



‘Jeopardy!’ champion Holzhauer fulfilling a life-long promise

- By Emma Lombardozzi | Staff writer

A promise to his grandmother is what motivated James Holzhauer to become a ‘Jeopardy!’ champion. After twenty consecutive wins, Holzhauer is on his way to becoming a household name.

“I had wanted to be on the show since childhood, when I watched with my beloved Granny,” he said. “I promised her I would be on the show one day, so I always felt I owed it to her.”

The 34-year old professional sports gambler from Illinois has recently turned down many professional publications, but he agreed to answer questions through email for a SAMS Salmon exclusive.

“I support student journalism,” he wrote, an evening before viewers watched him stretch his show winnings to more than \$1.5 million.

Even though he made the promise as a child, it took years for Holzhauer’s vow to become a reality. He took the online ‘Jeopardy!’ test every year since 2006, when it was first offered. “I started seriously trying to get on the show in 2012,” he wrote.

Holzhauer’s streak has been bad news for the other ‘Jeopardy!’ contestants. In fact, most of the games he has won haven’t even been close. On April 17, Holzhauer answered every question he buzzed in for correctly, 41 in total.

So how does he know so much information about so many categories? He reads children’s books. “I dedicated myself to learning at least the basics of every subject I could imagine popping up on the show,” he wrote. “For me, that meant reading a lot of children’s books, since they are specifically designed to get the reader interested in a new subject.”

Holzhauer’s strategy to the game has been to open big leads by answering the more expensive questions first. He jumps around the board and bets a lot when he finds the “Daily Double.” But not every ‘Jeopardy!’ category has been easy for him.

“There was a Monty Python Phrases category one day that was almost completely foreign to me,” he wrote.

‘Jeopardy!’ games are taped in advance, so viewers have no way of knowing how many games Holzhauer won or if he is still playing. If he were to make his own clues one day, he said they would be challenging and stay true to the show’s quizzical wording.

“There’s a fine art to writing Jeopardy clues; most include some clever wordplay that hints at the right response,” Holzhauer wrote. “I’m not sure I would be good at that. But I’d probably write about some topic that doesn’t pop up on Jeopardy much, like pro wrestling.”

Holzhauer, who lives in Las Vegas with his daughter and wife Melissa, had some advice for young people.

“I was an undisciplined student, but I set a goal for Jeopardy and really focused on achieving it. No one has ever played Jeopardy like I do, but I didn't let that stop me from approaching the game the way I thought I should.”

As for what surprised him about his experience on ‘Jeopardy!’, Holzhauer revealed something about the show’s long-time host, Alex Trebek. “I learned that Alex Trebek has a potty mouth once the cameras aren't recording,” he wrote.