

Meet Elizabeth Carter

by
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**Elizabeth Carter coaches at
Pinecrest HS, NC**

What was your first NFL experience?

An absolutely terrifying Saturday, when as a totally inexperienced coach, I took five totally inexperienced students to a tournament at Massey Hill Classical School—and none of us really knew what to expect. The outcome was gratifying: a first place in dramatic interp and a second place in Congress. It was just enough to make us all want to do it again!

When did you decide to be a teacher and/or coach?

As the daughter of a teacher and a school superintendent, I always insisted that I would never be a teacher. My junior year in college, I realized that I was headed toward being a starving writer and decided to do the education courses as security.

What is your team philosophy?

Everyone succeeds by helping one another.

How many hours do you spend with this activity a week?

About 10 hours per week plus the Saturday tournaments. We practice after school three days a week for two hours each day plus I spend a lot of time doing community

programs, out of class instruction, and simply “talking” with students.

What is your vision for the future of the NFL?

It would be wonderful to see every high school emphasize public speaking through the auspices of the NFL. My kids thrive on the spirit of competition. I’d like to see judging become more consistent across the country. It is so disappointing to attend a regional or national tournament and find that expectations vary so greatly.

What is exciting about being an NFL coach in your State?

It is rewarding to develop friendships with teachers and coaches from other high schools. This gives us a chance to share curriculum concerns, team controversies, and general “teacher-speak”. I also enjoy developing rapport with students from other schools, being able to give constructive criticism, and seeing how students improve from one competition to another.

What’s unique about your High School as an NFL chapter?

Our chapter receives absolutely no funding from the schools, yet we do not charge any fees for student competitions. Along with the help of

my students and parents, I do a massive amount of fund-raising to keep this program afloat. I do not have an assistant coach and I do not get a stipend for coaching this team. We are unique in that I must handle all concerns for a very fast growing program.

What qualities do you look for when recruiting students for your program?

I look for outgoing students who are good listeners. Although I prefer that students take one of my speech classes, our team is not closed to those willing to work after school.

Were you an NFL competitor? If so, how has the NFL changed since you competed?

My high school did not offer speech and debate, but it wouldn’t have mattered to me if it had. I would never, never have gotten up in front of a group and done what my speech kids do as routine competition. I far preferred the written word and served as editor of both my high school and college newspapers. My first teaching jobs actually included newspaper and yearbook journalism, not speech.

◆ *Coach Profile continued*

If you have attended a National Tournament, what is your favorite memory from a National Tournament?

The National Tournament in Philadelphia was my third year coaching and the first time I had students place into Nationals. Two of my favorite students, Meagan Anderson and Sarah Berk, competed in Duo, and together we had a wonderful time, both within the

competition and through the usual tourist route in Philadelphia. We finished our week saluting one another at The Melting Pot before returning home. Nothing will ever compare with that very first big time experience.

What is the greatest challenge as a coach today?

A coach's greatest challenge is to avoid overload. It is so easy to sink

beneath the demands of a very active program. When going to tournaments Saturday after Saturday, the stress on home and family is intense, and it's difficult to maintain enthusiasm in the classroom as well.

What's your favorite weekend tournament food item?

My favorite is the Krispy Kreme doughnuts that sometimes surface at breakfast. I first look for the raspberry-filled, then I work to limit my intake!

WHAT KIND OF FUND-RAISING KEEPS A DEBATE PROGRAM AFLOAT?

I've become pretty efficient at grant-writing, getting good support from local educational foundations and youth support groups. This usually generates large dollar amounts and is the basis for our traveling program. We sponsor our own tournament yearly and also generated funds by hosting districts last year and our state tournament this year in March. A really well-organized parent support team can make a major profit selling concessions from donated goods.

I try to involve students in fund-raising as much as possible, and we look for creative ways to do so. A "sumo-wrestling" tournament this fall involved them all. We also have raffled off a week of catered lunches for a student here at school, the privilege of a prime parking space, and tickets to ballgames. We're currently operating a coffee cart selling coffee and hot chocolate before school. It's quite a popular item for both students and teachers.

All advanced students take part in presentations to civic groups (Lions Club, Kiwanis, Rotary, etc.) within our community and this usually generates contributions of both time and help from group members.

This past summer, advanced students also planned, publicized, and carried out our first middle school speech and debate camp, learning a lot about themselves and younger minds as well. A fee of \$100 was charged for each student attending the weeklong event; we met from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. each day. The camp was open to students in 5th through 8th grades.

Of course, our best sponsors are the professional members of our community and the parents and grandparents of debate team members. They are generous beyond belief.

--by Elizabeth Carter



SUMO TOURNAMENT

Spanish teacher Aaron Bisonette jumps in to show his support of the Pinecrest Debate Team.