finished in the top spot in the tournament. Aepli and Hansen also teamed up to compete in Duo Interpretation where they finished as qualifiers as well. And finally, both students competed in Congressional Debate, where Hansen qualified in the Senate and Aepli qualified in the House category of the event. There is a rule preventing qualifiers from competing in more than one event at Nationals so Aepli and Hansen have chosen to compete in Public Forum Debate at the National tournament this June.

JHHS continued to impress in Congressional Debate where junior Lily Briggs, along with sophomores Alexis Hernandez and Sophie Lamb finished in the top spots in the event clinching their qualifier status. Sophomore Jheili Montiel Huerta showed great upcoming strength in the event as well, finishing as an alternate in the Senate.

Sophomores Julieta Anaya and Blanca Sartillo Mejia capped their season's success in Duo Interpretation by qualifying for the National Tournament in the event. Sartillo Mejia also finished as an alternate in Program Oral Interpretation.

Junior Sarah Schweitzer moved through 6 rounds of International Extemp to reach her qualifier status in the event that sees students researching and giving speeches on foreign current events with only 30 minutes to prepare. She also teamed up with junior Carter Worcester in Public Forum Debate to reach alternate status. Briggs teamed up with senior and team captain Preston Harmon in Public Forum Debate where they finished as alternates in the event as well. And finally, Montiel Huerta and Hernandez competed in the event, finishing as alternates also.

Worcester, Harmon, and freshman Jackson Neishabouri were selected as qualifiers in World Schools Debate. World Schools Debate is a debate event that combines "prepared" topics with "impromptu" topics, encouraging debaters to focus on specific issues rather than debate theory or procedural arguments. The three JHHS competitors will join 12 other Wyoming students to form three teams of five at the National Tournament.

Montiel Huerta was selected to compete at the National Tournament in editorial commentary, an event where students prepare an original 5-minute speech from a current event prompt. Sophomore Ventura Garcia Perez was also selected to compete at the National Tournament in Prose, an event that combines multiple elements of oral interpretation of literature.

Hansen was voted in as the Wind River District Student of the Year. This award is presented to a graduating senior who best represents the tenets of the Association's Code of Honor: humility, equity, integrity, respect, leadership, and service. Nominees must also demonstrate strong academic credentials and a commitment to the speech and debate community. As the nomination letter expressed, "Josh Hansen is a true ambassador for the Wyoming Forensics community. His devotion to his craft as a competitor and his dedication to his team is truly exemplary. Josh goes above and beyond any expectations and pushes himself to excel, while at the same time being a proactive helper to his fellow teammates and other competitors across the state."

Additionally, coach Londe Gagnon was named the Wind River District Coach of the Year. This award honors high school coaches who reflect outstanding leadership and commitment to speech and debate activities. The nominating letter stated, "It is because of Londe's relentless dedication to and love

for the Wyoming Speech and Debate competitive community that she sacrificed so much time and energy helping it succeed this year. After her leadership and optimism fueled us through last year's online State tourney, she relentlessly planned for the coming year and then worked to help plan and run online tourneys all season without significant break time. This coach is truly a model of selflessness, warmth, and professionalism."

The JHHS team as a whole, earned first in the Congress sweepstakes at the tournament.

The 2021 Nationals will be held June 13-18. Top competitors from across the country will gather online to determine the national champion in each forensic event. The National Speech and Debate Association is an honor society that "promotes interscholastic debate, oratory, and public speaking by encouraging a spirit of fellowship and by conferring upon deserving candidates a worthy badge of distinction." As Gagnon observed, "Our entire team represents the qualities the NSDA strives to achieve. All twelve Jackson students will be exemplary ambassadors for Wyoming Speech and Debate this summer."



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