

Alton's Schaper Brothers to Compete in National Speech & Debate Tournament

by Sydney Sinks, News Reporter
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ALTON - Two local high schoolers have qualified for a national speech and debate tournament.

Jacob and Blake Schaper, students of Fortitude School in Alton, will compete in the Coolidge Cup in July 2024. This tournament offers over \$15,000 in scholarship money and pulls in competitors from across the country. The Schaper brothers have competed in speech and debate tournaments for several years.

“Most assuredly, it’s daunting going to these higher tournaments. But Lord willing, we’ll both do very well,” said Blake, a junior. “I think a lot of kids our age really need those communication skills. I’m excited to be known as a speaker. I feel like I’ve just scratched the surface, but I’m definitely proud to be able to communicate my ideas more effectively and to just, I think, lead the charge and inspire some other kids to try it, too.”

In addition to the Coolidge Cup, both students will participate in the National Invitational Tournament of Champions later this spring. Blake and Jacob will compete in Parliamentary Debate and Impromptu Speaking. Jacob will also compete in Team Policy Debate and give his “crowd-favorite” Expository Speech on how to bake sourdough bread. Blake will participate in the Lincoln-Douglas Debate, Original Oratory, Persuasive and Apologetics categories.

Jacob explained that the brothers started out by giving speeches to their parents and grandparents. They then joined Stoa, a speech and debate organization for homeschooling Christian families, and both boys fell in love with the experience. They are excited to compete at these high-level tournaments later this year.

“I think it was a natural shift,” Jacob explained. “It’s definitely nerve-wracking and a little bit terrifying preparing for it, but we’re also just super excited to participate.”

Both students have big plans after their tournaments. Jacob, a Meridian Scholarship winner, will be attending SIUE in the fall to major in mechanical and mechatronics engineering. Blake will work as an intern with the Classical Learning Test this summer.

The boys’ mother, Christy Schaper, said she is proud of the work they have put in. She is grateful for the opportunities that homeschooling has given them.

“I feel like homeschooling has provided an opportunity for them to really explore who they are as people, to find their passions and to be able to fully immerse themselves in learning,” she added. “What I want most for my two boys is that they continue to become men of faith and integrity and carry with them into the future the gift of lifelong learning that homeschooling has provided our family.”

The boys are looking forward to competing at both the Coolidge Cup and the National Invitational Tournament of Champions. They both said they enjoy speech and debate, and they have developed skills that they hope to carry with them for the rest of their lives.

“I think we’re losing our ability to look at ideas that we disagree with and to analyze them and to take them for the truth that they have. I think our society will crumble if we lose those skills,” Blake said. “Speech and debate is a necessity for kids and adults to learn. It’s part of our heritage and culture...Debate is a very populist, a very democratic way of looking at government. It’s definitely an American kind of pastime.”