

4-4-2019

# Law School News: National Admiralty Champs! April 4, 2019

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## Recommended Citation

Bowden, Michael M., "Law School News: National Admiralty Champs! April 4, 2019" (2019). *Life of the Law School (1993- )*. 673.  
[https://docs.rwu.edu/law\\_archives\\_life/673](https://docs.rwu.edu/law_archives_life/673)

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April 4, 2019

# ***Law School News***

## **National Admiralty Champs!**

A team of third-year law students from RWU Law sweeps the premier admiralty law tournament in the United States



RWU Law's winning 3L team displays the competition hardware.

April 4, 2019  
Michael M. Bowden

A team of third-year law students from Roger Williams University School of Law has swept the premier admiralty law tournament in the United States, winning the overall championship as well as awards for best brief and best oral advocate.

The team – consisting of 3Ls Brody Karn, Steve Lapatin and Joe Staph – traveled to Charleston, S.C., last weekend to participate in the 26th Annual Judge John R. Brown Admiralty Moot Court Competition, where they squared off against 24 teams from 18 law schools, including admiralty law powerhouses such as Tulane (defeated by RWU in the quarter finals), and returning champs Louisiana State (with two teams, defeated by RWU in the semi-final and championship rounds respectively).

“This is the second time in a decade that a team from RWU Law has won the title,” noted Dean Michael J. Yelnosky. “There is a case on the second floor full of hardware won in other years when RWU Law teams went deep into the tournament. We have a little dynasty brewing down here in the East Bay.”

This year's 3L team also won the award for Best Brief, and Karn was singled out as Best Oral Advocate in the competition.

Preparations for the competition began several months ago as the teams researched and drafted complex 60- to 70-page briefs, which were then graded by top admiralty lawyers across the country, accounting for 40 percent of each team's final score. The other 60 percent of the score is based on oral arguments.

“It's a very involved process,” said Robert Falvey '98, who coached the team along with Professor Jonathan Gutoff. “To say these students worked extremely hard would be a huge understatement.”

The Brown competition carries an enormous amount of prestige in admiralty law circles.

“This is one of the most important events, not just for students interested in maritime law, but for the maritime bar and bench as well,” said Professor Jonathan Gutoff. “The semi-final panels were made up of past and present officers of the Maritime Law Association, and the finals panel had six sitting judges – two from the U.S. Courts of Appeals, two federal district court judges, and two state court judges.”

Yelnosky noted that the coaches' contribution to the win could not be underestimated.

“Jonathan has been the one constant through the years, and he has helped give our students these meaningful experiences that also raise the profile of RWU Law,” Yelnosky said. “He is joined by many others in mooted the teams; it's a great cast of characters that includes other faculty, staff, and alumni. Congratulations and thanks to all of them.”

Falvey, a marine insurance legal specialist with Falvey Insurance Group, has coached the team for more than a decade, as well as hiring RWU Law students as externs with his firm – including Karn last semester and Staph this semester.

RWU Law's 2L team – consisting of Genevieve Fidler and Elizabeth Hyland – also participated in the competition and contributed significantly in preparing the 3L team. “Next year is their time to shine,” Yelnosky promised.

In 2009, another group of RWU Law 3Ls – Brian Eisenhower '09, Amanda Argentieri '09 and Manford Susman '09 – also topped the Brown competition, again coached by Gutoff and Falvey. In the years since then, RWU Law teams have reached the championship round twice, placing second by very close margins.

The Honorable John R. Brown served on the United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit as one of the nation's most prominent admiralty judges from 1955 until his death in 1993. Shortly after his death and in his honor, The University of Texas School of Law established the "Judge John R. Brown Admiralty Moot Court Competition," an interscholastic appellate advocacy competition. Each year, the Competition is held under the joint sponsorship of The University of Texas School of Law and a local host school. (Professor Teitz was Judge Brown's law clerk after she graduated from law school).

Major funding each year is provided by the Houston law firm of Royston, Rayzor, Vickery & Williams L.L.P. (where Judge Brown practiced from 1932 to 1955) and the Maritime Law Association of the United States.