It is an old axiom that wherever there gather more than three educated men, there arises an argument over a physics problem or a topic of world politics. Technicians are no exception when it comes to this love of argument.

Way back in the late 1960s a group of MIT undergraduates got together and formed a debate society to fulfill, at least in part, their need for competition in the art of debate. The system was different then, with schools making individual contracts with other schools for debate on a topic agreed upon by the two teams.

The tournament system

Now, however, debating teams all over the nation use the tournament system in which the coach, from across the nation decides upon a major topic which is then debated by all the teams in the country. A tournament involves two or more teams. The MIT tournament is one of the nation's oldest and most respected.

When asked why they debate, most debaters are hard put to come up with an answer. Among the answers to this question was asked of MIT veteran debater Eric Johnson '67, "What is the man who came in second at last year's Harvard Tournament," asked of MIT. "That's just the beginning," said, "Oh," he said dully, "to the bathroom."

There are many amusing, not to mention embarrassing, things that can happen to a debater, even a veteran one.

President Patterson tells the story of a debate tournament at a few years ago where a member of an opposing affirmative team was finishing his final speech, when suddenly the person stopped talking. He looked around for a second, walked over to his partner and whispered something in his ear, and then left the room. The automated judges asked the remaining team member where he had gone. "Oh," he said daily, "to the bathroom."

Feeling is high among team members as well as coaches that this year may turn out to be one of Tech's finest in debating. If their past record is any indication, this prediction may well come true.

MIT debaters Eric Johnson '67 (left) and Madis Suly '65 discuss strategy in the National Debate Tournament held last April. They reached the quarters in this major tournament held annually at West Point.

SOL SPOTLIGHTS

Debate Club

By Bob Reiner

Experience in debating behind is often a great plus. For sophomores, and those whose techniques still need polish, the two debate coaches fulfill a major role.

According to director David Ilsen and assistant director Robert Hillman, both Boston lawyers connected with the department of Humanities, the role of the debate coaches has changed significantly over the years. While once the coaches were mainly law students hired on a part time basis, now the coaches are experienced men who serve permanently. These men, debate veterans themselves, pass on valuable knowledge and know-how to the undergraduate debaters, particularly the incoming freshmen. Staff as the competition is, the freshman class has risen to the challenges, with 16 out of the 15-20 active debaters being freshmen.

Can be embarrassing

Life as a debater is not just endless research and speechmaking that some make it out to be.

To debate on a topic

The debate topic, though, must be directed to be useful. This year the debaters of the nation will be discussing a rather topics, according to president Joe Patterson '90. "Resolved: that law enforcement agencies in the US should be given greater freedom in the investigation and prosecution of crime."

The MIT debate society is looking toward the same kind of success with this topic as it has enjoyed with the many other topics that have come and gone. In the past the greatest successes they have wound up several major victories: MIT took third place at the Emperor, Kansas tournament out of 47 teams, an echo of Roger Kirt '67 and Eric Johnson '67. At the Anheurds Tournament, the first place fell to MIT with Gary Kolbe '80, Bill Arthur '80, Arts Cahn '80, Gary Epling '67 debating for Tech.

Two coaches

Not all of the debaters have come to MIT with a few years of experience in debating behind them. For sophomores, and those whose techniques still need polish, the two debate coaches fulfill a major role.

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