

CHAPTER 6

AFFIRMATIVE CASE STRUCTURES IN POLICY DEBATE

Selecting a powerful and well-structured affirmative case is essential to success in debate. Planning to win consistently on the affirmative is comparable in importance to holding serve in tennis. You have important advantages when you are on the affirmative: (1) You have the privilege of selecting the example of the resolution you want to defend, and (2) You have both the first and last speeches in the debate.

CHOOSING THE GROUND

Most resolutions in policy debate provide considerable latitude to the affirmative in selecting an affirmative case. Suppose the resolution is “The United States federal government should substantially increase alternative energy incentives in the United States.” An affirmative case could focus on any form of energy meeting the definition of alternative energy—solar, wind, ethanol, hydrogen, nuclear, biomass, geothermal, and so on. If an affirmative team chooses to defend wind power, the whole debate then focuses on whether the expansion of this one form of energy is a desirable option. The affirmative is under no obligation to defend every possible example of the resolution. The following paragraphs discuss some of the strategies affirmative debaters use when selecting an affirmative case.

Fall in love: Are you a true believer in an affirmative case? After you have done considerable research, you might come to believe that a case is simply true. This means you will bring passion to the task of persuading judges to vote for the affirmative option. Although passion won’t win rounds by itself, it can be an important part of a winning formula.

Surprise: Will the affirmative case catch the negative team off guard? The negative team might be prepared to debate wind or solar power, but it might never have considered the possibility of cogeneration: having waste incinerators produce electrical power by burning refuse. A *squirrel case*—the term debaters often use for a surprise case—has some significant limitations, however. First, word spreads quickly at a tournament when a new case is winning debates. The surprise often lasts only for one or two rounds before negative teams begin developing a preround strategy for the case. Second, the surprise strategy often backfires. When a negative team doesn’t know how to answer an affirmative case, the resulting chaos is not always a good thing for the