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# THE DEBATER

Acacia Asbell

AS CAPTAIN OF the Frederick Douglass High School Debate Team, Acacia Asbell has been known to artfully argue with a teacher or two. Last spring, when only four students showed up for an Algebra II test, Asbell suggested the teacher postpone the exam. "I was trying to convince the teacher to have the test the next day rather than give everyone a makeup test," reasons Asbell. "He tried to argue, but we ended up having the test the next day—so I guess I won."

Winning debates—and almost everything else she pursues—is nothing new for the 17-year-old senior. Asbell was selected out of 500 students citywide to attend a gathering in London to debate the merits of segregated vs. integrated schools with a group of girls from a Muslim high school.

This past summer, she was handpicked out of 5,000 young adults to intern with Bank of America in conjunction with Chesapeake's Habitat for Humanity, during which she rebuilt houses in her own Pen Lucy neighborhood and elsewhere. She holds membership in several nonprofit organizations including Y.O.U.R.S. (Youth Organizing Urban Revitalization Systems) and S.T.A.N.D. (Students Taking Actions in New Directions).

Not surprisingly, the straight-A student, who hopes to pursue a career in law, is also president of the Douglass student government. In her official role as president, she has been active in leading strikes against Baltimore City Board of Education. "All of Baltimore City has

been cut back in teachers," says Asbell, "and they seem to think that since Douglass is not one of the top schools in the city, we don't need to have as many teachers. But they ignore the fact that there are some students, like myself, who are trying to get a proper education."

Though life hasn't always been easy for her, Asbell has learned from adversity. "A lot of drug addiction and alcoholism runs in my family," she says. "My brother is currently in jail, so seeing all this stuff in

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my family has encouraged me to overcome this and be the first one to graduate from college. My philosophy is to be better than everyone around me and to be better than those from whom I've learned. Everything that has happened in my family has given me the inspiration to do what I do." ■