

World Championship caps Railton's high school career



By Brock Weir

Olivia Railton is not someone who often cries at sad things. Moments of 'overwhelming joy,' however are another story, and the tears readily flowed last month in Sydney, Australia when the Aurora student took the crown at the World Individual Debating and Public Speaking Championships.

No stranger to the Championships, this year was a different story for the award-winning debater. As a Grade 12 student, Olivia knew she was boarding the plane for her 'last big hurrah' at the high school level.

'It was a pretty overwhelming wave of emotion going towards my final debate tournament in high school,' says Olivia, who is finishing her final year at Country Day School in King. 'I was excited more than anything. I have never been to Australia, so I was excited about that, but the pressure was definitely on this year. But, I was excited more than anything and that encouraged me to work particularly hard this time.'

Accompanied by fellow Country Day School student Maeve Tebbutt, a Grade 10 student making her debut at Worlds, where she placed 11th overall, Olivia debated a wide range of issues from whether or not to institute mandatory voting, to nuclear war, to even the pros and cons of vegetarianism.

Looking back, however, perhaps the most fulfilling topic to tackle was whether or not it is ethical to break laws which are seen as unjust.

'I am someone who prefers, generally speaking, debates on international relations and current affairs,' she says, 'but this year other types of topics I really liked were the more philosophical ones. As opposed to narrowly defining the terms and the resolution like you have to do in other rounds, the word 'unjust' is one of the main contentions of the debate, and one of the main points of argument is the subjectivity of injustice.'

This time around, Olivia had to argue against the breaking of unjust laws, something not particularly natural to the 'PC person' she describes herself, but in tackling the issue she gained added perspective from her South African debate partner who grew up in a very different environment.

'Aside from the actual competition, what I have learned about different cultures and the history of different countries and how people live is probably the greatest takeaway from my high school debating experience and Australia just continued that, if not gave me on a greater scale than I have received in any other competition.'

Despite ending her high school debating career on the ultimate high note, Olivia is not content to rest on her laurels. Recently accepted into Oxford University, she is excited to start the next phase of her career in the United Kingdom this fall and try out for the prestigious Oxford Union Debate Team.

Growing up here in Aurora, Olivia says she was once '100 per cent certain' from the age of 13 she wanted to be a lawyer, pursuing

a career in International Law. While that is still a possibility, the more opportunities she has had to explore the world, and explore the multiple facets of the issues defining it, the broader her outlook on life has become.

She's less certain about what she wants out of her future, but she is open about the possibilities.

?At this point, I am going to school to study what I love: international and European law,? she says. ?I am also thinking of potentially pursuing a PhD and becoming an academic. I think I would really like a career in academia, or policy, so we will see what happens there. One of the fantastic things about public speaking and debate is regardless of what career path you choose to pursue, whether you want to be an actor or a teacher or a scientist, you're going to have to, at some point, try and speak publically, explain your ideas to people, or condense information and learn to get to the point.

?They are the skills you can take with you through your entire life, no matter what you choose to do. That is one of the many reasons I am thankful for all the experiences I have had.?

As she prepares for the next phase in her life, Olivia says she would like to thank the community for all the support she has received over the years.

?It is a really cool thing when you go to the grocery store or music lessons and you have parents of younger kids come up to you and say reading about you made my eight-year-old want to take public speaking at high school,? she says. ?That is probably the most fulfilling aspect of it. The success is great but when you find out from other people that your success is inspiring in some way and encouraging other kids and other people to pursue the things that I have been fortunate enough to pursue, that is probably the most amazing thing about it.

?Thank you for all the support and encouragement. That support is probably one of the main contributing factors to my success.?