

‘Good speakers and good thinkers’: Bozeman High speech and debate tops undefeated season with state championship

- [By Liz Weber Chronicle Staff Writer](#)
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Bozeman High School’s speech and debate team won the state championship, capping a season that has been held entirely virtual amid the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

The win makes the team the first undefeated speech and debate team since 1984, Head Coach Adam Thane said.

“Our philosophy is we do the right things at the right time and everything follows,” he said. “Good speakers and good thinkers and the rest kind of takes care of itself.”

Bozeman High topped the virtual tournament hosted by Butte on Dec. 29 and 30 with 206 overall points, runner-up Flathead High School had 163.5 points and Glacier High School earned 139.5. Last year, the Raptors came in second to Flathead High.

Thane credits the rivalry between the three teams as a catalyst for propelling the whole state to have strong, competitive teams.

“It’s nice to have good rivals that push you to get better,” he said.

Thane said this year’s team was a group of students that came together and did anything it could to support each other.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the teams competed virtually all year, with a platform designed by the national speech and debate association. Thane said the Bozeman team still had students come to the school and compete from there to help instill a sense of camaraderie with the team.

Since competitions were held virtually this year, Thane said it was the only school activity where if someone had to quarantine or tested positive for COVID-19, they could still compete from their home.

He said if that weren't possible, there would have been a few instances where the team would have lost students for a competition but instead they were allowed to compete and did fairly well.

"It was a great supportive group that works well together and the results show that," he said.

There was one competition where the internet was down for the entire school building. Thane said the students were "frantically running computers and phones to each other" and sharing internet hotspots with those who needed them.

"What could have been a massive disruption was another way of coming together," he said.

At the beginning of the school year, students had to adjust to not having the energy of an audience, Thane said.

"It's different but it hasn't been earthshakingly different," he said.

Despite some of these challenges, Thane said students have reported it's been a positive year of competing for them.

He said he was also impressed with how students who maybe didn't perform as well as they expected still held happiness for the whole team.

"It says a lot about a young person when they can handle that without a lot of bitterness," Thane said.

Gallatin High School's speech and debate team also finished 8th in its inaugural year.

Bozeman High is ranked 25th in the nation after the state championship, defying expectations of some after the team was split in two with the creation of the district's second high school.

The team will start preparations soon for the Montana West District Tournament held on Feb. 12-13, which determines who will be competing in the all-virtual national competition in the summer.

Individual results for Bozeman students

- Policy debate: second, Amelia Hartshorn and Esmirelda Hurd; third: Miles Fastnow and Ethan Gilpin; fourth: Isabelle Lewis and Chloe McDonald; sixth: Katherine Callow and Nia Zillis.
- Lincoln Douglas debate: first, Soren Wade; fourth: Lorelei Michael-Owens; fifth: Samantha Savage; eighth: Siena Popiel.
- Public forum debate: first, Ani Hadley and Sellers Shockley; second: Liza Huggins and Marika Schultz; third: Annika Gao and Mason Scurry.
- Extemporaneous speaking: first, Olivia Bulis; second: Brooke Bothner; third: Parker Summerhill; eighth: Jude Wolfe.
- Impromptu speaking: second, Brooke Bothner; second: Parker Summerhill.
- Program oral interpretation: third, Tristan Pritham.
- Duo interpretation: third, Hugh Burroughs and Tristan Pritham; fifth, Willow Craighead and Logan Sigler.
- Dramatic interpretation: eighth, Kyah Hegreberg.
- Memorized public address: fifth, Kyah Hegreberg; seventh, Olivia Smith.
- Original oratory: seventh, Olivia Smith.
- Informative speaking: fourth, Abigail Sheets.