

## **Worlds Schools Debating Championships 2008 in Washington D.C**

### *Burning sun, hurricanes, surprises and disappointments*

This year's World schools debating championship took place in the American capital: Washington D.C.

But before the actual tournament started, this year's Team Germany - Carmen Belafi and Jana Gilke (both Max-Born Gymnasium Backnang), Valerie Deiss (Salier-Gymnasium Waiblingen), Leonie Dressel (Königin-Olga-Stift Stuttgart) and Franziska Seethaler (Albert-Einstein-Gymnasium Böblingen.) - spent 4 days downtown Washington D.C. sightseeing. Of course, also with us there were Sven Laux (Königin-Olga-Stift, coaching this year's team) and our adjudicators Klaus-Peter Heil (Parler Gymnasium Schwäbisch Gmünd), Angelika Hoeness (team manager and adjudicator, Lessing-Gymnasium Winnenden ) and Birgit Trefz (Max-Born Gymnasium Backnang.)

We visited the most important memorials and monuments (The White House, Washington Monument, Lincoln Memorial...), hired a real American van and drove to Jamestown and Williamsburg, looked at Mt. Vernon and enjoyed the burning sun of the southern states. For sure, as an all girl's team we also went shopping in the huge American malls.

After having spent 3 nights on a plastic mattress in a 10-bed dorm of D.C.'s only youth hostel we set off to the Hyatt Regency hotel in Crystal City, Virginia, on Friday, 5.11.08.

As we arrived there too early to move into our rooms directly, Sven helped carry tons of bottled water (which would save 200 debaters from dry tongues during the tournament) and the German girls helped to register all the arriving teams.

Saturday unfortunately brought Hurricane Hanna with it and so the judges, coaches and debaters spent a day in the hotel. While the judges were hopefully listening to a judges' briefing, the debaters showed their creativity in small international groups building a replacement for the world trade centre in NYC out of trash.

Saturday evening the tournament was officially opened through the opening banquet. We all enjoyed the buffet and the dances and songs of a native American-Indian group.

On Sunday morning tension and nervousness rose, not only because of an hour's delay as some bus drivers did not know their way to George Mason University, but mainly because of the first two debates. Team Germany won against Kuwait and lost against Wales that day.

Monday meant pretty the same stress to all of us, especially having to travel by metro to our next venue, the only public high school in Washington D.C, Eastern High School. After having passed security checks, we won round three against the American team. Preparation time of round four was disturbed by the fact that part of the ceiling in one room came down and hit a Slovenian debater. Thank god nothing happened to her and although it didn't mean real interference to the other debates, we still lost against the Czechs.

Monday evening we were welcomed at the hotel with some small snacks and information about "Bickel and Brewer."

Tuesday night, after winning against Lithuania and losing against Netherlands, was exhibition night, which meant great pleasure for all of us. Each country had brought characteristic items of their country with them and presented them to the other teams. Wandering around, looking at the different tables with the items on, trying on different national costumes such as the Mongolian, sucking Canadian maple syrup sweets, dancing to Argentine music and much more set up the first friendships of this tournament.

Sadly, Wednesday was to be the last day of debating for us. We had a satisfying debate against Canada, which we lost. We did the same against Hong Kong, but this didn't mean not partying and having fun that night at break night party.

9/11 wasn't only 9/11 but also tour day for all national teams at WSDC '08. We had decided to go to Gettysburg, where we had a bus tour and some time to explore the village ourselves. When we met up again to get back to the hotel, one thing was clearly obvious: Team

Germany and Team Canada both support Barack Obama. Independently of each other we all had bought several items of Obama fan stuff (and so did almost all of the WSDC '08 participants, as we found out later in the hotel with Team Netherlands topping it all with a life-size Barack). In the evening we had a coming-together to have a moment of silence for the victims of 9/11.

On Friday there was either the possibility to watch the octos and quarter finals or do some more sightseeing. We preferred to go into the Capitol, which turned out to be more difficult than anticipated because of security controls. In the end we had to deposit all our deodorants and perfumes (allowed size on aeroplanes). After an impressive tour of the Capitol, the house of representatives, the supreme court and the library of congress, we successfully rescued our deodorants and perfumes from the bin again.

On the day of the semi finals, 13.9.08, we visited Georgetown, where the girls had an absolutely lucky strike. We made the acquaintance of a couple that had lived in Stuttgart for two and a half, the wife totally missing Germany and the husband now working at the Pentagon. They invited us to have a free, personal tour of the Pentagon on the Monday before we flew back.

Saturday evening we enjoyed the semi-final Greece-England. England won and so had to face New Zealand, who won against Scotland in the Finals the following day.

So on the last day of tournament all the debaters, judges, coaches, observers and so on travelled to the Ronald Reagan building to see England win WSDC '08.

The biggest surprise for us and for Germany was to come up that evening. After having enjoyed the closing buffet, everyone received their certificates and individual speakers won their prizes. So did our dear Carmen, being the best EFL (= English as foreign language) speaker of the whole tournament. Valerie landed on second place with only one point difference.

All in all, Team Germany found itself in 25<sup>th</sup> place out of 39. This was just another reason for us to really enjoy our last night in the States.

Monday meant packing, checking out, finally giving the last good-bye hugs to our newly won friends, an exciting visit to the Pentagon and finally we were sitting on the plane back to Heathrow. We arrived back in Stuttgart on Tuesday, 16.9.08, all very tired, jetlagged but as happy as can be.

We want to thank everyone who made this experience possible but especially our "kautsch" Sven Laux, our team-mama Birgit Trefz, our "manager for all wishes" Angelika Hoeness and the calm pole Klaus-Peter Heil.

Thank you!

Valerie Deiss