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HEADLINE: Verdict's in: Broadneck falls in mock trial

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BODY:

Pat Stone, 17, a prosecuting attorney for the state champ Broadneck High School mock trial team, wrung his hands silently yesterday as he awaited the judge's verdict.

The trial at the Court of Appeals building in Annapolis was fake, but the tension sure felt real.

"Not guilty," Judge Irma S. Raker said to the packed, hot courtroom, and the Broadneck team fell to New York state champ St. Francis Academy, a Catholic school near Buffalo.

"You are extraordinary," Judge Raker told the two teams of teen-agers. "I teach trial practice at American University and I can tell you, without exaggeration, that your performance equaled that of my third-year law students."

She said this trial was "extraordinarily close," but the way in which the St. Francis attorneys handled Broadneck's tough witnesses tipped the scales.

The judge's ruling brought to a close the annual meeting between the best teams from Maryland and New York, the highest level of competition for both states.

There is a national championship, but organizers from both states don't participate in it because teams get only three weeks to master a case. Mock trial teams in Maryland and New York have been arguing yesterday's case since fall.

It was a criminal case involving the state levying charges against Mickey Jackson, a student who has been charged with unauthorized access to computers and theft and distribution of internet files.

The dozen Broadneck students in the winter began competing against other teams in the county. The only loss they recorded was to Northeast High School in Pasadena.

Broadneck was named Maryland's best after defeating Baltimore City College on April 28 in a close, hard-fought match. The team of 12 was the first from the county to reach the pinnacle since Old Mill in 1986.

Broadneck senior Daniel Wittig, 17, was naturally disappointed by yesterday's out come, but was pleased with his team's performance.

"It was a good trial and really close. We've never gone against a team this good. They used techniques that you'd see in a real courtroom. But, it's OK, because we're still state champs."

Sophomore Emily Zeigenfuse, 16, said this year's success is especially sweet for the team, which did not fare well in last year's competition.

"This is a great academic legacy for Broadneck," said Cheryl Menke, a team coach.

St. Francis senior Jason Pieczonka called Broadneck, "the stiffest competition we've faced this year."

That's a real compliment given that competition in New York high schools may be four times tougher than in Maryland. There are 128 teams in Maryland compared with 550 in New York. Mock trials in this state, sponsored by the Maryland Bar Association, began in 1983 and have grown to more than 2,000 students representing 128 public and private schools throughout the state.

Annapolis resident Brian McNamara, an attorney with Foley & Lardner in Washington and a part of the Broadneck coaching team, called the teen participants "bright, articulate and not intimidated."

"There is a lot of tension in the courtroom, as much as I've seen in any real case," Mr. McNamara said. "You can't stand up and cheer in the courtroom when they make a good point."