

# Bob Rivera



SPEECH, SPEECH!—Robert Rivera is the center of a roomful of forensics awards.

—Chris Coye

# Putting action behind his words

# Forensics ranks 18th

by Dina Giacomini

Staff Writer

Robert Rivera is a man who puts action behind his words. In 1981, when he started the forensics program at the University of La Verne with a National Debate Topic (NDT) team and a Cross-Examination Debating Association (CEDA) squad, he promised that the two would develop into top-rated teams in the country.

He and his students have delivered on that promise.

National rankings are out for university forensics programs, and ULV is ranked 18th—good enough to be invited to the NDT National Tournament—again.

For his part, the director of the forensics program is ecstatic about the third invitation in a row for the ULV squad. "It is amazing we have qualified for the National Tournament; it is the most elegant of all tournaments I have ever been to."

To get there, ULV was ranked above Harvard University (20th), Georgetown (38th), the University of Michigan (43rd) and Stanford University (61st), among other national universities. ULV was bested in the ratings by such schools as the University of Southern California (1st), Dartmouth University (8th) and Illinois State (17th). In District I competition, ULV is No. 2, followed by Loyola, Redlands and Stanford. USC is No. 1.

Rivera explained that it is difficult to earn an invitation to the NDT National Tournament. "Six thousand NDT teams are organized each season, and only 60 make it. It is a great honor to make the tournament. Your school is immortalized; every school receives a trophy, and their name is on a list of honored schools forever."

The seasoned coach explained that the most prestigious team in the country is the NDT.

"This is a symbol that identifies the more difficult type of debating. NDT teams debate policy which is much harder because if someone decides to advocate a change in policy, you have to do much more research. CEDA, which is much larger, is involved with debating value—what is good and bad—and demands less research."

"When we first started the program, our goals included making a mark with an NDT team, getting invited to the National Tournament and making ULV's name known nationally," said Rivera.

The ULV team that made it to the nationals is captained by Tony Lacsamana, transfer student from Dartmouth University, Ken Lee, and team members Nikolaus Formanek, Sean Doherty, Damien Dietze, Rene Morales and Robert Adams.

"They were undefeated at El Camino College, and at the Pacific Southwest Collegiate Association contest, Sean received best in senior speaker and Nikolaus received third best NDT speaker, senior division, even though he is a novice." Rivera offered a prediction: "If Nikolaus stays with our debate squad, I predict he will win a national championship for ULV."

Indeed, with its heightened reputation, ULV is attracting more debators, and the future continues to look promising.

"Next year, we have three new recruits: Carrie Patterson, out of Moorepark College, who won the National two-year college NDT debating championships, and we're also getting two outstanding competitors out of L.A. Valley College who are potential two-year college champions," said Rivera.

Those who are to come will find that ULV has a David and Goliath grudge match going with Harvard University. ULV and Harvard are tied 1-1, with Harvard besting ULV this year.

But La Verne defeated Harvard last year in national debate competition, and as *The Los Angeles Times* reported Jan. 4, 1990, Ivy Leaguer Sam Cooper was out for revenge. "I never heard of La Verne before last year," he said in the *Times* article. "We need this win."

Rivera said debating requires patience and stability of mind. "There is so much pressure and stress; it is not easy." There is a tremendous push from everyone to win. It is especially not easy for a low-profile institution like ULV that hasn't had a long history like most of the other well-known schools such as Harvard or Berkeley."

Rivera came to ULV in 1978, working as a development officer and teaching part time in the Communications Department.

He, personally, has received much recognition for his many achievements, being listed in many who's who type biographies.

He has also been a member of Toastmasters International for 50 years, serving in 1983 as the Governor of Greater Los Angeles District Toastmasters International.

Toastmasters, he said, is the largest education club in the world. "It started in 1905 and was designed to help the individual with prepared speaking and to satisfy the need for speech education."

Rivera has an impressive speaking record in the organization, including being the 10-time champion of the area speaking contest, and reigning as champion of district, zone and western regional speaking contests. In 1960, he was an international champion.

The La Verne chapter of Toastmasters, founded by Rivera, meets every Friday at 6:30 a.m. in the Presidents Dining Room. Said Rivera, "Our forensics team at ULV has constituted the nucleus of Toastmasters."

The veteran teacher, who has had the likes of Tom Selleck in his classes when he taught at L.A. Valley College, explained that speech is important because the ability to write and speak is the foundation for a fine college education.

"Due to the population explosion, you have to be able to communicate with other people. It is the main reason for failure on the job today in the United States. This tells me that they are not communicating."

As for the motivation he uses to charge his students, Rivera said he tries to treat others as he would like others to treat him. "When I was in school, I never responded to teachers who were not involved in my progress. I liked teachers who treated me as a friend; I try to treat students how I want to be treated."

Spoken like a man who puts action behind his words.



ULV debate team members Jason Sanford, left, and Christina Jagannathan, right, have just returned from the world debating

Larry Crowe/Daily Bulletin

championships in England. Accompanied by team coach Bob Rivera, center, the team beat 16 of 27 teams at competition.

# Debaters reveled in Oxford experience

By J. Rezendes-Herrick  
Daily Bulletin

A VERNE — Oxford's aura hit Christina Jagannathan at breakfast.

"The dining hall was filled with debaters," said the University of La Verne student who recently returned from the world championships. "Everybody was talking in different languages dressed in formal clothing. But you turn the clock back and the hall resounded with the same noise, the cutlery. To me, that's what brought it home."

Jagannathan, along with Jason Sanford, competed against 188 teams from 20 nations last month in the home of verbal contention in the English tongue. Sponsored by the 170-year-old Oxford Union Society, the 13th World Championship brought La

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—Bob Rivera, debate coach

Verne pride of competition and recognition.

"Christina and I went back to the office the last day," said Bob Rivera, university director of forensics and the debate coach. "The man running the tournament came in and said, 'You're La Verne, right?' That was it. That's why we came."

In head-to-head competition, Jagannathan and Sanford beat teams from Princeton, Brown University, Rutgers, Fordham, the University of the City of London, the London School of Business, Edinburgh University and Leiden

University in Holland, among others.

Unlike other forms of debate that require intensive research, the world competition uses the parliamentary format, stressing thinking on your feet and breadth of education.

"It encourages in students the ability to show every aspect of a liberal arts education," said Sanford, 22, a London native who has been in the United States about eight years. "It encourages students not only to read and write but to speak and to speak with commitment."

Debate topics were given 15

minutes before the competition and subjects ranged from "We regret the existence of England" and "We would rather have a queen than a president" to "Feminism is a dead end."

Four two-member teams compete for points in each round. Through nine rounds, La Verne had beaten 16 of the 27 other teams, but they failed by two points to advance to the next round.

Jagannathan, 31, who is from Madras, India, and has been in the United States about a year, said she was floored by the last topic. She was forced to argue against feminism while her opponent raised the debate to a fever pitch before two apparently receptive women judges, she said.

"It became a very emotional debate," Jagannathan said. "The girl on the other side

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## ULV students travel, explore other cultures

by Nicholas R. Hartman Jr.  
Editorial Director

Saving the rainforest, improving detente and debating world issues are usually life-long missions. But ULV students and faculty packed these missions into the month of January as they journeyed to China, England and the Amazon.

Debate team members Jason Sandford and Christina Jagannathan, along with Director of Forensics Bob Rivera, crossed the Atlantic to debate at the Oxford World Debate Championships in England.

The sojourn to England was the first-ever by a La Verne debate team that was seeking world-wide respectability.

Jagannathan and Sandford defeated 16 of 27 teams at the competition, beating teams from Princeton, Brown University, Fordham, Rutgers and other universities from Ireland, Israel, Holland and other countries.

"It's important to realize that this is a monumental leap forward for the (forensics) program," said Sandford, a senior, who orchestrated the trip.

"We wanted to give our students experience on a world-class level and see how viable we would be in a world-class tournament," said Rivera. "One of our goals was to get international visibility—that was what we expected, and that's what we got."

The competition followed a parliamentary-style format, which requires contestants to argue a topic on-the-spot—a skill that requires a wealth of general knowledge.

"Our team is exceptional in intellectual and academic background and well-read," said Rivera.

Education nurtures a successful debater and it is something Sandford has in perspective. "I feel the tournament represented a culmination of four years of education, it personified what a liberal arts education is all about," he said.

elevated it to a personal thing. I had some very good arguments. But the temperature in the room was such that no matter what I said . . . the judges were giving certain looks, shaking their heads."

But the debate pressure cooker was relieved by the English ceremony and civility.

"The Oxford tradition is so overwhelming," Jagannathan said.

The debates were held in a replica of the House of Com-

mons, "huge, gothic, ancient," Rivera said. Opening ceremonies took place in the Sheldonian Theater, a 16th-century edifice.

Sandford was lodged at Wadham College in rooms occasionally occupied by Oxford dons.

"I was sitting in my room looking at the empty bookshelves, just breathing in the academic ambiance," he said. "Just to know that books had been there for 500 years . . ."