LD Assistant Debate Coach
Culver City Middle School

After wrapping up my junior year, I had the opportunity to do something I never expected to be doing while still in high school: coach a middle school debate team. At the NSDA event in Richmond, Virginia, a parent of one of the participants told me that their school was looking for coaches. He gave me the head coach's contact information, and after I interviewed with her, she invited me to come to a four-hour debate clinic in August. That is how it all started.

There are about a cohort of nine students on the team, and since the season had just begun, we spent a lot of our time working on research and framework. They were an enthusiastic group, and honestly, they reminded me a lot of myself when I first got serious about debate. They were eager to learn, competitive, and excited to win. My biggest question at the beginning was pretty simple: Could I actually hold the room and keep these kids engaged?

I am still a high school senior, and suddenly I was standing in front of middle school students trying to teach them something I had spent years learning myself. I quickly realized that knowing debate was only part of being a good coach. I had to figure out how to explain things in a way that made sense to them and how to keep them interested when the research got difficult or tedious.

As the season has continued, the students have started sharing their research documents with me. That has allowed me to work with them more closely, read through what they are developing, ask questions, help strengthen their arguments, and give them feedback before they compete. It has also helped me get to know them as individual students rather than just as a team.

What I enjoy most is seeing their excitement when something finally clicks. I remember having those same moments as a debater, and now I get to be on the other side of them.

This experience is still ongoing, and I am learning just as much as I am teaching. Coaching has pushed me to become more patient, confident, and adaptable, while giving me the chance to pass along something that has meant a lot to me. I came into this thinking I was going to teach debate. I did not expect that I would also learn so much about leadership along the way.