Welcome back to the 2013-2014 school year! I hope that this letter finds you rested and ready to return for another year of coaching. As the board met in May many ideas and concepts were discussed about things that could be done to help start the year for new and old teams alike. I would like to address most of these things in this newsletter in the hoped that we can get this year started off stronger than ever.

The first thing everyone needs to do is pay their dues. You can find an [invoice](http://www.massforensics.org/invoice.html) on the Massachusetts Speech & Debate League (MSDL) website, [massforensics.org](http://www.massforensics.org). Go to the tab labeled “joining” (or just click on the hyperlink, above). If you are new you can get started there. If you are already a member, print out your invoice and get it to your school administration for payment. We would really like for all current schools to have paid their dues by December 7.

More importantly for those who are interested in starting a new team or new coaches, working on trying to figure out what you need to do first, shoot me an email and hopefully we can schedule a meeting. Part of what I would like to do is help newer programs to get their bearings to start off the school year in an organized and successful way.

In conjunction with this, Debbie Simon, middle school coach at Milton Academy, who has for many years been doing the judge training at each tournament before it starts, has graciously offered to come with me to any school in the league for an evening to train parents. We would come on an evening that you have worked out with your parents and do a custom training session for them. This will help to get the parents comfortable with judging. There will be no time constraint so we can answer all the questions that need to be answered and shorten the time for judging meetings at tournaments.

Debbie has also agreed to be at each tournament to hold a judges meeting DURING the first round of the tournament. This will give new judges an hour to spend with Debbie, asking any questions they need answered. Then they will be judging, along with Debbie, the next round. This will help them to feel comfortable their first time judging and produce strong ballots for the students.

For new coaches out there, Debbie and I will also hold a workshop at your school to help you with any coaching and general administrative needs you have. Sometimes just an hour or two of dedicated one on one questions and answers can get you in a good place for the whole year. We will also be happy to do a joint coaching session with one of your students if you feel that would help you as well.

I want to encourage everyone to send an email to us any time they have a question. The success of the league depends on the success of every school in the league, and there are always lots of questions that come up during the year.

Another new thing we are going to try was brought up at the league year end meeting. The people who are the staff that works in the tab room at each tournament are considered very good coaches. Because they run the tournament, it is impossible for them to judge and in turn students miss out on some very good ballots from these coaches. We are working on the plan that all the coaches who run the tournament will be judging the first round of every tournament. There will, of course, be a couple of people in the tab room during the first round to deal with an issue that could arise, but the rest of the group will be judging. In this way must students will then have access to these coaches who will give them some very strong and useful critiques.

For now – that’s it. I hopefully I will be putting a newsletter up on the website every few months with what’s happening and new information. In the meantime here’s to a great year for all of us.

Susan Marianelli

Milton Academy

President Massachusetts Forensics League