

Tennent's Pronin rises on national stage for his debating skills

By Gary Weckselblatt Staff Writer | Posted: Tuesday, June 24, 2014 10:30 pm

Michael Pronin of William Tennent High School was one of only three high school Lincoln-Douglas debaters to advance to the trophy rounds of two major national tournaments this spring.

Pronin captured eighth place out of 254 competitors in the National Speech and Debate Association's national tournament June 15-21 in Overland Park, Kansas. Prior to that achievement, the soon-to-be Pennsylvania State University freshman advanced to the Sweet 16 at the National Catholic Forensic League's national tournament in Chicago against 216 competitors who qualified from 81 dioceses.

"I never really thought I'd get that far," Pronin said Tuesday night, after his accomplishments were recognized by the Centennial school board. "I'm very happy how things turned out."

Pronin, a modest young man, described his success as similar to "a ball bouncing the right way" like a football. "I feel very lucky."

Chris Berdnik, the district's business manager and debate team coach, said Pronin had an "incredible run."

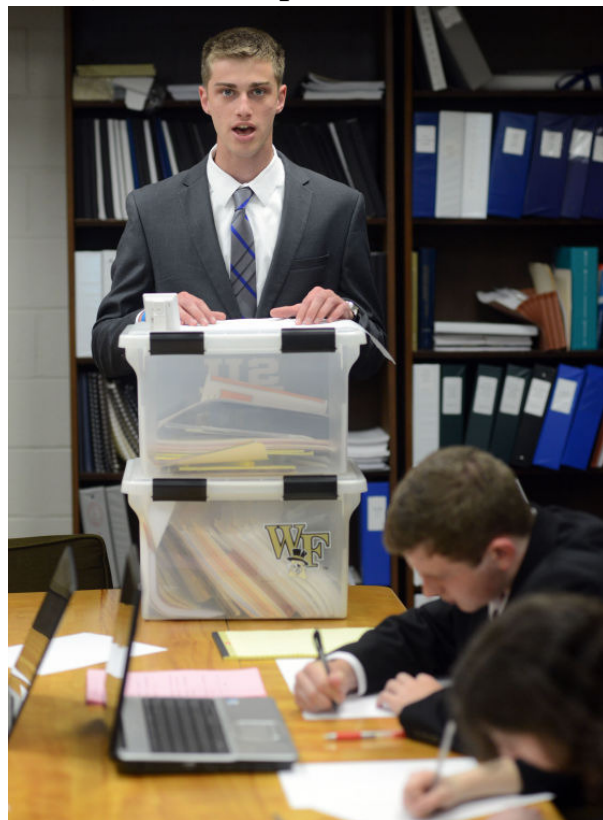
Berdnik, a former high school debater at Pittsburgh Central Catholic and Saint Vincent College, described Pronin's 12th round performance in Overland Park as "the best round I've ever seen" from a high school debater.

"He adapted well to the judges," Berdnik said of the debater he has called the team's "superstar."

He complimented Pronin's "word economy ... exceptional use of evidence" and said he wrapped it up "with strong, compelling voting issues."

"I don't say that lightly."

Pronin credited Berdnik with helping him become one of the country's top debaters. "I couldn't have



Tennent Debate Team

WARMINSTER, PA - MAY 1: Michael Pronin, a member of the William Tennent High School debate team practices with teammates Thursday in Warminster. (Photo by William Thomas Cain/Cain Images)

done it without him,” he said. After the tournament in Chicago, “We practiced every day, even on weekends.”

Berdnik said Pronin’s “marquee performance was a testament to his hard work.”

Pronin has a fascinating background. His parents, who immigrated from Belarus, both speak Russian. Pronin did not speak English until the age of 5. In addition to his status as co-captain with Donato Luongo, he is the school’s top tennis player.

Five Tennent competitors are ranked in the top 150 students in the commonwealth for lifetime points among active participants.

They include Pronin, Luongo, Loqman Adnane, Chris Berdnik Jr., and Cameron Zurmuhl. The latter three are returning, giving Berdnik a positive feeling heading into the future.

“I’m truly at a loss for words to describe what Mike’s run means to our team,” he said. “Make no mistake about it, we’ll be back.”