

Student's Name

Professor's Name

Course Name/Code

Date

### **The 3-2 Decision**

The judge's ballot read 3-2. One vote separated me from the state semifinals.

For three years, I competed in Lincoln-Douglas debate, a format that rewards clear thinking under pressure, the ability to read a room, and the capacity to adapt in real time. I was good enough to reach the state quarterfinals as a junior, where I lost on a question about criminal justice reform.

I had predicted every argument my opponent would run. What I had not anticipated was his framing. He opened his rebuttal with a specific story about a seventeen-year-old who had served time for a nonviolent drug offense. By the time he finished, the round was no longer about policy abstractions. It was about one person. My prepared responses no longer fit.

I spent two weeks after that loss studying what had happened. I watched recordings of rounds I had lost across the season, not looking at the arguments but at the structure: where the energy shifted, which moments made judges lean forward, what changed in the thirty seconds before someone nodded.

The following season I argued differently. I stopped leading with the strongest evidence and started with the most human detail. I won more rounds, but more importantly, I could feel the difference: the room listening instead of waiting.

My debate coach told me I had become a better advocate than an arguer. I did not understand the distinction until that ballot. Now I do, and it is the insight I most want to

develop in college: the ability to persuade not just through logic but through genuine understanding of what the other person actually needs to hear.

