THE QUEST FOR QUIZZING QUALITY
SLOW-MOVING PROGRESS IN A WORLD OF HIGH-SPEED THINKING

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List of Topics

- Stages of trivia development
  - How am I doing? What went wrong?
  - How to improve?
  - Get to work!
- Final thoughts
- Photo montage
- ~~Answer-and-question~~
  Question-and-answer session

In the Beginning (Day 0 - High School Tryout)

- Good memory from the start
- Computer games, board games
- Academic Bowl
  - Varying degrees of failure
- Mathcounts – Phoenix winner!
- Early days of Jeopardy! (reboot)

Senior Year of HS

- Jeopardy! Tryout!!
  - Lucky postcard got picked
  - Fly to California
  - Sit in audience of actual set
  - Take test via video of 50 questions
  - Bomb

Current Evaluation

Knowledge: 2.5/10   Speed: 5/10   Nerves: 1/10
Strategy: N/A   Wagering: N/A   Timing: N/A

What needs work?

- What doesn't?
- Knowledge, knowledge, knowledge

Fun (?) fact: Academic Decathlon vis-à-vis AP English

Failing the Test (College - 2003)

- Tryout failure Part II
- Daily newspaper dorm delivery
- Online chess – 0 1 or 1 0 games
- Quizbowl – 1997-present
  - Last place at College Bowl Nationals 1998
  - 5th place in 1999
  - Part of very good "trash" trivia team
- Tryout failure Part III
- Quizbowl group at SNL ('02-'09)
- NTN Trivia (frequent national champs!)

Current Evaluation

Knowledge: 4/10   Speed: 6/10   Nerves: 1/10

Strategy: N/A   Wagering: N/A   Timing: N/A

What needs work?

- Could still/always use more knowledge
  - Missing entire categories (fine arts, geography, etc.)

Fun (?) fact: Writing questions vs. reading/playing on them

Failing the Interview (2004 - 2017)

- Diversified knowledge/speed opportunities
  - Competitive sudoku/puzzle player
  - NY Times crossword via ABQ Journal
  - Sporcle online quizzes
  - Pub quizzing galore
    - Geek Bowl winners – 2009, 2013
  - Hosting quiz activities
    - Albuquerque Academy coach: 2014 - present
    - Annual music quiz
  - Learned League player – 2011 - present
  - Tryout failures Parts IV-VIII

Current Evaluation

Knowledge: 5.5/10   Speed: 8.5/10   Nerves: 3/10
Strategy: N/A   Wagering: N/A   Timing: N/A

What needs work?

- Focus more on esoterica
- Better stories / goals / personality (?) / look (?)

Fun (?) fact: Mock game vs. teammate/groomsman

What changed?

- Las Vegas vs. Los Angeles, but actually…
- Phoenix tryout, January of 2017
  - Another teammate of mine had his tryout on the same day, made the show in summer 2017
- Planning on taking online test, late March 2019
- Until…

🔊

- This was Wednesday, March 13th, 2019
- I was to fly to LA on 3/29 for a game on 3/30
  - Unusual that this was a Saturday
  - Accelerated taping schedule to accommodate medical treatment
- Time for me to binge-watch shows on DVR and study the Jeopardy! Archive

History of Jeopardy! Television Program

- Created by Merv Griffin
  - Originally on air from 1964-1975
  - Did you know: When Jeopardy! was canceled, Wheel of Fortune replaced it the following week!
- Rebooted in 1984 with legendary host Alex Trebek and announcer Johnny Gilbert
- Over 8000 episodes, tons of awards, etc.

Rules of Jeopardy! gameplay

- Three contestants choose from six categories of five questions
  - First round: $200-$1000
  - Second round: $400-$2000
- If contestant selects a Daily Double (placed randomly on board) they can make a wager of their choosing
  - 1 DD in first round, 2 DD's in second
- Final Jeopardy! is one clue from announced category and players can secretly wager any amount from their total. The winner has most money after FJ. In case of a tie, a single (?) tiebreaker clue is presented.
- Famously, players must phrase their responses in the form of a question.

Behind the Scenes Stuff (2019 version)

- Five shows are usually taped each day, with the survivor of the final show brought back for the next taping day.
- Contestants are expected to bring four or more different outfits in case they win.
- Challengers for each match are only announced minutes before show begins taping.
- Friends are in audience and cannot interact with any contestant until they lose.
- Interview topics are submitted by players and chosen for each day after consultation with production staff.
- Shows are taped up to 4 months ahead of airdate.
- Buzzers are a lot more complicated than you might think!

It's Showtime!

- Returning champion was Sam Kavanaugh
  - Went on to win $156K over five games
  - Quite intimidating
  - Fellow teacher
- 3rd show of day – Sam lost handily to Roey
- 4th show of day – Roey lost an **incredible** match to Nathan, another teacher
  - Miracle scores after final question of regulation
  - TWO tiebreakers needed to settle match
- By not being called for 4th show, I could relax for 30min before my game.

Show #1 - Pregame Evaluation

Knowledge: 6.5/10   Speed: 9/10   Nerves: 6/10
Strategy: 3/10   Wagering: 7/10   Timing: 5/10

- First time meeting Mr. Trebek
- First correct answer: "What is quarantine?"
- Correctly got Saturn V missile right
- Told story about winning by striking out
- 2/2 on DD's on Cryptocurrency and The Mikado
- FJ: "It's the only state to have had 4 female governors, 3 of whom served consecutively between 1997 & 2015"
- Winnings: $26,600
- Return to ABQ and prepare for a different (??) game show

Shows #2-6 - Pregame Evaluation

Knowledge: 7/10   Speed: 8.5-9/10   Nerves: 7/10

Strategy: 5/10   Wagering: 7/10   Timing: 6/10

- Survived precarious situations in **FOUR** consecutive games
  - Very fortunate how the final clue went in game 2
  - Different wager on DD changes outcome in game 3
  - Needed to get FJ right to secure victory in games 3&4
  - Precise scores before FJ in game 5 lead to WILD finish
    - 1970 Album Reviews: "Rolling Stone said this 1976 album had "the best & worst tendencies of L.A.-situated rock" & was an "unflattering portrait of the milieu""
  - Winning the last game of the day meant I would lead off the next season as champion

Plus/Delta from games 1-6

- (+) Able to luck into Maurice Sendak from "1964" and "'Picasso of children's books'".
- (+) Able to sniff out Scrabble from game originally called "Lexico".
- (+) Able to rally from throwing away all my money on a DD in the category "Seas".
- (△) Missing that DD in the first place
- (△) Not seeking out DD's well enough
- (△) Misreading FJ that could have ended everything
- (△) 3/6 on FJ is quite pedestrian
- (△) Missing $1000 clue on "Quail", huh.

Time to get VERY serious

- 3.5-month break between April 6 and July 22 taping dates
- Worked with old friend and record holder Roger Craig
  - Question database, strategy help, good vibes
- Several hours a day devoted to studying
  - Lots and lots of Sporcle quizzes on weak topics
  - Mix in sudoku, crosswords, Anki, working out to keep sharp
- Run through backlog of new episodes on DVR
  - Take what I can from James Holzhauer's phenomenal run
- Buzzer App practice
- Try my very best to keep a secret

Shows #7-11 - Pregame Evaluation

Knowledge: 8.5/10   Speed: 9.5/10   Nerves: 9/10

Strategy: 9/10   Wagering: 8.5/10   Timing: 8/10

- Funny moment in hotel lobby on way to taping
- Wore tie from high school and told story about my father
- Plenty of +, very little △
  - 4/5 on FJ – only one I missed was ludicrous
  - After settling in, all games were decided before FJ
  - Best show ($58400) could maybe have been even better?
  - Performed tribute to my mother via one FJ result
  - Got a rise out of Mr. Trebek on "minuet" DD
  - In retrospect, celebrated a little too hard that night…

Shows #12-16 - Pregame Evaluation

Knowledge: 8.5/10   Speed: 8.5/10   Nerves: 10/10

Strategy: 9/10   Wagering: 8.5/10   Timing: 6/10

- Problematic warnings from the very first game
  - $20K swing on very gettable FJ on European Authors
  - Calamitous 2nd game – anyone can win!
  - In the negative for awhile on 3rd game
    - Thank goodness for Twisted Sister
  - Outbuzzed consistently on 4th game, no DD's
  - Had lock in 5th game by slimmest of margins
    - Made it rain $5 bill(s)
  - 5 more wins, at about half the yield of previous week
  - Running out of energy – and stories

Shows #17-20 - Pregame Evaluation

Knowledge: 8.5/10   Speed: 9.5/10   Nerves: 10/10

Strategy: 9/10   Wagering: 8.5/10   Timing: 6/10

- Back fresh after a two week break
- Strong start, three good wins – very competitive 3rd game
- Game #20 – luck finally evened out
  - Knew all three DD's, didn't get any
  - Flip any single question to me for probable lock
  - Whiffed on very gettable FJ, lost to good player
    - "'The Eighth Wonder', by composer Alan John & librettist Dennis Watkins, is about this building that opened in 1973"
  - Haven't missed a question about this one since!!!

Plus/Delta from games 7-20

- (+) Lots of quickness, ability to compete on most clues
- (+) Significant increase – $22.9K to $30.4K per game
- (+) Very rarely felt pressure
- (△) Buzzer timing degraded across the games
- (△) Missed some key clues on key questions
  - Anthem "(w)ith lyrics by Sir Adolphe-Basile Routhier…"
- (△) 11/20 on FJ – stark difference from rest of performance
  - (!) Need to reorganize solving/calculating process

Time to get **VERY VERY** serious

- Tournament of Champions awaits…someday
  - Ended up a full 20 months after previous trip to Culver City
  - Date was moved several times for sad reasons
- Relied upon same resources as before (Roger, J-Archive, Sporcle)
- Prioritized knowledge based on expected likelihood of appearance
  - Exposure and vague familiarity with nearly everything
  - Lots of views/angles of common topics
    - States, Countries, Authors, Geographical Features, Chemical Elements, Composers, Artists, Top Films/Plays/Musicals, Wars, Monarchs, Capitals, Currencies, Flags, Acronyms, State Quarters, National Parks, Olympics, Empires, Animals, Operas, Paintings, Stock Symbols, Election Losers, Vice Presidents, Amendments, Foreign Words and Phrases, and **many** more

Time to get VERY VERY serious (cont.)

- New sources of information
  - Quiz Nations international online team game; BP Trivia
  - Mental Floss quiz book; Ladies' Room Reader Quiz Book
  - Brainiac and Maphead, both by Ken Jennings
  - Every clue from last 15 TOC's
    - Researched/summarized unfamiliar answers
  - 73 pages of "Pavlov Revisited" from online Jeopardy! group
  - Recent Oscars, very recent books, cultural topics
  - 2020 Zoom Jeopardy! TOC Champion!
- How to attack wordplay categories?
  - Studied Greek/Latin roots (relentlessly)
  - Quizzed on loanwords from foreign languages
  - Crosswords/Cryptics, Words With Friends, Lightning Round

Behind the Scenes Stuff (2021 version)

- COVID compliance is paramount!
  - PCR test, N95 masks provided
- No audience
- To keep distance, we were in WOF studio
- TOC host was possibly a secret, but once word got out we were asked to publicize it ourselves
  - Buzzy Cohen – superchamp, 2017 TOC champ
- Buzzer practice minimal
- Show put us up in otherwise closed hotel
- 15 contestants – 2 tourney champs, 13 3+ game winners
  - 2 alternates in case of COVID positive case

TOC (April 2021) - Pregame Evaluation

Knowledge: 9/10   Speed: 8.5/10   Nerves: ?/10

Strategy: 10/10   Wagering: ?/10   Timing: ?/10

Plus/Delta from TOC

- (+) Got every FJ I attempted (and most I didn't)
- (+) Direct help on certain answers from studying
  - "Love, Valour, ????", "Stock symbol X"
- (+) Still solid at pop culture categories – movies, sports
- (△) Timing was erratic, preparation was limited
  - Felt like a rookie at times
- (△) Nerves kicked in as answers didn't
- (△) Flattened in 1st game
- (△) Massive blunder in 2nd game

Final Thoughts

- Slim margins → large variance
- Reliving summer of 2019 in spring of 2021 was unlikely
  - Same hotel, different everything else
  - At a very different place in life
- No shame in how TOC turned out
  - Jennifer, Sam both all-timers
  - Anybody there could've won
  - Greatest story (n)ever told
- Not likely to forgive myself for wager
  - That's life
- Random playlist said it best

Thank you for listening!
Any questions?