

## **In The Beginning: Facts, Figures, and Anecdotes from AMTA's early years**

From Brad Bloch, AMTA Historian

How many teams competed at the first "National" Intercollegiate Mock Trial Tournament (NIMT) in 1985? The answer: We don't know. Oft-repeated AMTA lore and several subsequent national championship tournament programs say 12. But longtime AMTA historian Brad Bloch asserts that the original documents show it was actually ten teams from eight schools; the only question is who comprised the tenth team. According to Bloch, the field was Augustana (IL), Buena Vista, Central, Drake, Eastern Illinois (two teams), Illinois, Iowa and Loras. Central entered two but its venerable coach, Don Racheter, has insisted some of his Dutch backed out. Our best guess is that "Team 10" was a mix of Central and Drake students, thus becoming AMTA's first bye-buster!

Here's what we do know. The first intercollegiate mock trial tournament was held on February 16, 1985, in Des Moines, Iowa. Its main organizers were Dean Richard M. Calkins of Drake Law School and Des Moines attorneys Gene Reifsnider and Dan Stamatelos, who had already created the Iowa High School Mock Trial Tournament (in 1983), the National High School Mock Trial Tournament (in 1984), and the Iowa Middle School Mock Trial Competition (also in 1985). The competition itself lasted just one day and consisted of two preliminary rounds, followed by a championship trial. The first national champion was Eastern Illinois University, who defeated Iowa's Central College in the final trial. The case involved a sex discrimination claim by a male nurse.

Early growth was explosive. The second tournament was attended by 28 (or possibly 30) teams from 14 States. The third had 51 teams from 24 States. By 1991, participation at the national championship tournament had increased to 98 teams from 25 States. It was the last season where teams could attend nationals without qualifying.

The 1991-92 season introduced profound innovations. It was first year of carbon form ballots. The first power pairing. The first captains' meetings. And the first year of regional qualifying tournaments, of which there were eight.

Other changes did not stand the test of time. For two years (1993 and 1994), AMTA had three separate national tournaments: a Championship flight and a Gold flight in Des Moines in February and a Silver flight (or National Intercollegiate Mock Trial Tournament (NIMT)) in Milwaukee in March. The separate Gold flight was quickly abolished, but the Silver flight lasted until 2000. Starting in 1995, the Silver flight champion and runner up earned bids to the national championship tournament and the practice of second-chance bids

continued to expand. In 2002, the NIMT was expanded into two divisions. By 2004, the NIMT consisted of four divisions held at two different sites and a full 25% of the national championship tournament's field was selected via this two-step process.

Another much-beloved tradition was the All-American Honors Trial, which lasted from 1996 through 2004. The basic concept was simple: the three highest ranked attorneys and witnesses from each division who were not competing in the national championship trial squared off one last time with nothing but bragging rights on the line. Those who attended reported a steadily increasing silliness to seriousness ratio, which--along with the logistical challenges of organizing the event--played a role in the tradition's demise.

The 2008 season was the last in which teams could qualify directly from regionals to nationals. Starting in 2009, all bids from regionals were to the newly established Opening Round Championship Sites (ORCS). Under this system (which is still used today), all teams must survive two rounds of qualifying just to reach the 48-team national championship tournament.

Some other AMTA firsts and notable events:

- The 1988 case featured a sex-specified bartender named Tootsie LaRue. A male cadet from the Citadel received an All-American Witness award for his portrayal;
- The first invitational tournament was held in 1989 at Bellarmine;
- The first California school to participate was Cal State-Los Angeles in 1986;
- For the 1988 NIMT, the University of Hawaii-Manoa set an early record for greatest distance travelled;
- In 1990, a motion to limit participating schools to one team each failed by one vote;
- The first program to win a second national championship was Rhodes College. In 1991, Rhodes both accomplished that feat and became AMTA's first back-to-back national champion;
- In 1992, the University of Maryland became the first (and still only) program to earn both spots in the national final trial. AMTA's rules were immediately amended to prevent such an event from happening again but "the Maryland Rule" was itself repealed in 2010;
- The official tournament program from 1992 contained the following entry: "PARTY at the MARRIOTT!! 7:00 p.m." [all capitalization and punctuation *sic*];
- 1993 was the last year in which there were three rounds on Saturday at the national championship tournament;
- In 1997, Howard University became the first team in AMTA history

to win two national championships in the same year. Having failed to advance to the national championship tournament directly out of regionals, Howard won both the Silver flight tournament to earn a second-chance bid and then won the national championship tournament itself;

- After winning nationals in 1999, all of the members of Bellarmine's team were made Kentucky Colonels by the Commonwealth of Kentucky;
- The 2007 national championship tournament was the first held outside of Des Moines. It was hosted by Stetson University in St. Petersburg, Florida. Since then, the tournament also has been held in Memphis; Minneapolis (twice); Orlando; and Washington, DC;
- In 2010, David Nelmark became the first former competitor to serve as AMTA's President;
- The 2015 national championship tournament will be the first to feature an entirely new case. The case will not be released until the conclusion of ORCS, giving teams just over three weeks to prepare.

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Editor's note: Brad Bloch served as AMTA's historian for many years. He is a former National Tabulation Director and longtime member of AMTA's Board of Directors. Brad coaches the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee's mock trial team.