

MOCK TRIAL

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I REMEMBER SITTING IN A REAL COURTROOM MY FRESHMAN YEAR OF HIGH SCHOOL, HAVING JUST COMPETED IN MY FIRST MOCK TRIAL MATCH. IT FELT VERY COOL. THERE WAS A REAL JUDGE PRESIDING, AND REAL ATTORNEYS KEEPING SCORE. I HAVE NO IDEA WHO WON, BUT I REMEMBER THE WAY IT FELT. AND I WANTED MORE.

Typically, after each Mock Trial match, the judge will look at both teams and say some variation of: “You all were amazing! You were well prepared and knew your cases. *You are just as good, if not better, than most of the attorneys that come through this courtroom. And the skills you learn in Mock Trial will help you be successful with whatever you choose for your future endeavors.*” What I didn’t realize at the time, and that I do now as a practicing attorney, is that in a lot of ways, it’s true. With Park Mock Trial right now, it’s certainly true.

I have been lucky enough to be involved with Park Mock Trial since its inception, first as a student participant (2000-2004), and then as an attorney coach (2017-present). While I did not help found the club, my freshman year at Park in the 2000-2001 school year was the first year the club existed, and I signed up immediately and participated from the start. We learned more and more each year, watching the other teams, and working harder and harder. My senior year, 2004, we won our first State Title. More hard work on the part of subsequent teams and State Titles followed: 2011, 2012, 2017, and 2021.

While the Maryland High School Mock Trial competition has been around since 1984, Park has only been involved since 2000-2001, and yet our five State Titles are more

than any other school has earned in the history of the program. Our 2011-2012 back-to-back wins are the only back-to-back wins in the history of the program. This year, when our state competition finished early because of a compressed Covid schedule, our team captains begged the National Competition to allow Maryland to compete for the first time. Because they refused to take no for an answer, we were included. Six weeks, and countless hours of work and preparation later, we were National Champions.

Of course, it’s not all about winning, and Mock Trial is such an amazing activity for a number of reasons. But these kids are so competitive, and winning is a lot of fun.

Mock Trial is valuable because it teaches critical thinking and public speaking. It forces one to think on one’s feet, and problem-solve in real time. It involves a certain level of acting and drama. It asks you to reflect on your own weaknesses, and defend against them, and to find and figure out how to exploit those of your opponent. It teaches you to trust your gut. And it asks you to do all of this as part of a team, working together.

For all those reasons, Mock Trial is also really the quintessential Park activity. It lines up perfectly with Park’s philosophy on learning. Adults are simply there to let the kids learn and solve problems on their own. As coaches, we are there to help students think about their case, to answer questions, and formulate their theories and strategies, but they really have all the freedom to generate those ideas, make those decisions, and then defend them. They decide how often and how long to practice; and they thrive because of it. My favorite part of coaching is hearing them talk out their ideas, and defend their positions. It is a joy to watch them challenge each other, and ultimately, themselves.

So many of the skills I learned, practiced, and honed in high school Mock Trial are the same ones I leaned on in college, law school, and still use in my career. But, as rewarding and valuable as my time competing was, my time helping to coach the team is far more satisfying.



Matt was a student at Park when the Mock Trial club was founded in the 2000-2001 school year. He's pictured here (left) with his Maryland State Championship-winning team in 2004. And in the picture below, he celebrated, this time as a coach, with team members last year.

As a coach, I have seen students emerge and grow as people, coming out of their shells and becoming confident speakers, thinkers, and questioners. I have watched students work hard together to solve a problem and achieve a common goal. I have seen them challenge each other and push each other to be better. I've watched them disagree, sometimes strongly, but come together to work out their differences and form a collective solution. The hard work and maturity are amazing to see, and I am lucky to be a part of it. Watching that hard work and maturity pay off with results? Priceless. I can only hope that they have learned as much from me as I have from them.

I think my favorite part of this *national championship* season was sitting in the hype room at school, watching our team compete in the national tournament. Yes, we

had a Mock Trial hype room. The team was competing by Zoom, and all those who were not actively participating in this specific match came to school and watched together. We were hooting and hollering with every objection and point our team made, yelling as if it were in the fourth quarter of the Super Bowl. We would boo a bad ruling by the judge as if the Yankees or Red Sox were in town. We had never been in this competition before, and we dominated it. Watching our team outwork and outsmart 45 other state champions was exhilarating.

It made me think back to that comment the judge always makes: the skills these kids learn together in Mock Trial will help them be successful in whatever they choose for their future endeavors. And I am excited to see what their futures hold.

