

WISCONSIN ACADEMIC DECATHLON

Helpful Hints from Coaches

I. TEAM SELECTION

- A. Open to all students.
 - 1. Recruit as many students as possible in the beginning. We encourage two teams for qualifying, these extra students can later be used as alternates if needed. Give USAD practice tests to determine who makes qualifying and regional exams. Coaches who have used this type of “competitive” format found that there was no resentment on the team.
- B. Recommendations from teachers or other students.
 - 1. Talk to guidance counselor. Match GPA's to ACT or SAT's especially an inverse match....highest SAT, for example, to lowest GPA.
 - 2. Get leads from other students. “Is there anyone in AP Physics who's getting a D and shouldn't be?”
 - 3. Survey your teachers and keep track of names. Put a recruitment letter in every teacher's mailbox to look for the “C” students.
- C. Use PSAT, Standardization Tests; SRA Test Scores, IQ tests, Knowledge & Concepts Exam, etc.
 - 1. Find good testers by looking at all test scores.
 - 2. Talk to Gifted & Talented staff, and talk to middle school guidance counselors.
- D. Hold general meeting of interested students.
 - 1. Use your experienced decathletes to talk about merits and disadvantages of decathlon.
- E. Point out advantages of being a part of the Academic Decathlon to students.
- F. Determine student's availability. Look at conflicts with other extra-curricular activities hours available, part-time job commitment, etc.
 - 1. Coaches' consensus to choose the “busy” kid.
 - 2. Meet during the day.....some schools meet during morning 0 hour.
 - 3. Meet at night. i.e. 7:00-9:00 p.m.
- G. Review courses taken by students as they relate to the Study Guide for current year.
 - 1. One of the most important things is to make certain that the kids are in the right course.
- H. Characteristics essential in picking team: Intelligence and brain power, motivation or desire, team player, peer acceptance.
 - 1. “Personality is so important...”
 - 2. “I would rather spend my nine months with students I like, than to win...”
 - 3. “Watch out for the non-team player.”

II. TEAM RECRUITMENT

- A. Year round effort.
 - 1. Determined by commitment of students and coach.
 - 2. Availability of students during various "seasons" is a factor.
 - 3. Advantages: begin novel, begin research.
 - 4. Disadvantages: GPA's not set.
- B. Coach is a salesperson.
 - 1. Teams are hand chosen.
 - 2. Stress honor and tough competition.
 - 3. Make students aware of scholarship opportunities.
 - 4. Give formal awards, both team and individual, and informal (food bribes and special events) awards.
- C. Talk it up in all your classes.
 - 1. Let those left behind know where you are going.
- D. Recruitment may be necessary to secure varsity level students (many "C" students finally feel like they belong when they become part of the AD Team). More incentive to do well. Look for underachievers and consider LD students.
 - 1. Ask for help from guidance staff, parents, teachers, students, administrators, test scores, and other team members.
- E. Be honest with amount of time required.
 - 1. Many hours.
 - 2. Use study guides, teacher resources, and study groups.
- F. Be alert to extra-curricular activities (especially jobs).
 - 1. Choose meeting time which is good for all and then that becomes "academic" time -- stick to it.
 - 2. Give students time to complete key areas for review.
- G. Balance your team (having sophomores and juniors help with next year's team).
 - 1. Seniors have the advantage of the upper level classes.
 - 2. Levels will work together and have different commitments at different times and you will not be left empty-handed.
- H. Run qualifying test during summer to help pick a team using last year's USAD Practice Test -- Math & Science are similar each year. Have them write an essay to determine writing ability.
 - 1. This qualifying essay cannot be used in later competitions.
- I. Register a 2nd team if you have enough students and/or if you want to give more students the testing experience at Local Competition. Appeal to area booster clubs to raise money for the entry fee for the 2nd team if school won't finance a 2nd team. Only one team per school from Local Competition may advance to Regional, but the team rosters from Local can be combined to form a Regional team.

III. SECURING RESOURCE MATERIALS

- A. WIAD recommends you purchase the Curriculum Package from USAD, which will contain everything you need to get started.
- B. Practice Test Booklet from USAD – this is very important to give you an idea about format of questions, etc.
- C. Essay prompt at Regional is on the novel; essay prompt at State is on the Super Quiz material.
- D. Keep file on reusable resource materials from year to year.
- E. Use public libraries. Check with other faculty and staff for music, etc. -- tape can be purchased from USAD; school media specialists (library) can often secure materials under their budget for you; share with other coaches.
- F. Enlist librarian for help to research in databases.
- G. National Gallery of Art on laser disc.
- H. Get 3-ring binder for each student on your team so they can organize their materials and have them handy for study. Get a local company or organization to donate binders for your students.
- I. Purchase a copy of the novel for each student.



IV. STAFF INVOLVEMENT

- A. Utilize staff expertise. Try band, orchestra, choir directors, English, Math, Science, Economics, Social Science, Art, Chemistry, History, Geography, Physics teachers, forensics coach and use librarians to help with Speeches.
 - 1. Give each appropriate area a copy of outline and talk to them about the program.
- B. Give recognition to those who help with a special thank you and a gift where appropriate.
 - 1. Have a banquet at end of season, and invite those who helped throughout the year and the parents.
 - 2. Rolls, cards, flowers.
 - 3. Give WIAD pin each year to faculty helper.
 - 4. Academic Decathlon T-shirts.
 - 5. Budget for such items ahead.
 - 6. PTA.
- C. Need administrative support -- get the Principal and administrator behind the program. Many coaches are paid; keep track of your hours so you have something to work with.
- D. Guidance Counselor and business department could conduct interviews of prospective students for the team.
 - 1. Have personnel directors from local businesses conduct interviews.
 - 2. Principals could conduct interviews.
 - 3. School board members.

- E. Recruit parents to help work with teams. Many parents have specialty areas of expertise to share -- or business or university people to help teach.
 1. Parents as academic boosters.
 2. Recruit alumni or current college students who graduated from your school.
- F. Try to incorporate certain things within the curriculum - speeches as part of English.
- G. Have English classes read the required novel.
- H. Art Prints are on a web-site and can be printed out on hard copy.
- I. Publicity - Newspaper articles - include staff names in press.
- J. Use staff to actively select team members. Once they feel they have a commitment, they are more inclined to help.
- K. If you are in a position to support their programs – do so. As a librarian, for example, you could offer to help and pay for materials they need or purchase materials that can be used for Academic Decathlon, but which can also be used in the classroom. This works well with art and music and also with taking photos for extracurricular activities. You can help someone – They can help you.

V. TEAM PREPARATION

- A. Have regular sessions each week – Very Important.
- B. Have special get-togethers, pizza or chili parties, watch videos, have snacks during session.
- C. Recommend students read novel over the summer months.
- D. Determine number of sessions needed for each subject area. Cover one test area each week.
- E. Video-tape presentations by resource people so if a student misses, they can watch it later.
- F. Check with English Department; they might have students use the novel for their class, which helps in competition preparation.
- G. Have students make their own flash cards for each test subject.
- H. Request interview packets from the WI Job Service – have local business people conduct interviews.
- I. Conduct scrimmages with other decathlon teams.
- J. Have decathletes give speeches at faculty meetings, club meetings, etc.



VI. MOTIVATION TECHNIQUES/COACHING TECHNIQUES

- A. Coach needs to *want* to do it.
- B. Challenge kids to score certain number of points at Local competition to earn a party, or some other incentive.
- C. You will need financial backing from Administration.
- D. Publicity: run articles in school and local community newspapers.
- E. Have school sponsor motel room at Regional/State, if you go.
- F. MVP Award for Academic Decathlon.
- G. Gimmicks: Pizza or sub sandwiches after Local round; t-shirts; bumper stickers; school banners in gym; write memos to kids praising them for their good work.
- H. Tell the Truth: Academic Decathlon can be a long season if you go on to Regional and State. Avoid putting too much pressure on kids. Make it fun besides being serious. Let them know what your expectations are.
- I. Create that team atmosphere, as students must feel ownership in the team.