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On Boxing Day, when I would normally be gorging on the leftovers of a fabulous Christmas dinner, I instead found myself flying half way around the world to Manila, capital of the Philippines, to represent Cambridge in the World University Debating Championships. Hosted by De La Salle University, this year's World Championships promised to be one of the most exciting and well-organised Worlds ever. We were not to be disappointed. The World University Debating Championships have been held annually since 1981, though the date has slowly moved backwards through the calendar year to its current spot straddling New Year's celebrations, and this year marked the 32nd Championships. 400 teams from 70 countries, descended upon Manila, and 800 speakers competed to take home the coveted title of 'World Champions'. They were to be judged by an equally international judging pool, filled with 600 of the world's finest debating judges.

The first day of the tournament started off brilliantly, with my teammate and I soundly winning the first round, proposing that all fathers should have to take paternity leave. After the next two rounds, in which we had to oppose a motion about misleading truths, and propose a motion about fining companies that cause structural unemployment, my teammate and I found ourselves on 5 points out of a possible 9. While it hadn't been the perfect start, it was a solid platform to build on over the next two days, and a comfortable enough start. It is often said that you can't win Worlds on the first day, but you can lose it, and we had done well to emerge relatively unscathed. The evening was spent enjoying traditional Filipino culture in the comfort of our hotel, and meeting and reuniting with lots of the other debaters from around the world.

One of the most common questions I was asked about Worlds before I left was 'How does the language barrier work?'. The answer is 'Much more simply than you might imagine!'. All of the debates at Worlds are done in English (there is a separate Spanish Worlds held every summer) and at the end of the 9 preliminary rounds, the top 32 teams overall (regardless of language) are seeded for 4 knockout rounds, culminating in a grand final. The next 16 best teams from whom English is a second language are seeded for 3 knockout rounds to determine the ESL (English as a Second Language) Champion, and the next 8 best teams for whom English is a foreign language are similarly seeded to find the EFL champion.

The second day of the tournament went even better than the first, and saw my teammate and I grabbing a further 6 points, leaving us with 11 points after two days. After opposing a flat level of wealth (with enforced charitable donations), and the abolition of deaf schools, we had to propose progressive legislation in democracies, even when it goes against the wishes of the people in round 6. The evening of day two was spent at the German night (Worlds next year will be held in Berlin, and it is tradition that the next host of Worlds will host one night in the preceding worlds to show off the culture of the next host country), which was a rather strange concept in the middle of Manila, and not quite what we expected, but was fun nonetheless!

Day three of Worlds is notorious. Not only do the last three rounds determine who will make the cut to the elite 32 team 'break', but none of the teams are told how they have done in each of the debates until after the break is announced, which can make the tension

unbearable. My teammate and I had to oppose the removal of all limits on labour movement, and propose exempting academic disputes from defamation law (a topic I particularly enjoyed debating) in rounds seven and eight. Then came the ninth, and final, preliminary round. Basic maths, and the fact that we had a particularly good judge judging our room, told us that we had to be in with a shot of making the top 32 teams. My teammate and I had to propose the banning of all private healthcare, and we gave strong economic and political arguments that we felt were crucial to our side, along with some interesting examples of how healthcare reforms occur, but it wasn't quite enough. When the break was announced, just after the New Year's celebrations, our names were not read out, and we were left as spectators for the final knockout rounds.

The knockout stages of the competition were dominated by English Universities until the Quarter-final results were announced, when all but 3 of the English teams bit the dust, many very controversially, including the Cambridge A team. By the time the final came around, there was one English team left (Oxford), along with 2 Australian teams (one from Monash University, and one from Sydney), and an American team (from Stanford). Debating the motion 'This House Supports Nationalism', the finalists treated us to the finest speeches I'd seen in the whole competition. While many in the audience predicted a victory to the team from Sydney, the judges disagreed, announcing that Monash University had unanimously been declared World Champions for the second year in a row. After the closing ceremony, and a fantastic Filipino banquet, I had another chance to explore Manila on my final day, and took up a local's recommendation of visiting the Mall of Asia, the pride of Manila, and the talk of all of our friendly taxi drivers! As I took the opportunity to buy some souvenirs of my time in the Philippines, I was also treated to more modern Filipino culture, which is satisfyingly resistant to Western influences, fast food and the omni-present Starbucks aside. As I flew back to the UK, I wondered what great achievements this crop of debating talent might accomplish over the coming decades. Countless politicians, lawyers, economists, academics and even comedians have first come to prominence at Worlds, and I hope that my experiences in Manila might help me advance my journey towards these goals.