

Olys on Stage

Welcome to the third edition of our revived London Olympians newsletter.

In our previous issue, we followed one member's personal transformation as he took the leap into his Ice Breaker speech — and discovered just how powerful that first step could be.

In this edition, we step further into the spotlight, exploring a defining part of Toastmasters life: the speech contest.

We bring you reflections from two dedicated members — one just finishing a term as Club President, the other a seasoned speaker who's spent years returning to the contest stage. Together, their insights show what it means to take on a challenge, face an audience, and grow through the process. Whether you've competed before or are simply curious what it's like, this issue is for you.

Thank you for reading — and thank you for being part of our ongoing story.

Written by Val Slavina and Mark Yansen

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— The London Olympians Committee



London
Olympians

The Contest, the Courage, and the Club: Reflections from Your Outgoing President

As I wrap up my term as Club President, I've been reflecting on all the moments that made this year unforgettable: the laughter, the lessons, the shared stories. But one experience stands out like a spotlight on a stage: the Toastmasters speech contest.

Now, I didn't enter the contest to win (though let's be honest, a little friendly competition never hurts!). I entered because I needed to remind myself of why I joined Toastmasters in the first place: to stretch, to speak, to grow.

Crafting that contest speech pushed me in ways I didn't expect. It asked me to be brave. To be honest. To show up as myself, even when my hands were shaking and my mind was second-guessing every word. It wasn't about chasing perfection. It was about standing tall in my imperfection... and trusting that my voice still mattered.

To my fellow members: the contest isn't just for the "natural speakers" or the "funny ones." It's for anyone who has something to say, and the courage to try. I saw seasoned members surprise themselves, and new members rise to the occasion with incredible heart. It reminded me that we're all on a journey here, and every step, every stumble, every standing ovation counts.

As I pass the baton to our next leadership team, my parting wisdom is this: say yes to the things that scare you a little. Say yes to contests, to speeches, to roles you think you're not ready for. Toastmasters is a place where we grow by doing, and we become who we're meant to be by daring to speak up.

The spotlight is waiting for you. Step into it.



Even during the pandemic, the contest spirit lived on – here is Val competing on Zoom during lockdown.

With pride and gratitude,
Val
Outgoing Club President

Why I Keep Coming Back to Toastmasters: Reflections on Speech Contests

By Mark

I've been a Toastmaster on and off since 2009. Over the years, I've left several times – busy life, new projects – but I always come back. Why? Because I miss the people, the fun, and the lessons. Every time I return, I remember how much I gain from being part of this community.

It's not just the brilliant speeches I've heard over the years – from "The Dangers of AI" to "Eurovision Deep Dives" and "Buying Art in China." These talks have entertained me, inspired me, and opened my mind. But another reason I keep returning is because I love a challenge. And nothing challenges me more than a speech contest.

Most of us can give a decent speech. But a contest speech? That's a whole different level. It demands more from you: more meaning, more clarity, more presence. And over the years, I've learned three key lessons from contesting that I want to share with you:

- **Create Something Truly Meaningful**

To move an audience in a contest, you need more than just a good story. You need something that sticks. Something they'll remember years later. That's the magic of a great contest speech – it can shape how people think, feel, and act. It's a chance to go from "good" to "unforgettable."

- **Refine Through Repetition**

Unlike a regular speech, a contest speech lives many lives. You deliver it at the club level, then polish it for area, then again for division. Each round sharpens your eye and ear. You cut, you tweak, you improve. You strive for something close to perfect – and even if you never quite get there, the pursuit makes you better.

- **Win or Lose, You Learn**

When I started, I was surrounded by great speakers who always won. I didn't. But I kept going. I learned. And eventually, I started winning too. The contest stage teaches you resilience, humility, and growth. And those lessons stay with you – not just in Toastmasters, but in life and work too.

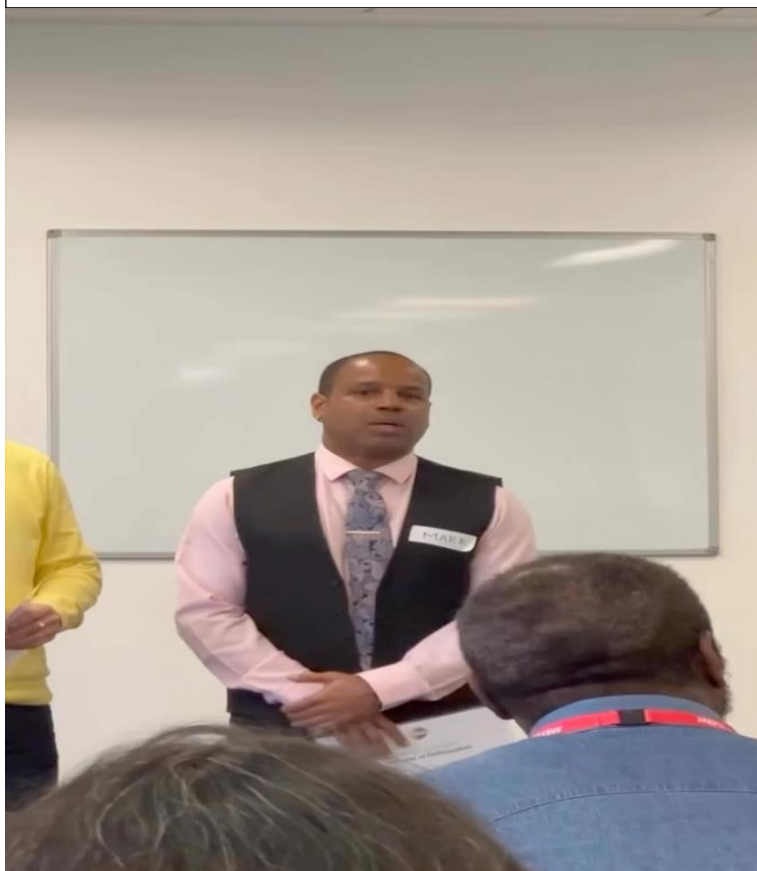
So whether you're a seasoned member or someone still working up the courage to give your first speech: consider entering a contest. Not for the trophy, but for the transformation.

Because in the end, it's not about winning. It's about who you become when you step up.

With love and peace,
Mark



Val and Mark, pictured here celebrating their contest achievements – different paths, same courage.



From the Heart: Mark at the Division Contest

When asked about his favourite quote, Mark turned to the words of Martin Luther King Jr.: ‘Anyone can be great, because anyone can serve.’ Inspired by that and by his hero Muhammad Ali, Mark said humbly: ‘I’m not so smart, but I can serve.’

Want to see Mark’s full message? Watch the video on our Instagram — [click here to view it.](#)

From the Ice Breaker to the contest stage, every challenge we take on at London Olympians shapes us into stronger speakers — and stronger people.



Club Contest Night – Every contestant brought courage and charisma to the stage. Here is to the power of participation and the spirit of Olympians!

We hope this edition has sparked your curiosity, courage, or even a desire to step into the contest arena yourself. Whether you're preparing your first speech or your next big moment, remember: growth comes from doing.

Thank you for being part of our community — and part of the journey.

We'll see you on stage — wherever your next challenge takes you.

— The London Olympians Committee