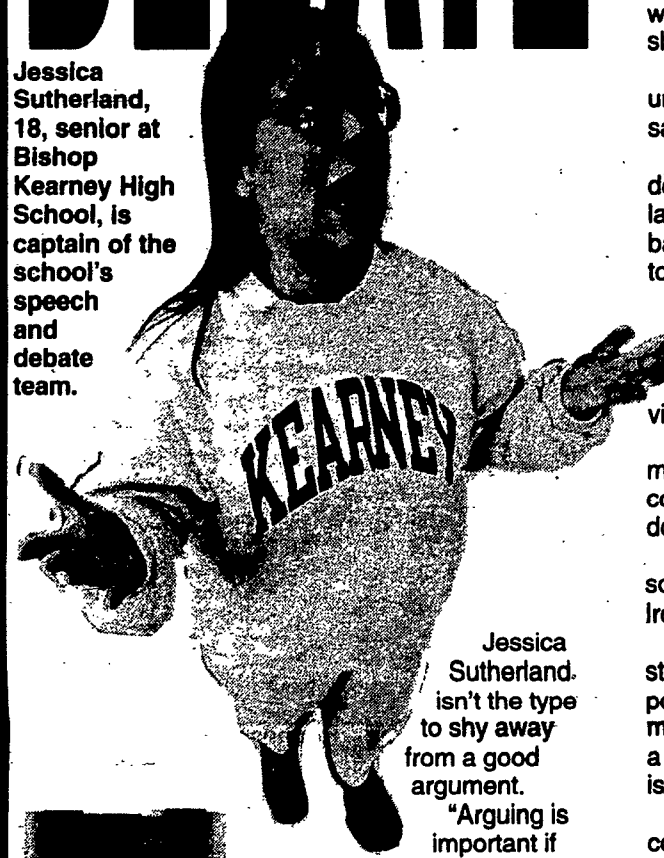


# HEALTHY DEBATE

Jessica Sutherland, 18, senior at Bishop Kearney High School, is captain of the school's speech and debate team.



Jessica Sutherland isn't the type to shy away from a good argument.

"Arguing is important if you're going to have a healthy relationship, because you have to let the person know your feelings. And you have to take their feelings into consideration, too," said Jessica, 18, a parishioner at Holy Trinity Church in Webster.

"Arguing has been put into a negative light. But if you put your feelings on the table, you can come up with a solution," said Mike Germain, 18, who attends Holy Spirit Church in Penfield and is a senior at McQuaid Jesuit High School.

But for Jessica and Mike, arguing is not just yelling at other people. From their experience with high school speech and debate teams, they've learned to air their

views in a logical and calm manner in everyday life. Jessica, who captains the Bishop Kearney speech-and-debate squad, said that before she joined the program as a sophomore, her attitude in an argument was, "It's my way — and that's obviously the right way."

But one requirement in speech-and-debate competitions, she noted, is to argue the same issue from opposing sides. Now, the BK senior said, she is able to see matters from other people's points of view.

This skill helped Jessica recently when she approached school officials to protest the switching of her senior banquet to a date that conflicted with a speech-and-debate team competition. Although she was unable to convince the officials to change the date, she said she was able to accept their decision.

"They didn't end up seeing it my way, but I understood where they were coming from," Jessica said.

Because she didn't act belligerently during that debate, she said, officials were open-minded when she later raised another issue — that she felt the girls' bathrooms needed to be equipped with more soap and toilet paper. This time, her wish was granted.

Dave Bentivegna, another BK speech-and-debate team member, noted that you may not win every debate — but you stand a much better chance if you argue from a rational and well-informed viewpoint.

"I've become a lot better at logic and reasoning with my arguments," Dave said. He added that in competitions, opponents will quickly jump on you if you don't have your facts straight.

"You can get in big trouble," remarked Dave, 16, a BK sophomore who attends Church of Christ the King in Irondequoit.

The competitions, also known as forensics, involve students who engage in speeches and debates with opponents on political and social topics. Competitors must make both pro and con arguments on each issue. Using a head-to-head format, each round won by an individual is applied toward his or her team score.

Both Kearney and McQuaid have fared well in local competition this winter, placing third and fourth, respectively, in the Genesee Valley Catholic Forensics League. Meanwhile, Jessica from BK and Mike from McQuaid have qualified for individual state competition next month in Albany.

One key to excelling in these competitions, Dave said, is to keep your emotions under control. Although he said that emotion can help drive a point across, being overemotional can backfire.

"I've certainly won a few rounds because I've come across more persuasively, even though somebody may have had a better case," Dave said. "I find it good to argue with emotion — but you definitely don't want to argue with your emotion getting in your way, because it clouds your judgment."

Joe Pulvino added that ego can cloud one's judgment as well. He said that being on the McQuaid speech-and-debate team has been challenging because he's not always good at accepting other points of view.

"My parents said I should join the team because I debate everything around the house anyway," remarked Joe, 16, a McQuaid junior who attends St. Margaret Mary Church in Irondequoit.

# Accepting compromise

However, Joe has learned, "If you don't listen to the other side, you're never going to win because you don't know what you're arguing about."

And Mike pointed out that arguments shouldn't be viewed as something you win or lose.

"You have to reject the idea of somebody being absolutely right or absolutely wrong," he explained.

Instead, Jessica said that in her relationship with her boyfriend, they try to meet each other halfway.

"It's basically a big compromise. It's like, 'I do it my way tonight, and we'll do it your way next time,'" Jessica said.

She echoed Dave's point that feelings must be kept relatively in check during the debating process.

**"If you lose your temper, then your mouth will get ahead of your brain and you'll say something you really wish you hadn't," she said.**

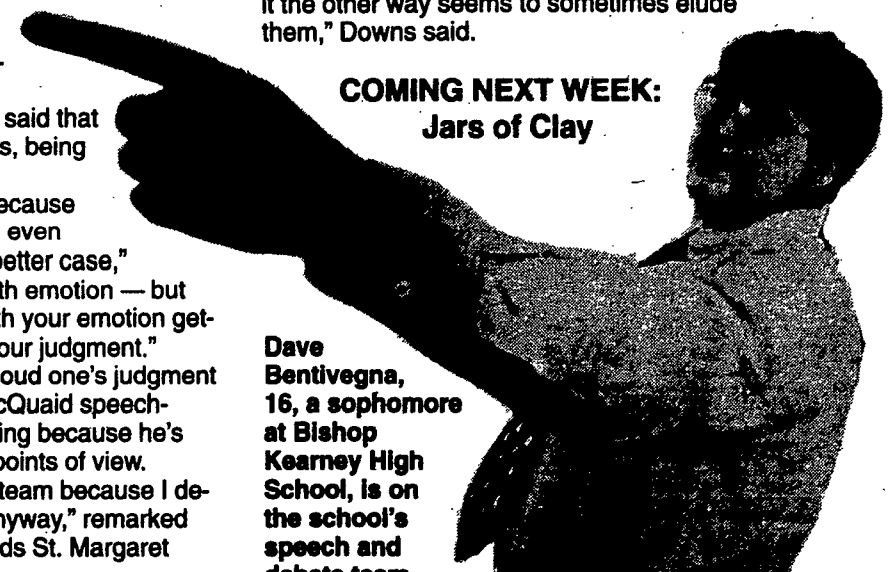
However, this can be easier said than done. Tom Downs, Kearney's speech-and-debate coach, said a revealing incident occurred when his team was traveling to a competition in the early 1990s. The debate:

whether to pull off the highway to eat burgers, or pizza. "Half the team wanted to go to a burger joint and half wanted to get pizza. I asked each group to present their rationale why, and there wasn't any clear answer. I sided with the pizza group," Downs recalled, adding that his vote broke the tie.

The burger lovers, he noted, did not react well to the decision. "The issue kind of stuck around for the rest of the school year," he said. "It was dumb; it never should have been that big an issue." He added that he has made all subsequent judgments on road-trip cuisine.

This example goes to show, Downs said, that even the most skilled arguers and debaters have to constantly work on their skills.

"When they're dealing with an academic thought process, they understand the perspective of the opposition. But in a real life *personal* activity, the ability to see it the other way seems to sometimes elude them," Downs said.



COMING NEXT WEEK: Jars of Clay

Dave Bentivegna, 16, a sophomore at Bishop Kearney High School, is on the school's speech and debate team.

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