Talking Mules reclaim Montgomery Cup from U.K.

(WARRENSBURG, Mo. – March 23, 2010) -- The Montgomery Cup has returned to the United States. From March 4-18, the University of Central Missouri Talking Mules, with two competitors from Northwest Missouri and one from Missouri Southern, debated some of the elite debate societies in the United Kingdom. After seven debates, the Talking Mules claimed the title by a combined score of 23-19.

Head coach Art Rennels was understandably proud of his squad.

“The debaters, and especially the UCM team, displayed the characteristics and the quality that the rich tradition of debate at UCM has fostered,” head coach Art Rennels said. “With a history of debate going back over 100 years, the team not only had a legacy to defend but a history to learn from. This just demonstrates, yet again, that the quality and caliber of young men and women at UCM who are taught and trained in the art of advocacy can not only hold their own but flourish against the best in the world.”

In British Parliamentary debate, each nation is represented by two teams: 1st and 2nd Proposition vs. 1st and 2nd Opposition. At the end of the debate, the judges award first through fourth place in the debate. The first-place team is awarded three points. The second-place team is awarded two points. The third-place team is awarded one point, and the fourth-place team receives no points.

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In the opening round, the Talking Mules tied the Glasgow University Debate Union 3-3. The hybrid team of Brandon Christen (UCM) and Valerie Melton (Missouri Southern) took first, while Glasgow took second and third. The UCM team of tour veterans Zack Dodson and Adam Blood placed fourth.

The score remained tied after the second round, as Edinburgh received first and fourth and the U.S. took second and third, making the tournament score 6-6.

March 10, in front of a packed house in the Lower Parliament at St. Andrews, the U.S. team broke the tie, taking the first and third positions to score four points. The representatives of Scotland took the second and fourth positions. The win gave the U.S. a 10-8 lead. Dodson and Blood represented the Talking Mules in the Prime Minister’s position and took first-place honors. The Northwest Missouri pairing of Michael Tweedy and Jory Baker was third.

From St. Andrews, the tournament moved to England and the Durham University Debate Union. The teams from Durham finished first and fourth while the U.S. took second and third, resulting in the third tie of the series. Still, the U.S. maintained its two-point lead, 13-11.

Two nights later, the Talking Mules visited the ancient fortress city of York, England, where they widened their lead to 17-13. The U.S. representatives were awarded first (Christen and Melton) and third (Tweedy and Baker), and York took second and fourth.

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The four-point cushion was short-lived, though, as the U.S. traveled to Oxford. In another close round, Oxford took first and third, making the overall score 19-17 and setting up a final battle at Imperial University.

With the Montgomery Cup on the line, Central Missouri’s Dodson and Blood teamed as 1st Opposition to claim first place and guarantee the victory. Baker and Tweedy placed third for good measure.

The win marks the first time since 2007 that the Montgomery Cup has been on U.S. soil. Dodson said it was “instant excitement” to hear that he and Blood had pulled through to secure the win.

“After losing it two years in a row, there was a whole bunch of anticipation before the match,” he said. “When we received the one, there was an instant sigh of relief. It was rewarding. To be a part of the team that helped bring it back will be something I remember for the rest of my life.”

Dr. Jack Rogers, chair of the UCM Department of Communication and tournament organizer was equally proud of the accomplishment.

“I’m very pleased that we were able to return the Cup to Central,” he said. “It was a very close competition throughout, but we’re very pleased with the outcome.”