

Kluwer Arbitration Blog

The Vis Moot Is Much More Than Who Wins

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From left to right: Aaron King, James Plotkin, Natalie Kolos, Chloe Waind, Dora Konomi, Emily Bradley, Emily McMurtry, Prof. Anthony Daims, Eric Bergsten (moot founder), the final bench: Professor Yes'im M. Atamer (Turkey; Professor at Istanbul Bilgi University and also a member of the CISG Advisory Council), Carlos S Forbes, (Brazil; President of CAM-CCBC), and the Rt Hon. Lord Phillips of Worth Matravers (UK; former Senior Law Lord and former President of the UK Supreme Court).

It is hard to put into words the sheer magnitude of the Vis Moot, let alone how it feels to win such a prestigious and challenging competition. While we cannot begin to describe the emotions experienced during the six months leading up to the University of Ottawa's victory, nor the feelings we continue to experience since then, this post is our best attempt to explain the individual moments, both big and small, that made the Vis Moot one of the most memorable experiences of our lives.

While the competition itself began in the beautiful Vienna Opera House, where we were serenaded with the latest version of Harry Flechtner's CISG song, our preparation began long before then. The team spent many nights debating on the best arguments for the Claimant and the Respondent,

all while endeavouring to remember our high-school math when trying to figure out how many Equatorianian Denars there are in one US Dollar based on the variable exchange rate.

We had the pleasure of attending several pre-moots before travelling to Vienna, including the 4th Annual Penn State Law Pre-Moot, the 5th Annual NYU Practice Moot, and the 1st CAM-CCBC Hanseatic Pre-Moot. These pre-moots gave us the opportunity to test our arguments in front of expert arbitrators from around the world who challenged us and pushed our oral advocacy skills to the next level. Before the competition began, we also participated in a few informal practice rounds with the University of Freiburg, the University of Belgrade, and the University of Auckland. There we met students who were not only articulate and compelling speakers, but also kind and sincere individuals who truly embodied the Vis Moot's professional and inclusive character. They gave us yet another glimpse into the exceptional talent we would encounter over the next few days.

In the general rounds we faced opponents from the HBKU School of Law, Peking University, Catholic University of Andres Bello, and the University of Zenica. While we felt confident in our performance, we could not help but ruminate on the mistakes we made and the things we wished we had done differently. Given the scoring system's subjectivity and the strength of our competition, we were relieved to learn that our hard work got us into the playoffs.

We went up against some excellent teams during the playoffs. In the round of 32 we faced the University of Mainz in one of our closest matches. Both the team and their coach, Prof. Dr. Peter Huber, were humble and gracious when we were declared the winners of the round. Throughout the remainder of the competition, they would continue to support us and congratulate us on our success.

By the end of the first day of the playoffs, we were tired – we had argued four challenging rounds in one day, with some of us arguing every round. After a good night's sleep we were recharged and ready for the semi-finals. There, we faced the University of Montevideo, a consistently strong competitor. The University of Ottawa had faced Montevideo in the 2011 Vis Moot finals so we knew we had our work cut out for us. The team held each other and our breath as we awaited the results. At that moment we felt the weight of the blood, sweat, and tears we had poured into this moot for the last six months. When the arbitrators declared that the University of Ottawa would be advancing to the Grand Final, we cheered and cried.

Walking into the Reed Messe Vienna for the final round brought back the same feelings of awe we experienced during the opening ceremony. Sitting in an immense room filled with thousands of our peers and international commercial arbitration experts from around the world, we could truly feel the significance of the Vis Moot. Eric Bergsten, the father of the Vis Moot and the man who crafted the arbitration problem for the first 20 years of the moot's existence had succeeded in creating something truly special – a devilishly complex and challenging moot that would bring together over 340 schools from across 65 countries. Because of his vision and passion, we will forever be connected to many of the world's brightest arbitration minds and the 2,000 students who shared in this experience with us. And the Vis management, made up of Stefan Kröll, the new mad genius behind the problem, Christopher Kee and Patrizia Netal have found a way to capture the magic that our own Vis alumni refer to while recounting their experiences.

The final round against O.P. Jindal Global University flew by, and once again we were left unsure as to which team would prevail. While we nervously awaited the final results, we were overjoyed to learn our teammate Natalie Kolos was awarded the Martin Domke Award for top individual

oralist and Chloe Waindand and Emily Bradley received honourable mentions in the same category. It was not long before Mr. Carlos Forbes, the President of the CAM-CCBC and an arbitrator on the final tribunal, climbed the stage to announce the winners. His speech was short and sweet. With a huge smile, he announced the University of Ottawa had won. For the next several hours, students and coaches from around the world would congratulate us and shake our hands. The level of support and congeniality we experienced was exceptional.

Our victory represented a record breaking third win for the University of Ottawa – the most wins by any university in the Moot’s history. This level of success exemplifies how seriously the University of Ottawa and its faculty take mooting and oral advocacy in general. Our university consistently performs well in both domestic and international moots, thanks in part to its excellent coaches. Our coaches, Prof. Daimsis and James Plotkin, a member of the Vis 2015 winning team, pushed us harder than any of us had ever been pushed before. Prof. Daimsis also brought in a great number of guest arbitrators to ensure we considered the problem from every possible angle. Lord Hacking, a leading figure in arbitration for over 35 years, came all the way from London, England, to help in our training. Prof. Daimsis and Mr. Plotkin’s dedication to the Vis and our success inspired us and brought out the best in every team member.

Winning the Vis Moot was a rewarding end to the six months of hard work and dedication we have put into this arbitration problem. But what truly made us winners was not achieving our goal of winning the final, but what we became in getting there. The Vis Moot has had a profound impact on each and every one of us in different ways and has taken us all from ordinary law students to fierce advocates ready to embark on what will surely be exciting and successful careers in law.

Throughout the year, our coaches reminded us that the Vis is so much more than just a moot. Participating in the Vis, according to Prof. Daimsis, is a transnational accreditation. This explains how students from our faculty have ended up in the world’s leading law firms, specifically in their arbitration departments. And the common thread linking all our alumni is the Vis moot.

From all of us on the Ottawa team, thank you to everyone who helped make this dream possible and thank you to all those in the Vis community who contributed to this once in a lifetime experience.

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