How we did it: A Guide to how Baylor Law Conducted Top Gun XI Online

By: Robert Little, Stephen Rispoli, Kathy Serr, Ricky Sowell, Ricky Lovecky, and Nathaniel Jones

From May 27, 2020 through May 31, 2020, Baylor Law held the annual Top Gun competition. But this year was different. This year, Top Gun XI became the first ever mock trial competition to be held completely live and online. While preparing for and running this year’s iteration of Top Gun as a live online tournament, the team at Baylor learned a lot about what works in hosting an online competition and what doesn’t. So, we wanted to share what we did with the rest of the advocacy community in the hopes that it will help others that are putting on competitions in the fall of 2020 and potentially in the spring of next year.

One key to understanding how we set up Top Gun XI to run in an online environment was that we planned to maximize the quality of the experience for all participants while limiting the potential points of failure as much as possible using the resources at our disposal. This meant keeping it simple – simplifying the technology, using “old school” methods of communication (like a telephone) whenever we could, and it meant never trying to get too fancy with how we utilized Zoom. If there is one overriding principle I would say we embraced it was to keep it as simple as we possibly could so that we could make it about the advocacy and not about the technology.

One more note before we begin, many of the videos that are referenced within this article can be found on the Top Gun XI YouTube page, which also contains videos of every single round of the tournament itself. Here is the link to that page: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCuIAtG0WdAHYkxYkGDB2VHw.

Room Setup

One Zoom limitation we found early-on was that with our campus-wide Zoom implementation/license an individual could not host more than one meeting at a time. Without the time to procure generic licenses, our solution was to ask four (4) faculty members to create and host the trials with their login information, and to make the Baylor Law IT team co-hosts in each of those meetings. By doing so, our IT team was able to jump into any meeting at any time in the event of an issue arising.

For Friday and Saturday – the days on which the preliminary rounds were taking place – we set up four (4) different Zoom meetings, each with their own link and own password. We named the meetings after courtrooms: Courtroom 1, Courtroom 2, Courtroom 3, and Courtroom 4. Each meeting was set up by a different member of the faculty using their Baylor Zoom account, and was set up to open at 7:30 a.m. (an hour-and-a-half before the start of the first round that day) and to run for twenty-four (24) hours. That way, we could come in and open the courtrooms – or start the Zoom meetings – way before the first trial would begin and leave them running throughout the day.

Five (5) to ten (10) minutes before each round, the participants would enter the courtrooms using the Zoom links and passwords provided to them and would be admitted from the waiting room by the presiding judge. To make it as easy as possible for our scoring judges, we sent calendar invites to them that contained the information that they would need to join the Zoom meeting. All they had to do was open their calendar, find the event and click on the link. Once the round was completed and all of the
ballots had been returned, the presiding judge would release everyone from the trial, the participants would leave the room, and the presiding judge could start admitting the participants for the next trial.

This setup – having only four (4) Zoom rooms open throughout the day – meant we never had more than four (4) Zoom meetings going at any one time, which was consistent with our philosophy of having as few moving parts as possible.

For Sunday – the day on which the semifinals and finals took place – we set up two (2) Zoom meetings, each with their own link and password: Courtroom 1 and Courtroom 2. Once the semifinal rounds were completed, we closed down Courtroom 2 and held the final round in Courtroom 1 as well. Again, this meant that on Sunday we only needed two (2) Zoom meetings going at any one time.

There are other ways to handle this. For example, you could set up only one Zoom meeting and have everyone log in to that Zoom meeting and then create breakout rooms for each trial, moving the participants to those breakout rooms as needed. We just thought our method was simpler.

One important note, if you’re going to set your competition up this way then you need to make sure to remind your presiding judges NOT to log out of the meeting when the trial concludes. Make sure that you take control of logging into and out of the meeting for the presiding judge, and they should never hit that red button at the bottom of the screen to leave the meeting. It needs to stay up and open all day long.

Pairings

Top Gun includes sixteen (16) competitors from law schools around the country. There are four (4) preliminary rounds, and then four (4) teams advance to semifinals, and the winners of those semifinal rounds advance to a final round. The preliminary rounds take place during the day on Friday and Saturday, and the semifinal and final rounds take place on Sunday.

The pairings for the Friday rounds were released on Thursday morning. The pairings looked like this:

### Round 1 – Flight A

May 29th, 9:00 a.m. CST
(Woodshedding Begins at 8:30 a.m. CST)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Courtroom</th>
<th>Plaintiff</th>
<th>v.</th>
<th>Defendant</th>
<th>Presiding Judge</th>
<th>Witnesses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Austin Wallick (213)XXX-XXX</td>
<td></td>
<td>Olivia Dworkin (248) XXX-XXX</td>
<td>Kyle Gardner (210) XXX-XXX</td>
<td>Aubrey Saracen – Keira Hornyak (571) XXX-XXX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Kevin Littlejohn (336) XXX-XXX</td>
<td></td>
<td>Carson Sadro (254) XXX-XXX</td>
<td>Bailey Strohmeyer (254) XXX-XXX</td>
<td>Aubrey Saracen – Jessie Cox</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Competitor 1</td>
<td>Competitor 2</td>
<td>Competitor 3</td>
<td>Phone Numbers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Aishling Fitzpatrick (347) XXX-XXX</td>
<td>Sara Papantonio (850) XXX-XXX</td>
<td>Mark Altman (214) XXX-XXX</td>
<td>Aubrey Saracen - Zach Fiene (949) XXX-XXX</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Reese Taylor - Salvador Robles (214) XXX-XXX</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Rebecca Garcia (831) XXX-XXX</td>
<td>Imokhai Okolo (330) XXX-XXX</td>
<td>Lee Ann James (254) XXX-XXX</td>
<td>Aubrey Saracen - Adriana Adams (254) XXX-XXX</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Reese Taylor - Oliva Stedman (505) XXX-XXX</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As you can see, the pairings include Courtroom numbers for each round, the names of the competitors competing in that round, the sides those competitors will be representing, the name of the presiding judge for that round, and the name of the people playing the witnesses for that round and the role they will be playing for that round. Witnesses at Top Gun are Baylor Law students, so the competitors do not bring their own witnesses, which is why they are listed here on the pairings.

You’ll also notice that phone numbers are provided for everyone involved in the round. While Zoom is a very stable and reliable platform, and a necessary one for competitions like this, we wanted to rely as much as possible on traditional means of communication in order to reduce the risk of glitches or technology issues, and to reduce the number of moving parts. In order to accomplish this, we provided everyone with all the phone numbers they would need to communicate with their opposing counsel and their witnesses so that pre-trial conferences with opposing counsel and woodshedding could happen over the phone. We gave them twenty (20) minutes for woodshedding, which began thirty (30) minutes before the round. We allowed competitors to communicate with their witnesses prior to woodshedding, but only to discuss how the woodshed would take place (i.e. over the phone, via Facetime, or via another Zoom meeting the competitor would set up themselves).

We also provided the competitors with the presiding judge’s phone number so that, in the event of any technological glitch in the trial (like a competitor losing an internet connection), they could call the presiding judge in order to inform them of that issue so that the trial could be paused.
The pairings also included a chart that looked like this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Courtroom</th>
<th>Zoom Link</th>
<th>Password</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Courtroom 1</td>
<td><a href="https://baylor.zoom.us/j/99737011040">https://baylor.zoom.us/j/99737011040</a></td>
<td>TOPGUN2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courtroom 2</td>
<td><a href="https://baylor.zoom.us/j/99737011040">https://baylor.zoom.us/j/99737011040</a></td>
<td>TOPGUN2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courtroom 3</td>
<td><a href="https://baylor.zoom.us/j/99737011040">https://baylor.zoom.us/j/99737011040</a></td>
<td>TOPGUN2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courtroom 4</td>
<td><a href="https://baylor.zoom.us/j/99737011040">https://baylor.zoom.us/j/99737011040</a></td>
<td>TOPGUN2020</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

So, each of the competitors has been assigned to a Courtroom, and now the competitors have been provided with Zoom links for each of those courtrooms. So, all the competitors had to do during the competition was click on the Zoom link for the courtroom they were assigned to at any time, enter the password when prompted, and they would be in the right meeting.

Pairings for Saturday were released on Friday night once all of Thursday’s rounds were completed, and pairings for semifinals were released on Saturday night once the advancing teams had been announced.

An example of a full set of pairings and the e-mail that went out to competitors will accompany this document for reference.

**Flights**

We decided to have two flights for every round, an “A” and a “B” flight, which meant that eight (8) competitors would compete in the Flight A and eight (8) competitors would compete in Flight B, and there would be a total of four (4) rounds happening in each flight at any given time. Flight A would begin two-and-a-half hours before Flight B. So, for example, Round 1 looked like this:

**Flight A – 9:00 a.m. CST**
- A v. B
- C v. D
- E v. F
- G v. H

**Flight B – 11:30 a.m. CST**
- I v. J
- K v. L
- M v. N
- O v. P

We used flights for two main reasons. First, it cut down on the number of rounds happening at any given time, which meant that we needed fewer Zoom meetings running, fewer presiding judges, and fewer witnesses. Given the nature of online advocacy and the technology risks involved, we thought fewer rounds would give us more control and decrease the chances of something going wrong.
Second, we wanted to try to level the playing field for west coast schools as much as we could. If everyone started competing at 9:00 a.m. CST, then the west coast schools would have to start at 7:00 a.m. PST, while the east coast schools would be starting at 10:00 a.m. EST. This just seems like a built-in disadvantage for the west coast schools that must get up earlier, may get less sleep as a result, which may impact their performance. We fixed this problem by placing all the schools that are in the Mountain or Pacific time zones into Flight B by drawing their letters first out of a pot that included only the Flight B letters. Once that was done, the remaining schools were assigned letters by random draw involving all remaining available letters.

The key with flights is making sure that you space out the flights and the rounds correctly. In Top Gun, each competitor had five (5) minutes to make pretrial arguments and fifty-five (55) minutes to present their entire case (excluding objections), which meant that both competitors had a total of sixty (60) minutes. We instructed the presiding judges to keep time, strictly enforce time limits, and limit the number of breaks during the round. Additionally, we instructed scoring judges not to give comments to the competitors after the round. All of this allowed us to complete the rounds in under two-and-a-half hours. However, any future tournament that wants to use flights would have to consider these facts in order to determine how much time to give between each flight and how much time to give in between each round.

Pre-Matching Versus Power Matching

For Top Gun XI, we decided to pre-match all four (4) preliminary rounds. So, before the tournament even began, we already knew who would be playing who in each round, and we knew what side they would be on in those rounds. This was important for a bunch of reasons.

First, this was the first live online tournament. Going into this, we didn’t know how or if it would work. Therefore, we felt like pre-matching all the rounds and eliminating the need to power match rounds three (3) and four (4) would limit the risks associated with running a tournament like this and give us more time to focus on making it the best experience possible.

Second, pre-matching all the rounds meant that we could also pre-match our presiding judges, scoring judges, and witnesses for each round to ensure that no advocate saw the same presiding judge, scoring judge, or witness throughout the entire tournament. If a tournament wants to power match rounds three (3) and four (4) and wants to ensure that no advocate will have the same presiding or scoring judge in their room twice, then you cannot pre-match the scoring judges or presiding judges before the tournament, with one caveat that will be discussed below. This is a big problem because it means that you can’t send out calendar invites to those presiding judges and scoring judges in advance of the tournament because you don’t know what Zoom courtroom they will be in for those power matched rounds, which increases the risk of having issues getting your judges where they need to be when the trial start.

There are a few ways to solve this problem. One would be to have completely clean panels of judges for your power matched rounds. If your judges for three (3) did not judge in rounds one (1) or two (2) then you can go ahead and pre-match them to Zoom courtrooms for round three (3) because you know they won’t have any conflicts. Similarly, if your judges for round four (4) did not judge rounds one (1), two (2), or three (3), then you can go ahead an pre-match them to Zoom courtrooms for round four (4) because you know they won’t have any conflicts. So, if you get completely clean panels for round three (3) and four (4) then it should make power matching much easier in an online format.
Additionally, another way to incorporate power matching would be to abandon the traditional three-day format for tournaments. Traditionally, tournaments are held on weekends, Friday through Sunday, in the hopes that students will not have to miss too much class and presumably because of increased availability of space in courthouses. However, with online tournaments, there is no travel time, there is no need for courthouses, and there is no need for a student to miss classes to compete. Why can’t a tournament be held over the course of an entire week with rounds starting in the evening? Why couldn’t a tournament hold rounds one (1) and two (2) – the pre-matched rounds – on one day, but then hold rounds three (3) and four (4) – the power matched rounds – over the following two days, which would give you more time to pair those rounds, pair the judges to those rounds while avoiding conflicts, and send out invites to your judges giving them sufficient notice of when and where they’ll be judging.

We absolutely believe that power matching is the best practice and can be utilized in the online tournament format. However, there are some problems presented with power matching in the online environment that need creative solutions in order to work, and the ideas outlined above are just the starting point on that issue.

**Ballots**

Beginning on Thursday afternoon, every judge received an e-mail containing their ballots for the following day of the tournament. The ballots for Saturday rounds went out to judges on Friday afternoon, and the ballots for the semifinals went out on Saturday night once the competitors were identified after the preliminary rounds. And the ballots for the final round went out as soon as the semifinal rounds had been completed. To avoid the issues noted above with power-matching, we brought in new scoring and presiding judges for the semi-final and final rounds. Each judge received one e-mail containing one ballot for each round they were judging. The ballots looked like this:
As you can see, all of the information about the round and the competitors was filled out when the ballots were sent out to judges. Judges were given instructions regarding how to fill out the ballot and send it back in. The ballots were sent from Robert Little's e-mail account so that when the judge hit reply and sent the ballot back in it went directly to Robert Little, who was running the tab room for the tournament.

When the ballots came back they looked like this:
Round: 4 – B  
Room: CR3  
Name of Judge: H. Oliver

Simone Leighty  
Plaintiff's Lawyer  

Eric Love  
Defense Lawyer

Check (√) the column for Plaintiff or the column for Defendant

Who Did the Better Job With Regard To:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Plaintiff</th>
<th>Defendant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opening Statement</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct Examination</td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cross Examination</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closing Argument</td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence, Objections, Responses</td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2  
TOTAL (0-5) 3

**NAME OF WINNING LAWYER (Majority of Checks): Eric Love (Defense)**

Obviously, the Top Gun ballot is unique in its simplicity, and instructions and ballots may need to be different for those tournaments that are using a points system, which is most tournaments.

We did consider using an online format like Google Forms to have judges send in their ballots and automatically tabulate rounds. However, sticking with our theme of relying on technology and platforms that people are familiar with, we decided that using e-mail – a technology that every lawyer is familiar with – was the best way to go. And it went off without a hitch. Everyone knew how to hit “reply,” fill out the ballot, and send it in.

An example of the e-mails we sent out to judges with their ballots and what they looked like when they were returned to us will accompany this article.

**Judge’s Calendar Invites**

Lawyers are familiar with getting calendar invites via Outlook e-mails that, when accepted, automatically go on their calendar. So, prior to the tournament, we sent out Outlook calendar invites to each and every judge that was judging in the preliminary rounds. These Outlook invites contained the link to the Zoom room for their trial and the password for that room. So, it would look something like this:

[https://baylor.zoom.us/j/99737011040](https://baylor.zoom.us/j/99737011040)
Once the judge accepted this invitation, it would automatically show up on their calendar, and all they had to do when it was time for that trial was click on the meeting link and enter the password when prompted, then they were in the meeting and ready to judge.

An example of what these calendar invites to scoring judges looked like with accompany this article.

**How We Wanted the Trials to Look**

We spent a lot of time thinking about we wanted the actual Zoom trial to look for the competitors and the scoring judges. We ultimately determined that we wanted to make sure that there were as few people on camera as possible at any given time so that the boxes where the competitors, presiding judge, and witnesses were located would be as big as possible in gallery view, which would make it easier for the scoring judges to evaluate the competitors. To that end, we gave the following instructions:

- We had the presiding judge leave their camera on throughout the trial, but we told the presiding judge to mute their microphone until and unless they needed to speak to the competitors or to make a ruling. We also instructed presiding judges to hide all non-video participants. This was critical. In addition to give scoring judges a better view, since we were streaming each round we didn’t want to clutter the screen with people who would not have a speaking role during the trial.

- We had the competitors leave their cameras on throughout the trial, but we told the competitors to mute their microphone until it was their time to speak or if they needed to make an objection. We also instructed competitors to hide all non-video participants.

- Once they were checked-in, all witnesses were instructed to turn off their cameras and mute their microphones. They were then instructed to turn back on their cameras and unmute their microphones when they were called to testify. Then they were instructed to turn back off their cameras and re-mute their microphones once they were done testifying. This meant that the witness would only show up on the screen when they were actually testifying.

- Once they were checked-in, all scoring judges were instructed to turn off their cameras and mute their microphones. Additionally, they were told to hide all non-video participants so that the only people that would appear on their screen would be those people that had their cameras on during the trial. That way, the only people that would appear on the screen during witness examinations would be the presiding judge, the competitors, and the witness that was testifying, which meant that the screen was not as cluttered with boxes.

- Once they were checked-in, all second chairs were instructed to turn off their cameras and mute their microphones. They were told that they should only turn on their cameras and unmute their microphones if necessary to do something like read in deposition testimony in question and answer format.

You can see examples of how this setup looked by looking at the rounds on the Top Gun YouTube channel. You can also see all the instruction videos that were sent to attorneys, second chairs, presiding judges, and scoring judges that gave instructions on how to make all this happen.
One issue we faced was what to do since the scoring judges would not be on camera, meaning that the competitors would not be able to gauge their reaction during the trial. Because of this, we instructed the competitors to treat this as a bench trial, tried just to the presiding judge on camera. We instructed the scoring judges on this as well, and told them not to evaluate the competitors for how they handled a bench trial versus a jury trial. We instructed them that the only reason we did this was to improve the view on Zoom, and it wasn’t an advocacy point. This may be something the other tournaments want to handle differently, but we do think it is important to think about how the competitors will appear on the screen to scoring judges and ways to avoid a cluttered Zoom screen with everyone in small boxes.

In that same vein, Top Gun only includes one lawyer per side. Most tournaments have two lawyers per side. So, we will have to decide whether to have both lawyers on screen at all times, or whether to have them turn off their cameras when they are not speaking or examining a witness so that we can keep clutter off the screen.

Finally, one instruction we did not give but we think would be helpful would be instructing scoring judges to set up their Zoom to side-by-side view when a document is being shared by a competitor. The advocate from UCLA gave this instruction at the beginning of each of her rounds, and it really is helpful. So, we would suggest giving that instruction to scoring judges as well.

Judges’ Instructions

We held a judges’ meeting over Zoom on the Thursday before the tournament began. Most of this meeting looked like and covered the same topics as the standard judges meeting that happens at any tournament – don’t judge on the merits, time limits, etc. However, we also touched briefly on technology issues with the judges, including how any interruptions in the tournament would be handled. Specifically, we instructed the presiding judges to make sure the scoring judges had their telephone numbers at the beginning of every round, and we instructed the scoring judges that if they got kicked out of the meeting for any reason they should call the presiding judge and they should contact Robert Little or someone else at Baylor so that the round could be paused until they could get back in. There were a couple of times that judges were kicked out of the meetings for connectivity issues, but universally these were quickly resolved without the need for lengthy interruptions.

One other instruction we gave the judges was to always remember that their phone could be a backup if the internet in their location failed. The phone can be used to login to a Zoom meeting, and, as a last resort, the judge could just call into the meeting if they needed to. But giving the judges backup plans in case of interruptions was helpful.

One other instruction we gave to the judges was to try to arrive in the room 5-10 minutes before the trial began. This was intended to give them plenty of time to get admitted to the trial from the waiting room and to make sure that there was time to conduct check-in prior to the start of the trial.

Finally, one comment we are consistently getting from judges is how easily it is to get distracted during these online trials. They are sitting in front of their computers, they have their e-mail open, they have easy access to the internet, so it is completely understandable that they might not be able to focus. We gave them instructions about making sure they didn’t open their e-mail or the internet during trial, but this may need to be stressed in future competitions.
How Presiding Judges & Witnesses Tech Was Setup

It was decided early-on that the presiding judges and witnesses would all be on campus at Baylor Law while the competition was ongoing. This was done so that we would have more control over our presiding judges and witnesses, and because it would ensure that they would be hooked up to the Baylor Law network and using Baylor Law computers, which we thought would lower the risk of connectivity issues.

Regarding how we set up the computers for our presiding judges and witnesses, our initial plan was to use various laptops connected to Jabra 510 speaker/mics and Logitech 920C cameras. However, in the weeks leading up to the tournament, we decided to use iMacs from our computer labs which were not being used because there are no students on campus. This simplified the physical courtroom and witness room setup as all we needed was the iMac, which already had very good mic/speaker/cameras built-in along with a large beautiful screen.

We decided early-on to not rely on Wi-Fi for these machines as wired ethernet is marginally more reliable than wireless in the building and would remove a point of possible failure. We used software applications named Insomniate and Caffeine on Windows and MacOS machines respectively to prevent them from going to sleep and we disabled the screensavers. We used a local service that is a restricted account to log onto the machine as a user. This provided extra layer of security since the iMacs were logged in and running throughout most of the day.

The placement of the iMacs was important for the look of the competition. For the presiding judges, placing the iMacs on the judge’s bench allowed them to feel a little more like they were in a real trial. To make it look a bit more realistic, we moved the US and Texas flags close behind the judges so that they would show on camera. Lighting for the judges was overall good.

The witness iMacs were placed in individual classrooms. This was mainly and matter of convenience. It allowed the other witnesses to be in the room when called but remain socially distant since the rooms are quite large. Adjusting the curtains in the room to assist the camera to make the best picture helped as well.

Each morning, approximately forty-five (45) minutes to an hour before the start of the first round that day, the person that was hosting the meeting in each courtroom would go in and log on to Zoom and open that courtroom for the day. Then we would go in to each witness room and log in those computers to the Zoom meeting via the same link that was provided to competitors and scoring judges.

Streaming

Zoom is able to live stream on-the-fly to a YouTube or Facebook account. It can also do custom streaming to other services. We chose to use YouTube for ease and simplicity. In order to pre-schedule the live streams so that they would have a predetermined thumbnail on YouTube we used the custom streaming feature in Zoom. We decided for simplicity to only do one livestream per courtroom per day, all day long. This allowed us to share only one link for each room per day. The courtroom schedule was posted on the Top Gun XI website for spectators.

The live stream setup process involves setting it up in both YouTube and in Zoom. Each host’s Zoom account had to have livestreaming enabled in their Zoom settings. Then the owner of our YouTube channel logged into YouTube and scheduled a live stream for each day and room. We also add custom designed thumbnails to each pre-scheduled stream, so it was easy to see which day and courtroom was which. After
the livestreams were pre-scheduled, the Streaming Key, Streaming Server URL and Live Stream URL for each day and room were copied and compiled in a single document to simplify starting the livestreams when it was time. We also set the YouTube pre-scheduled livestreams to “Go-Live” as soon they began receiving video from Zoom. Finally, the livestreams were placed in a single YouTube playlist in our YouTube channel, and the channel was configured to show up first on the Top Gun YouTube Channel.

We have created a separate document that walks through the steps to accomplish what is described above, and that document will accompany this article.

**Rules Related to Technology**

We did not have a significant number of rules related to technology. Here is a rundown of the rules that we changed or added to this year’s competition because of the online format:

- No advocate may be in the same physical room as their student assistant/second chair or their coach during any trial. No student assistant/second chair may be in the same physical room as any coach during any trial.

- All communications during the round between the advocate and their student assistant/second chair must be conducted via the internet or over the phone.

- **Pre-Tournament Technology Check**

  Each advocate and student assistant/second chair will be required to login to a Zoom meeting prior to the start of the competition in order to test out their camera and microphone prior to the beginning of the competition. We will provide times when our staff will be available for these technology checks and teams can sign up for those available times.

- Each advocate will have twenty minutes per witness to prepare (“woodshed”). The additional time is to account for any technology issues his/her witness(es) prior to the start of the trial. Each competitor’s student assistant/second chair may assist in woodshedding. Approximately 45 minutes prior to each round each advocate will receive the name, telephone number, and e-mail address for their witness for that round. Woodshedding may then take place by the usual means of telecommunications, including but not limited to: a phone call, Facetime, Skype, Microsoft Teams, text message, etc. This is for the advocate and the witness to work out. However, once the woodshedding actually begins you will only have 20 minutes to complete the woodshedding of that witness.

- An advocate may prepare written materials to give to a witness during the preparation period. Such materials may be e-mailed to the witness or shared over the internet by whatever means you choose and that the witness is able to receive. Any such materials may not be sent to the witness until the woodshedding period begins. All preparation materials must be collected from the witness at the end of the witness preparation period. The advocate and the designated student assistant may not confer with the witness at any other time for the purposes of preparing testimony.
• Each advocate, student assistant/second chair, presiding judge, and witness will be provided with a virtual exhibit notebook containing every exhibit in the case numbered in the same manner they were in the packet. This will allow you to authenticate exhibits without having to share them over Zoom or through chat and will allow the presiding judge to see the exhibit during any evidence argument or objection to that exhibit before it is published to the jury. Once an exhibit is admitted it is up to each advocate to determine the best way to publish that exhibit to the jury.

• We forbid the use of virtual backgrounds.

We believe that other tech issues – like where to setup the camera or whether to use an external microphone – are advocacy issues and should be left up to each team. So, there wasn’t really a need for a lot of rules regarding technology. However, future competitions may consider some limitations on technology in order to ensure a level playing field.

Waiting Room

Each Zoom room was setup with a waiting room. This meant that when judges, competitors, witnesses, and second chairs entered the meeting they had to wait in the waiting room to be admitted by the presiding judge. This prevented people from entering a trial that was already in progress and gave the presiding judge control over who was in the meeting.

Check-In & Participant Rosters

Each presiding judge was given a “participants roster” for each trial they were presiding over. This allowed the presiding judge to know who should be in the room so they could admit the correct people into the room. Once everyone was in the room the presiding judge would conduct check-in to make sure that all the necessary participants were in the room and ready to proceed with the trial. This involved having each participant turn on their camera and microphone so that the presiding judge could see them and hear them and know that they were where they were supposed to be. Once that was done, the presiding judge would instruct everyone except the two attorneys to turn off their cameras and mute their microphones so that the trial could begin.

Exhibit Notebooks

Each competitor was provided with PDFs of each exhibit and each deposition separate and apart from the complete packet of materials they also received. So, they had a PDF file for Exhibit 1, a separate PDF file for Exhibit 2, and so on and so forth for each exhibit in the file. We then downloaded a file to each of the presiding judges’ computers and each of the witnesses’ computers that contained the exact same PDFs that were provided to the competitors.

This created a sort of “virtual exhibit notebook,” which could be used throughout trial to refer to exhibits, authenticate exhibits, and impeach witnesses. So, using these “virtual exhibit notebooks,” an attorney could authenticate a document like this:

Attorney: “Mr. Street, please open your exhibit notebook on your computer and open Exhibit 1. Let me know once you have Exhibit 1 open on your computer and you’re looking at it.”
Witness: “Alright, I see it.”

Attorney: “Do you recognize this document?”

Witness: “Yes.”

Attorney: “And what is Exhibit 1?”

Witness: “It is a handwritten note that my son wrote.”

Attorney: “And is Exhibit 1 a true and correct copy of that handwritten note?”

Witness: “Yes.”

Attorney: “Your honor, at this time we offer Exhibit 1 into evidence.”

At that point, opposing counsel could make objections, the objections could be argued, and the judge could make a ruling, and all of the parties would have the same exhibit in front of them without having to let the jury see it.

Then, assuming the exhibit is admitted, the attorney could share it via screen share on Zoom, which can be done like this:

Attorney: “Your honor, permission to share my screen so that the jury can see Exhibit 1.”

Judge: “Permission granted.”

There are other ways to accomplish this – such as using the file sharing option that exists within Zoom chat – but we thought this was the simplest solution, and it worked very well during the tournament.

Tech Checks

The week before the tournament, each competitor and second chair were given an opportunity to log into a Zoom meeting with the IT team from Baylor Law to check out their video and audio. During the check, we made sure that they were able to connect and had a working camera and microphone. They were also permitted to ask basic technology questions. The vast majority of these went perfectly and a couple of them identified microphone issues. This allowed those with difficulties to rectify them before the competition. This time also allowed us to remind competitors to plug directly into their cable modem if possible and have a backup network connection available such as a phone for a hotspot. This was not a complicated process, but we think it was an important one to give competitors a chance to try out anything they wanted with an outside IT team.
**Tech Tips**

Prior to the tournament, all competitors and second chairs were provided with a “tips” document that provided various tips about the best practices for an online tournament. That document is attached to this document for reference.

We believe that the recommendations to “hard-wire” in to the internet as opposed to using Wi-Fi, making sure to limit the devices that are using your internet while the tournament is going on, using an external microphone, and using an external webcam or camera were all particularly important to the quality of the tournament rounds, and we recommend those as best practices going forward.

**Separation of Competitors, Second Chairs, and Coaches**

Almost every team that competed in Top Gun had their competitor, second chair, and coach in the same physical building. However, that wasn’t true for every team, and we did not want those teams to have an advantage by being able to be in the same room during trial and communicate face-to-face with one another while other teams had to communicate via chat or phone. So, we put in the rules that, during the trial, the attorney, second chair, and coach all had to stay in separate rooms, and communicate via text or online. We think this is an important consideration for fairness in these online tournaments, and separating everyone puts everyone on a level playing field.

**Conclusion**

We hope that this article has provided you with some insight on how we conducted Top Gun XI as a live online tournament via Zoom. We are excited to compete this fall in an online world and we can’t wait to see how those tournaments improve upon what we did at Top Gun and continue innovating.

If you have any further questions please contact Baylor Law’s Director of Advocacy Programs, Robert Little, at Robert_R_Little@baylor.edu and he will be happy to answer them.