

Students parse law in mock trial cases

By **RACHEL SAUER**
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First, it all seemed like a big misunderstanding: Someone else logged in using his former ID and password! It wasn't him! All he'd wanted to do was some legitimate academic research!

Innocent until proven guilty, of course.

Under cross-examination, though, what had seemed black-and-white became somewhat grayer: He had teased his accuser in the past, though they'd been friends in elementary school. His chat room demeanor was often aggressive. He'd had unsupervised access to school computers.

Kris Stuart, the defendant, looked expectantly at the attorney.

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GRAND JUNCTION HIGH SCHOOL'S mock trial team will compete in regionals this weekend against Glenwood Springs High School. Junction students, clockwise from upper left, are Miranda Dvorak, Jake Madsen, Joseph O'Neill, Paul Harmon, team adviser Mark Carris, Spencer Pendry, Bettina Bostelman, Haleigh Jacobson and Sean Harmon.

CHRISTOPHER TOMLINSON
 The Daily Sentinel

Glenwood team heavy on success, but has fun, too

By **DENNIS WEBB**
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GLENWOOD SPRINGS — If Glenwood Springs High School senior Chuck Bergren-Aragon feels pressure being part of a mock trial program that over the years has claimed several state titles and been a national runner-up, he doesn't admit to it.

"We've just got to go into it with the mindset it's our year. It doesn't matter what teams have done in the past; that doesn't impact us," he said as he joined

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STUDENTS: 'Always aspired to beat Glenwood' SUCCESS: Experience builds many career skills

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"Why did the friendship (with the plaintiff) end?" the attorney asked.

"Objection," said Bettina Bostelman, a junior at Grand Junction High School. "Relevance."

And with that, the mystified, defensive demeanor lifted and Kris Stuart was back to being Sean Harmon, a Grand Junction senior. The courtroom was once again Mark Carris' social studies classroom, and the mock trial team was wading into a discussion about how to address questions of relevance. They eventually decided that sophomore Jake Madsen, who was acting as both defense and plaintiff attorneys, should say, "In your opinion, why did the friendship end?"

They were in the final preparations for the Western Slope regional tournament in the 26th annual Colorado Bar Association High School Mock Trial Program, taking place today and Saturday at the Mesa County Justice Center. Teams from around the area will compete in *Jamie Cullen v. Kris Stuart*, a civil case focusing on cyberstalking.

The case was issued to teams Nov. 1, providing a trial's-worth of materials in which the fictional Cullen accuses Stuart of making threats in a school-sponsored chat room, allegedly exacerbating Cullen's Generalized Anxiety Disorder and leading to the loss of a \$60,000 valedictorian scholarship.

Teams prepare both sides of the case, but present just one side at a time against a competing team. They're judged by a panel of attorneys on their or-

ganization, delivery, statement of facts, objections and examination in opening statements and closing arguments, direct and cross examinations and witness portrayal.

Winning teams advance to the state tournament March 11 and 12, and then to nationals May 5 through 7 in Phoenix. The Glenwood Springs High School mock trial teams consistently have swept regionals and state and advanced to nationals. They're the gold standard, said Carris, who has coached the Grand Junction team for 11 years.

"We've always aspired to beat Glenwood," Carris said, adding they've come close in previous years. Last year, the GJHS team initially tied for second place against Glenwood's C team, but lost in a final decision.

"This competition is our chance to get even with them," said senior Paul Harmon, an aspiring attorney who admitted that beating Glenwood has been one of his motivations for participating in mock trial all four years of high school. "I think it'll take a lot, but I think that they are beatable, just like any high school group of kids. I think we have a very good team as well. I think we've got a couple of kinks in our trial that we're going to throw at them, a couple little curve balls they're not going to be expecting.

"Ultimately, you have to be able to have a well-rounded team, because they do everything well. I could go one-in-four in the trial if that one win was against Glenwood A (team)."

To that end, the GJHS team has practiced since receiving the case, and even before, reviewing

the rules of evidence as early as September. In a school with many other academic extracurriculars that can siphon potential members from the mock trial team, those who commit are dedicated, said Harmon, who co-directs the team. Paul and his twin brother, Sean, are the team's only four-year members.

Through the years, local attorneys have helped the team prepare, Carris said, but ultimately it's the students who consistently attend after-school practices, parsing the nuances of civil case law and mining the psychology of a trial, who win competitions.

At a recent practice, they clarified differences between MRIs and FMRI — "An FMRI does detect brain chemistry," senior Spencer Pendry, a first-year team member, asserted (Jamie Cullen's medication is a possible factor in the case) — and crack open a dictionary to assess layers of meaning in the word "verdict."

"Hold on," Miranda Dvorak told fellow senior Haleigh Jacobson at one point. "Have you asked a question? Right now, you're just making statements."

Jacobson had been acting as defense attorney, cross-examining Bostelman. They reminded each other to keep emotions in check, to cut off all avenues of wiggle room, to be careful about turning their backs to the judge. Paul Harmon demonstrated the subtle art of asking a question of the witness, but facing the jury while doing so.

"What matters," Madsen said, giving the opening statement of a defense attorney but summarizing a key lesson of the mock trial program, "is the truth."

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a handful of others to practice opening and closing arguments in a Garfield County courtroom on a recent evening.

Besides, he said, it's not as if Glenwood's student body is focused on how the team does from year to year.

"They care about football; that's about it," he said.

Bergren-Aragon says that with a smile, which is just one of the things he likes about mock trial.

"It's kind of like a place to gather with people you really like and just laugh a lot," he said. It's also a place where team members take what they do seriously and are, as Bergren-Aragon puts it, "productive."

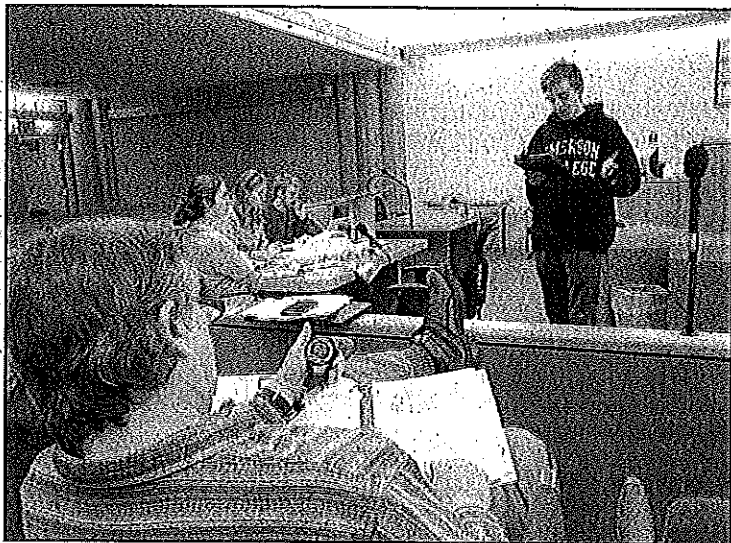
Glenwood's program normally fields three teams, and the school usually finishes in the top 10 at state. From 2002-05, the program won four state championships in a row. It also has recorded second- and third-place finishes at the national level, and two seventh-place finishes.

Such success doesn't come without work. Charlie Willman, one of the attorneys who coaches the program, said participants this year started practicing in August for a competition in October. They could keep going until Mother's Day if they win state and qualify for nationals.

Working around an attorney-coach's schedule can mean not starting practice until early evening.

"We go to 9 or 9:30, and they have to go home and do homework," Willman said. "It's not easy."

But the rewards of participa-



DENNIS WEBB/The Daily Sentinel

ATTORNEY AND GLENWOOD SPRINGS High School mock trial coach Charlie Willman times Chuck Bergren-Aragon as the student delivers his argument in a recent practice at the Garfield County Courthouse. Teammates, from left, Eileen Klomhaus, Isabel Carlson and Joseph Ciborowski prepare to provide constructive criticism.

tion can be great, believes Vic Zerbi, a retired Garfield County judge who as a longtime coach has figured prominently in the program's success.

"I believe this is one of the most challenging and difficult things kids can do in high school because it involves so many skills," he said.

Reading, writing and improvisational thinking can help participants in careers, which may or may not include law. Zerbi's daughter, Merida, participated in mock trial in Glenwood Springs and now is an attorney in Monte Vista. Willman's daughter, Abby, another mock trial veteran, is in law school. But Bergren-Aragon said he'd like to be a television anchor-

man and thinks mock trial will help him think quickly.

Sophomore Eileen Klomhaus said it's a great program for improving one's critical thinking.

She added, "I think it's really helpful with public speaking, which is most likely something I'll go into in some sort of career. ... I've considered being an attorney, but I have no idea at this point."

Having 24 kids in the program this year enables Glenwood Springs to field multiple teams. While Zerbi is happy to see Durango developing a strong program and Grand Junction's greatly improving, he's disturbed that the number of mock trial programs is falling on the Western Slope.

Glenwood mock trial teams take top 2 places

By SENTINEL STAFF

Glenwood Springs High School is sending two teams to the state mock trial tournament next month.

Glenwood Springs' A and B teams captured first and second place, respectively, in the West Slope regional tournament that concluded Saturday in the Mesa County Justice Center.

Grand Junction High School won the professionalism award for the competition and the John Sideek Trophy which is presented by the Mesa County Bar Association to the top team from Mesa County in the memory of the longtime chairman of the mock-trial competition and an attorney with Hoskin Farina and Kampf in Grand Junction.

In individual awards, outstanding attorneys were Isabel Carlson, Glenwood Springs High School, Callie Felkie, Glenwood Springs High School, Olivia Hayes, Glenwood Springs High School, Paul Harmon, Grand Junction High School, Melanie Taylor, Durango High School, and Chuck Bergren-Aragon, Glenwood Springs High School, who won with the most votes ever received for the award.

Outstanding witnesses were: Whitney Simon, Durango High School, Sean Harmon, Grand Junction High School, Alex Potosky, Glenwood Springs High School, Alex Munch, Durango High School, Warren Knutson, Glenwood Springs High School, and Francesca Ferlita of Durango High School.

The state mock trial competition will be March 11-12 in the Adams County Justice Center in Brighton.