

Tiverton beats Coventry to move on to semifinals

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PROVIDENCE—They placed fifth overall out of 30 public and private high schools, but in only their third year everyone can be proud of the Coventry High School mock trial team.

On Thursday the team competed in the quarterfinals of the 2011 Rhode Island Mock Trial Tournament, but was unable to beat Tiverton High School and move on to the semifinal round.

Coventry High School teacher Timothy Booker is the team's coach.

It is the third year Booker has been the advisor, but he did hear that Coventry competed in the tournament in the late 80's or early 90's.

Coventry made the top 16 out of 30 after winning two in a best out-of-three round in late 2010.

They later moved into the top eight.

The top eight were the teams competing in the quarterfinals.

Teams only find out the day before whether they will be acting as the prosecution or the defense.

The case is the same throughout the mock trial tournament and this was Coventry's fifth trial this year with the same case.

The teams spent months preparing for and being on both sides of the case. When they found out Wednesday that they would be the prosecution they

prepared that day and all morning the day of the trial.

Booker pointed out that most of the lines would be memorized rather than on cue cards.

Booker said the trials typically last a full two hours or so. "It is pretty intense," he said. He said it is "very, very rare" to see high school kids stay focused for that length of time, but they do, he said.

"They become grown-ups in a lot of ways," he said.

The trial has all the parts a real trial would with opening statements, direct and cross examination and closing statements.

The nine students at the quarterfinal trial Thursday were broken up into attorneys, witnesses, rules expert and there were two extra students who did not have roles in this trial.

The attorneys were junior Alyssa Quattrucci, senior Steven Comery and junior Caroline Bedard.

The witnesses were junior Erin Blackmar, sophomore Aaron Comery and junior Thomas Scappini.

Junior Autumn English was Coventry's rules expert, checking that the other team's roster and making sure they met requirements such as dress code.

Junior Victoria Cruz and freshman Joe Williams helped prepare the case, but did not have roles Thursday. There were four other members of the team not able to be there Thursday.

Blackmar is one of only two students returning this year. The other is Bedard.

Everyone else competed this year for the first time.

"This is amazing. I love this," Blackmar said.

A judge rules on objections and motions and the admissibility of evidence, for example,

but has no say in the decision of who wins in each round. The presiding judge Thursday was Judge Edward P. Sowa, Jr., an Associate Judge of the Rhode Island Workers' Compensation Court.

It is performance judges who determine winners each round.

The performance judges are real-world attorney's, Booker said.

The three performance judges in this quarterfinal were Providence attorney Charles Greenwood, Jeffrey D. Sowa, a partner at LaPlante Sowa Goldman, and also the presiding judge's son and attorney Barbara Margolis, who is deputy disciplinary counsel for the Rhode Island Supreme Court.

The case being used in this year's Rhode Island Mock Trial Tournament is the State of Rhode Island v. Parker (Parka) Plunkett. It is adapted with permission from the Arizona Foundation for Legal Services and Education and was originally written by: Lance R. Broberg, Esq. of Tiffany & Bosco, PA & Tiffany F. Brosberg, Esq. of Ridenour, Hienton & Lewis, PLLC.

In the case a Metro Light Rail operator, Plunkett, is on trial on counts of manslaughter and negligent homicide. A collision occurred between the light rail train he is operating and a small sports car. A passenger, the fictional Casey Gordon, flew from the car and died from "blunt force trauma to the head.

Coventry in this round of the competition is trying to prosecute Plunkett. Plunkett was found to be text-messaging prior to and at the time of the collision.

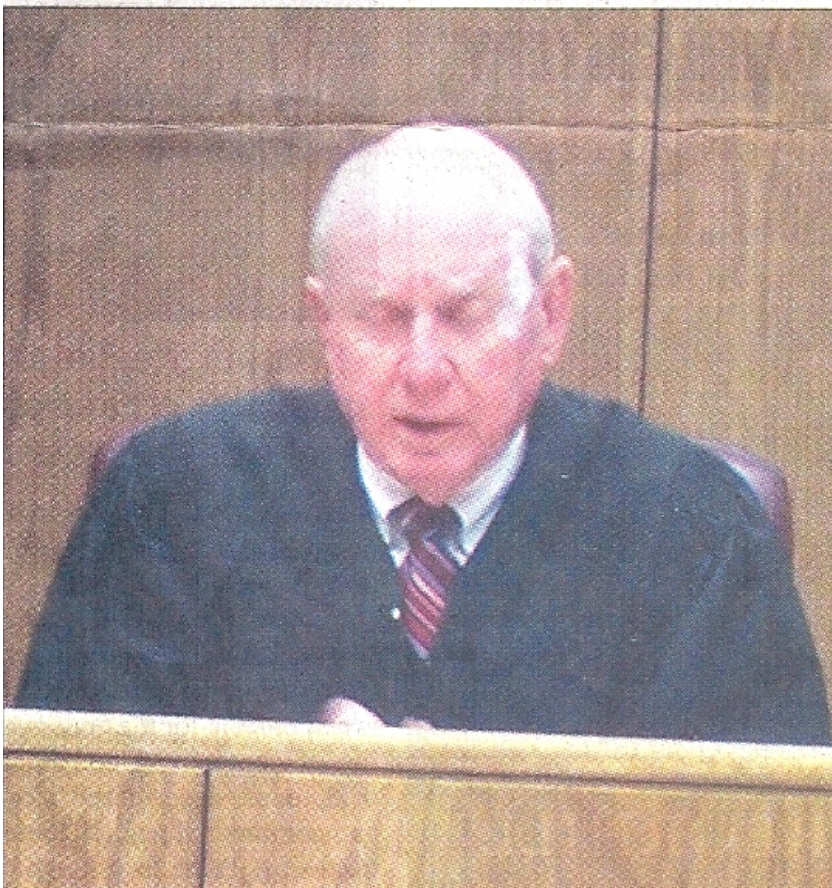
To complicate matters the car, driven by fictional witness

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Angelena Chapman/Daily Times

Above: Coventry students Steven Comery, Caroline Bedard and Alyssa Quattrucci were the prosecuting attorneys in the quarterfinals of the 2011 Rhode Island Mock Trial Tournament. Attorney Jeffrey D. Sowa (far right), a partner at LaPlante Sowa Goldman, was one of the performance judges.



Left: Judge Edward P. Sowa, Jr.'s gives his response to an objection raised. Sowa is an Associate Judge of the Rhode Island Workers' Compensation Court.

WEST BAY

Trial tests students abilities

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witness Billie Jean Dugan, was fleeing from police at the time of the collision. An attempt had been made to pull Dugan over because of an expired license tag, but because of a large amount of cocaine in the vehicle and the fear of being caught, Dugan fled.

The passenger, Gordon, had been seen leaning out of the vehicle throwing "what appeared to be small plastic bags" from the car before the collision.

Blackmar said that while the case may be seen as "technically defense leading," the performance judges would not be judging them on the case itself, but instead on their performance, hence why they are called performance judges.

Text-messaging and driver error and behavior are topics Blackmar said would come up in the trial.

Students from both teams were not shy Thursday in their opening statements to tell the court what they would present and also what they expected the other side to try and prove.

Cynthia Fontaine, Gail Gabrielle and her son Justin Gabrielle are the coaches for the Tiverton team.

Fontaine explained how before the trial begins the performance judges cannot know where each team is from so there is no bias.

Fontaine said the fee each year is \$500 to be in the tourna-

ment, but is open to any school. Tiverton won the tournament in 2000.

Fontaine, a parent of one of the students, has been officially helping for the last two years.

She said it is amazing to see "from beginning to end how much the students have changed" while on the team. "They will be able to use the skills they learn no matter what career [they go into]," she said.

The Tiverton team had three seniors, two sophomores and four freshmen, while the Coventry team is made up almost entirely of juniors.

This quarterfinal round was held in Providence at the J. Joseph Garrahy Courthouse in one of the real courtrooms, 4M.

Roger Williams University in Bristol will host Tiverton's semifinal round this Monday night.

More information about the Rhode Island Legal/Educational Partnership, who has been putting on the Rhode Island Mock Trial Tournament since 1984, can be found at www.rilep.com.

Linda M. Quattrucci, the executive director for the Rhode Island Legal/Educational Partnership, kept time and called out the case.

Booker said that Coventry actually won the quarterfinal in points, but that when the judges cast their ballots it was two to one in favor of Tiverton.

Booker said that Judge Sowa gave Coventry accolades for making it this far in only their third year in the tournament.