

# The Real Impact of a Mock Trial



**By Lea Nepomuceno**  
*Staff Writer*

Twelve years ago, Kristin Rayder's eldest son, Troy, came home and asked her a question: "If I work in an open cubby and boot up my computer and enter my password and walk away, am I giving up my expectation of a right to privacy?" She then asked what class this was for and was in for a pleasant surprise. It was in fact not a class, but for an all too familiar program— High School Mock Trial.

Rayder recounts the experience; "I told him I competed in Law School Mock Trial for three years and we competed at the National level for two of those years, and that I was awarded The Barristers Award, for displaying excellence in trial advocacy," she says, "Troy then asked if I would come to coach the team with Chris Todd, the current coach. I was hooked." Rayder has been coaching Scripps Ranch High School's Mock Trial team ever since.

Unlike other coaches, Rayder's approach emphasizes student-led analytical skills. "I help the members understand the legal basics of each case," says Rayder. "It is important to teach them the basics, and let them create their own analysis of the case, sometimes gently guiding them in the right direction, but leaving the final discretion to them." Her unique approach has led Scripps Ranch High School to many victories. This year alone, Prosecution Attorney, Shivanshi Sharma, and Clerk, Priya Kamath were awarded for their performances.

Building public speaking and analytical skills is a leading appeal for joining this club. The Program is administered by the San Diego County High School Mock Trial Committee, which is chaired by representatives of the San Diego County Superior Court and the San Diego County Bar Association. "Representing local law agencies and organizations, and the state and federal courts, committee members devote hundreds of hours of volunteer time, as

well as resources and expertise, to organize and conduct the annual competition," reports the Committee. The program seeks to develop high school students into better citizens by familiarizing them with legal documents such as the Constitution and Bill of Rights through a mock trial competition aimed at enhancing students' ability to think critically, communicate effectively, and work as a team as well as with other members of society.

Priya Kamath is the co-president of this year's Mock Trial Team alongside Madhavi Akella. "Mock Trial has given a unique insight into the field of law that I never could have imagined - not many get the opportunity to enter regional courts and give arguments to federal judges," says Kamath. Being her fourth and final year of High School Mock Trial, Kamath reflects upon the impact of Mock Trial in her personal life. "I also have made lasting friendships over the last 4 years, and my friends are some of the main reasons I have stuck with mock trial for so long." Like Rayder, Kamath is hooked.

For Scripps Ranch High School, the San Diego County Mock Trial Competition is just a glimpse into months of rigorous preparation. This year, attorney coaches Kristin Rayder and Brianne Doyle guided students through an in-depth analysis of "People Vs. Cobey"— a murder trial surrounding the peculiar snake-induced death of landlord, Erik Smith. A selected cohort of eight attorneys and eight witnesses competed against 31 other schools and a record 600-plus students.

Although mock, the relationships formed and knowledge gained are evidently real. Rayder's coaching coupled with student dedication enables Scripps Ranch High School to partake in the annual competition.