



This Is Jeopardy! The Story of America's Favorite Quiz Show

Episode Three: A Day In the Life of a Jeopardy! Contestant

A Production of Sony Music Entertainment and Sony Pictures TV

MUSIC: Whimsical spacey music begins

Laura Caton: My name is Laura Caton. And I am a non-profit arts administrator.

Cameron Creel: Cameron Creel, uh, I'm a software engineer.

Amanda Bain Wysocki: Amanda Bain Wysocki, and I'm a social worker.

Buzzy Cohen: It's a cold January morning in Culver City, Los Angeles. A group of about twelve people are gathering in a hotel lobby. It's early...around seven in the morning. But these people look pretty perky...

At first glance, it's hard to tell why they know each other — or even if they know each other.

Gregory Czaja: Gregory Czaja. I am a cardiologist.

Liz Jensen: Liz Jensen, and I'm a stay-at-home mom.

Buzzy Cohen: One thing they all share? You might have an inkling.

Laura Caton: I moved around a lot as a kid because my dad was in the Air Force. So, you know, watching it in all kinds of different states and it's on at different times, but it's still always *Jeopardy!*.

Peter Early: I've been watching it, um, for my whole life. Um, but now my wife and I have watched it at dinner since we started dating. Um, now we watch it every night with our two kids.

Liz Jensen: I'd watch it every day with my dad and, uh, I even had a little song that I would sing for Daily Doubles.

[Sings.] Daily Double. Daily Double. Daily Double.

Buzzy Cohen: For some, it's been a long process to finally get there...

Kari Elsila: I actually tried out for the show as a teenager for the Teen Tournament.

Amanda Bain Wysocki: I first auditioned for the Teen Tournament in high school.

Kat Jepson: I actually tried out for *Kids Jeopardy!*, like, 20 years ago.

Buzzy Cohen: And sometimes, life got in the way...

Eliza Haasmarr: I did get a text asking if I wanted to be on the show, um, last April, which was exactly the day that I was due to give birth to my first child.

Buzzy Cohen: But now...

They are all there.

THEME MUSIC

Buzzy Cohen: They are finally contestants on *Jeopardy!*

This is a tape day, when *Jeopardy!* films five games in a single day.

The contestants are about to board a shuttle to take them to the *Jeopardy!* set, where a million things are happening.

Up in the production booth, technicians are color-correcting video clues. On the stage, the crew is prepping for contestants to show up. And in the library, the host, producers, and writers are finalizing the day's game material.

But today, we won't be thinking about all that. Today, we're going to follow the contestants...we're gonna walk in their shoes.

I'm your host, Buzzy Cohen. And from Sony Music Entertainment and Sony Pictures TV, This Is *Jeopardy!*: The Story of America's Favorite Quiz Show.

This week...it's contestants on set!

THEME MUSIC

<AD BREAK>

ACT I

MUSIC: Slow building beat with strings

Buzzy Cohen: When *Jeopardy!* hopefuls first get the call, they might be doing any number of things: washing their dishes or picking up their kids from school or just getting out of a work meeting.

[Telephone ringing.]

Contestant: Hello?

Corina Nusu: Hi, I'm Corina with *Jeopardy!*. I'm a contestant producer on the show. I just wanna go over your application. Make sure everything we have on here is up to date.

BEAT

Corina Nusu: Lately, I've gotten a couple of people that are like, *Is this really Jeopardy!?* Like, even after I go through the whole thing. I'll go through every bit of information, they're like, *Whew, if this is a scam, we're good.* [Laughs.]

Um, but, my newest thing I'll say is like, *Well, go check when we won the Emmy this last year. I'm the woman in the blue dress who almost did cartwheels on stage.*

Buzzy Cohen: That's one of the contestant producers, Corina Nusu. It's *really* her. I promise.

Corina's been working on the show for 17 years.

Corina and the other contestant producers are the faces and voices that contestants see and hear the most on their big day.

The contestant producers ensure that no one gets hangry or parched. They shuttle the group from place to place and act as therapists when nerves run high. They coach on game play, run through interview answers, and help wrangle that dang buzzer.

But back to that chilly January morning...the contestant producers are there, welcoming the group that just jumped off the bus.

Laura Guili, Contestant Producer: Hey, Brian, we're just gonna have you do a once over. Renee's gonna do a once over on your hair down here. Okay?

Brian Henegar: Okay, cool.

Laura Guili: Just make certain no flyaways are sticking up.

Buzzy Cohen: The lucky twelve are in a huge cavernous space, which is actually the empty Wheel of Fortune set...and they're getting their hair and makeup done.

They sit in a row of chairs, facing mirrors. And the Wheel — yes, *that* Wheel — is behind their backs on stage, covered with a big sheet. The vibe is kind of like being in a museum at night.

It's pretty quiet in there, but do not mistake that for boredom. There's a flurry of activity all around.

Sandy Goodman: This is just a no color, high definition powder. And then I'm gonna go back in. I'm gonna kind of contour you up a little bit.

Crystal Zhao: Oh, love that. I have like...like a giant moon face, so I'm always trying to draw shapes in it. Like angles...

Sandy Goodman: Not on...not on my watch.

Crystal Zhao: [Laughs.]

Buzzy Cohen: That is the one and only Sandy Goodman. She's been applying foundation and rouging cheeks for two decades. She has seen it all. She even made me look pretty good on TV.

Sandy Goodman: No moon shapes allowed though. [Laughs.] They'd have to come take my union card away...and close one second.

Buzzy Cohen: There is a lot of nervous energy on the Wheel of Fortune set...you can feel it in the shifting around in chairs, the throat-clearing, the eyes darting around from place to place.

Makeup Technician: I'm gonna just, um, make sure you're not shiny. Okay?

Contestant: Okay. Yes. That's usually the struggle I face.

Buzzy Cohen: The hair and makeup team is all gentle instruction...every stroke of a brush a reminder that everything's going to be okay.

Brian Henegar: And like I told the, uh, hairdresser, making me look good is extremely difficult. So you'll be, you guys, you're earning your paycheck today.

Sandy Goodman: What are you talking about? You got such a cute little face.

Brian Henegar: Thank you for saying that to me. It means a lot.

Sandy Goodman: Come on. We got you, you're gonna look so handsome on camera. Are you kidding me?

Buzzy Cohen: While the contestants are getting dolled up, Corina grabs a microphone, stands up high, and from a perch in the audience, addresses the group.

Corina Nusu: Um, hi everybody and welcome. My name is Corina. I'm one of the contestant producers on the show. How's everybody doing today? Woohoo. Yeah, we're excited. [Cheering and clapping.]

I'm gonna be giving you a whole lot of information about how to play the game. Before I begin, I want you to all turn off your cell phones. I think that was already told to you. And it's off-off. Not pretend off. We don't wanna look up at any point and see you texting away. Um, and that's just to make sure you're not writing the writers. I know you're not doing that, but you know, we have to look no impropriety. You're not writing, *Hey, what's the next board?* Uh, we know you wouldn't do that, but we have to just make sure that you aren't doing that.

Buzzy Cohen: This is the famous “contestant spiel” that Corina knows as well as her own name.

Corina Nusu: **My husband knows exactly what the spiel is ‘cause he's heard it in my sleep.**

Buzzy Cohen: It's something she's said probably a billion times, but it's new information for these contestants.

Corina Nusu: **We are under security the entire day. Not only physical security, you met some of our security guards, but also security in the sense of how the game is played.**

Buzzy Cohen: Yes, *Jeopardy!* takes security very seriously. No, it's not metal detectors and bomb sniffing dogs. It's more like...nobody has forgotten those painful lessons from the quiz show scandals of the fifties.

ARCHIVAL: (News announcer): In the Senate hearing room, the dramatic climax of the probe of fixed and rig quiz shows.

ARCHIVAL: (Excerpt from the movie “Quiz Show”): I lied to the American people. I lied about what I knew and then I lied about what I did not know.

Buzzy Cohen: That's why an outside party from Standards and Practices is there, too, to remind everyone what's at stake.

Matthew Godfrey: **I'm obliged to inform you, uh, that it is a felony to rig or cheat or take part in the rigging or collude to affect the outcome of game, which you all claim to the best of your brilliant abilities, which I'm sure you do want to be as well.**

Buzzy Cohen: That's Matthew Godfrey from Sullivan Compliance Company.

Matthew Godfrey: **We are brought in on every single game show to ensure that the game is played in accordance with the rules and in a way and fashion that the show is depicted to the audience.**

Buzzy Cohen: Right now, Matthew is going through the *Jeopardy!* code of conduct...which is pretty much what you'd expect: don't cheat, don't mess up the production, and...

Matthew Godfrey: **You don't want to tell the world what's gonna happen in April when you play.**

Buzzy Cohen: Reminder: It's January. He's talking about April because *Jeopardy!* tapes a few weeks or months ahead of time...this game won't be broadcast until april.

Matthew Godfrey: So please keep it to yourself.

Buzzy Cohen: Come on...do not be the person that spoils it all.

Matthew Godfrey: You are on *Jeopardy!* and your waiting room is the set of Wheel of Fortune. It doesn't get much cooler than that. Have a great day.

Corina Nusu: All right, thanks Matthew. [Applause.] All righty...

Buzzy Cohen: The contestants line up to make their way to the *Jeopardy!* set.

MUSIC: Whimsical spacey music begins

Buzzy Cohen: I remember when I first saw the *Jeopardy!* set...the lecterns, the board, the clues...it was like when your dreams come true. You can feel it, you can see it, and you can actually step into it. It's amazing.

When the contestants set foot on set, it's 9:30 am — just two hours have passed since they left the hotel lobby. Take it from me...a tape day calls for a lot of stamina.

It's time now for buzzer practice!

But first...

Ken Jennings: Um, I just wanted to welcome you and congratulate you. I hope you're able to celebrate this moment, like after whatever your journey is, you made it on *Jeopardy!*

Buzzy Cohen: It's the man himself...Ken Jennings.

Ken Jennings: Well done. A hundred thousand people tried out this year, and you guys are the cream of the crop. So I hope in some sense, this is the culmination of your *Jeopardy!* dream, and you can enjoy your time here. Um, in fact, that's really the main tip I have is that the more you can just kind of try to relax and enjoy the strangeness and the beauty of this moment, um, instead of just getting so hung up on the outcome. I think you'll relax and I think you'll play better.

It's just a one of a kind experience and it's, I know firsthand it's gonna go by so fast. It's gonna seem like you're just up here for minutes and suddenly you'll be like, *Wait, what just happened? The game's over?* Um, it's just, it's a pleasure for me to hang out with, uh, Jeopardy contestants. You folks are the engine that runs the show, so thank you for being here. And, uh, I just want you to know, hopefully I'm a friendly presence up there. I want you to feel like you're welcome. Like I'm rooting all of you on. Um, I'm gonna do everything I can so that you don't feel like it's a weird, intense, intimidating experience. You know, I want you to feel like you're on your own home court, uh, the whole time. 'Cause I just wanna see you do well. Thank you for being with us today. And, um, they don't let me do the show in a Uniqlo hoodie, so I'm gonna go change and, uh, I'll come back out. [Applause.]

Buzzy Cohen: Ken leaves to get his hair and makeup done.

Laura Guili: **Either side of the aisle. This side of the studio, okay? Sit on either side of the aisles, space yourselves out, this side of the studio.**

Buzzy Cohen: The twelve are directed to sit at the right side of the audience. And the rehearsal is about to begin.

Just like the real game has its own host, so does the rehearsal.

Jimmy McGuire: **Good morning everybody, and uh, welcome to *Jeopardy!*. [Applause.]**

A round of applause. Uh, on behalf of our entire production crew, my name is Jimmy. I am your stage manager today, and I'm going to help you get through this rehearsal.

Buzzy Cohen: That's Jimmy McGuire. He's the stage manager. We'll get to that part of things too, but right now, he's playing the role of rehearsal host. Jimmy is standing in as host for three contestants at a time.

They'll each get their chance to stand up on stage, behind a lectern, and buzz in on clues.

Plus, everyone will get two practice rounds each.

Michael Harris: **For many of them, that's gonna be the first time they've ever touched the actual buzzer on stage, um, their signaling device.**

Buzzy Cohen: That's the enabler...Michael Harris. You might remember him. He sits off-stage and enables the three signaling devices...also known as buzzers...allowing contestants to ring in.

Okay, it's time for the first three to step up on stage and give it a go.

Corina and other contestant producers: Amanda and Brandie and Dan. Just rehearsal, just rehearsal in that order, everybody. Just watch your step. Okay. We'll have you go this way.

Producer: Headsets, please for rehearsal. Thank you.

Contestant producer: And then that order, it was Brandie first. Yep.

Contestant producer: So Brandie, watch your step coming up.

Amanda Bain Wysocki: Oh, Amanda.

Contestant producer: Amanda, I'm sorry.

Buzzy Cohen: Once the three are behind their lecterns, crew members make small adjustments here and there.

Like — you ever notice how *Jeopardy!* contestants are the same height?

That's because crew members raise shorter contestants up on a little lift — so they all appear level with one another. It makes for a much better camera shot.

Corina: Amanda, we're gonna rise you up a little bit. It's gonna be the slowest amusement park ride ever. Rise up. Here it comes. Just stand like you normally would. We'll get... 'cause Danny's a tall. Tallie on the end.

Dan Bayer: You don't need to push me up.

Corina Nusu: We'll dip you down a little bit. [Laughs.]

Buzzy Cohen: It only gets a little difficult when someone like Kareem Abdul Jabaar plays...because you know, you can only raise the other contestants up so much — you're never gonna reach that guy.

MUSIC: Fast drum beat begins

Buzzy Cohen: The lights are bright and hot and the three are starting to sweat a little. A makeup tech jumps onto the stage with some anti-shine powder, and pat, pat pat...

The real *Jeopardy!* board's lit up and ready to go. But, instead of real clues, a set of mock clues are illuminated — just for practice.

Jimmy tells the three on stage to focus on the lights on either side of the game board.

Jimmy McGuire: Those are your indicator lights. When you see those lights illuminate, that means it's time to ring in.

Buzzy Cohen: Much like the contestant producers, Jimmy's doing some extra work to calm nerves.

Jimmy McGuire: We'll give you each a test drive, and then once we get into the round, you'll get a feel for it. But don't get frustrated. This is why we rehearse.

Buzzy Cohen: After the break, they'll play a round of *Jeopardy!* that'll never air on TV. No cash winnings, no champions.

Stay with us.

ACT II

MUSIC: Whimsical spacey music begins

Buzzy Cohen: It's practice round number one!

Sarah Whitcomb Foss: This is *Jeopardy!*. The rehearsal BTR 117 2023!

Johnny Gilbert's recorded voice: From the Alex Trebek Stage at Sony Pictures Studio, this is *Jeopardy!* [Clapping.]

[*Jeopardy!* music begins.]

Buzzy Cohen: By the way, you're hearing Johnny Gilbert's voice but that's re-recorded after the fact....he's in his nineties and he works from home these days. So producer Sarah Whitcomb Foss fills in for the legendary announcer on the actual tape days.

Sarah Whitcomb Foss: Here are today's contestants. A local history librarian from Springfield, Missouri, Brandon Broughton. A social worker from Kansas City, Missouri, Amanda Bain Wysocki. And our returning champion, a personal assistant

from Panama City, Florida, Brandie Ashe, whose one-day cash winnings total \$15,000...[Clapping and cheering.]

Jimmy McGuire: Thank you, Johnny Gilbert and thank you ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to another week here at *Jeopardy!*. It's our rehearsal game. A chance for our players to get a feel where it's going to be like when Ken comes out in a few moments. I do want to welcome back Brandie. What a great day yesterday, extremely impressive. Will you do it again? We should find out and see. Amanda and Dan, welcome. Pick up those signaling devices. Let's get started.

Buzzy Cohen: At first, holding the signaling device feels a little alien, but they start to get the hang of it pretty quickly.

Jimmy McGuire: Uh, let's have you make a selection, Dan. Dan.

Dan Bayer: Uh, not a verb for 200.

Jimmy McGuire: Keep you on your toes, here, Danny.

Buzzy Cohen: It might be a little hard to make out, but that's the sound of Jimmy McGuire helping the contestants keep laser focus on what's happening right in front of them.

Jimmy McGuire: Capable, thrive, accomplish. Dan.

Dan Bayer: What is capable?

Jimmy McGuire: Yeah, that's not the verb. Select.

Buzzy Cohen: The clues you'll hear in the rehearsal — well, they're not *exactly* like the clues you'll hear in the real game. They're actually recycled from old games of the past.

Remember, this is all just for practice. The twelve are getting used to the physicality of the game.

Overall, the rehearsal isn't a perfect simulation. Until you're playing for real, you don't really know *exactly* how it feels. The stakes just aren't the same. It's a practice.

And it's also a chance for contestants to suss each other out ahead of time...

Michael Harris: I have seen some very crafty contestants who purposefully perform poorly in rehearsal so that they do not telegraph to their potential opponents that they are actually a little bit more competent on ringing in.

That's Michael Harris again — the Enabler. He's seen a lot of rehearsals.

Those crafty contestants he's talking about are actually the outliers...but they do crop up every now and then. And Michael remembers when they do.

Like this one time...when a contestant was faking it.

Michael Harris: I was like, *Wow, I really feel badly for this person. I hope they, you know, can really find a rhythm when the show starts.*

But then when they actually started their show, they not only won that game, they, like, won another game because their ringing in ability suddenly was really good.

Buzzy Cohen: It's a bit of a dance...contestants are getting a sense of what's to come...and sizing up the competition.

And as you can imagine, there is a huge range of emotions on display during these rehearsal games.

Corina Nusu: I've seen awe, I've seen pure joy. Um, that's always the fun ones, the ones that come on and you just see the sparkle in their eye and they are just living their best life at that moment. That is so exciting and infectious.

You get ones that are quaking in their boots, like, literally shaking. You could see them from off stage. You have people who shut down, um, that you have to kind of coax them out. You have people who get so serious and they don't even know they're serious.

Buzzy Cohen: After everyone's gotten a turn on the buzzer, it's time to record a quick promotional video to be aired on the contestants' hometown tv stations. These are actually called hometown howdies.

Each contestant takes a turn to face the camera with a big smile.

And Jimmy McGuire shows them where to look and how to pose.

Jimmy McGuire: Ready, Brandie? Big smile for me. Ready when you are, Russ. Hang with me, Brandie. Three, two...

Brandie Ashe: Brandie Ashe, Panama City.

Jimmy McGuire: Wait for the cue, though, okay?

Brandie Ashe: Okay.

Jimmy McGuire: Wait till I give you that.

Brandie Ashe: Oh, sorry.

Jimmy McGuire: It's okay.

Corina Nusu: Brandie, Brandie. Take a deep breath. All good?

Brandie Ashe: Yep.

Buzzy Cohen: Then it's time for a second rehearsal round where they do it all over again. Corina Nusu is still in very high spirits.

Corina Nusu: One more time through, yeah. And, uh, at different podium positions against different people. So they'll go up again a second time. And, uh, and then we, uh, get ready for the next, for the first show. Yay. Yes. That will be awesome.

Buzzy Cohen: When taping begins, Jimmy McGuire takes off his host hat and goes back to his regular role — stage manager.

Jimmy McGuire: Once the show starts, I'm located behind the scenes. I have a headset on, and I'm in communication with our director, our producers' table, as well as our contestant coordinators, and then most importantly, Mayim and Ken.

Buzzy Cohen: Jimmy is like air traffic control — he wears a headset that connects him to the production booth up above, the producers sitting offstage, and the hosts. He's always listening to about 10 people at once.

Jimmy McGuire: It's a special skill set. I'm able to sort of listen in one ear to what, uh, is going on behind the scenes, but yet have an open ear to what's happening in front of me.

Buzzy Cohen: It's shortly before 11 am...and the studio audience is filing in. It's time for Jimmy McGuire to pivot once again — and warm 'em up.

Jimmy talking to the audience: **Hi everybody! Welcome to *Dancing with the Stars*, everybody. Now, of course, I'm kidding. Welcome to *Jeopardy!* We are so excited that you're here...**

Jimmy McGuire: **One thing I do take most pride in is welcoming our audience. For a lot of these people, it's their first time at a television show, first time at *Jeopardy!*. And, uh, for me, I'm here every day. But, uh, I know what it's like when you take in something for the first time. You leave with a first impression, and you can never change that.**

Jimmy talking to the audience: **By a look around the room at a show of hands, how many people are with us for the very first time? [Applause.] Wow. That is terrific...so listen, before we get started, I think the polite thing to do would be to introduce myself...where are my *Jeopardy!* diehard fans, too? That's why you're here I'm sure. [Clapping] Terrific!**

Buzzy Cohen: *Jeopardy!* tapes five games in a tape day...three before lunch, and two after.

There's a morning audience and an afternoon audience. And that means a lot of coming and going.

As Jimmy warms up the morning audience for game number one, it's time to figure out who will take the stage first.

Corina Nusu works with Matthew Godfrey from Standards and Practices to choose two people at random.

Corina Nusu: **All right. So Matthew and I did a draw just before this, uh, to select the first show and our first two players are going to be Dan and Crystal. [Clapping.] So Dan, you're alphabetically first by last name of the two. So I want you to boldly pick one of these two hands. That hand. Perfect.**

John Barra, Contestant Producer: **Dan will be on the end. Crystal in the middle. Crystal in the middle. Good luck, everyone.**

Buzzy Cohen: Dan, Crystal, and the returning champ take their places behind the lectern. And it's time...well, you know how this part goes.

[Jeopardy! music sped up]

Two games later...it's all over before they had a chance to blink, especially for the contestant who just won.

Crystal Zhao: My name is Crystal Zhao and I am a tech consultant.

Buzzy Cohen: She just won a game!

Crystal Zhao: I mean, it was amazing. It was really surreal, right? Like I...even up until I started actually buzzing in and answering questions, I was just like, *This isn't real. This is like a video game I'm playing.*

Buzzy Cohen: But in Crystal's second game...she couldn't keep up that momentum.

Even though Crystal lost, she's buzzing with energy. And there's a sense of relief, too. For weeks since she got the call, she's been prepping for her big day on *Jeopardy!*.

Crystal Zhao: 'Cause you know, there was a state of mind that I was in where everything that I passed on the street or saw on an internet ad, everything, I was like, *Oh, do I need to maybe learn this fact? Do I need to dive down into this hole too? And to be free of that is kind of nice, right?*

MUSIC: wooden block beat with building momentum

Buzzy Cohen: Contestants like Crystal have two choices — they can pack up their things and leave the Sony lot, or stick around and watch their competitors.

For the remaining contestants who have yet to go on stage — it's still nail biting time.

Kari Elsila: In between games they would come out and say, who are the next contestants for the, for the game. So every, um, every time they came out kind of waiting for my name, don't hear my name, so I'm just waiting, waiting.

Buzzy Cohen: The waiting contestants file outside to Calley Park...and eat a boxed meal on a patch of astroturf just a few minutes away from the stage.

But after lunch...it's back to set.

That's after the break.

<AD BREAK>

ACT III

Jimmy McGuire: Woo. Ken loves the Friday crowd. Usually they're a little wilder. Um, Thursday crowd, they were okay, but I think you guys are gonna be a lot better than that Thursday crowd. Yes? [Audience cheering.]

Buzzy Cohen: It's the last game of the day — a "Friday" game. In one tape day, we've magically traversed a whole week of *Jeopardy!*.

Jimmy McGuire: So for those folks who watch *Jeopardy!* every day, we don't want them to think, *Hey, that's the same crowd that was there yesterday.* I know that's the...what...we, we, we kind of do with the theater of the mind. We manipulate reality a little bit. It's a new day!

10 seconds. Don't let me down Friday crew!

Here we go!

[*Jeopardy!* music begins.]

Buzzy Cohen: Throughout the entire day, at every break in taping, the contestant producers jump up on stage alongside the lecterns, giving tips and encouragement to the contestants.

Corina Nusu: All right, everybody. We're going into Double Jeopardy here. Remember your who's and what's. Have a sip of water if you need it. You'll not be reminded if you forget it this go around, so just remember your who's and what's.

If you get that Daily Double towards the end of the round, think strategically. What's the best way to attack it in order to be at best standing going into final, but look to see how much money's left to recoup...

Buzzy Cohen: And of course, Corina's ready to manage expectations, too.

Corina Nusu: One of my big things I tell them as well during tapings, this is for everybody, I do this for everybody, but especially those people who feel disappointed with their performance on the show, you know, you gotta let it go. You know, if you misspoke or you gave an incorrect response. There's a very, very wise Taylor Swift saying, shake it off.

Buzzy Cohen: Then, it's time for Final Jeopardy. And this requires a little bit of a set change.

[Sound of plastic dividers going up between contestant podiums.]

Corina Nusu: We're gonna get those dividers up. Uh, once says the dividers are up all the way. As soon as those dividers are all the way, you'll be able to use the purple paper to figure out your wager. When you're ready to wager, you'll take your pen...and you'll write your name. [Inaudible.] You'll put a dollar sign, a whole dollar amount, no decimal point.

Buzzy Cohen: But there's one part of every game that Corina *doesn't* help with.

Corina Nusu: When you're ready to accept, you'll tap that bar above it. But do know as soon as you tap that bar, you cannot change your wager.

Buzzy Cohen: Now, it's time to wager for Final Jeopardy.

The contestants are on their own to calculate and strategize their bets. The contestant producers give them no help with that part. Other than a little bit of scratch paper and a pencil.

Corina Nusu: We put up dividers so that they can't see each other wagering, and then basically they're given time to figure out their wager.

Corina speaking to the contestants: Have a sip of water if you need it. Do you need any water? Okay. Deep breath, everybody. We're good here.

Jimmy McGuire: Advance please, Michelle. No pickups.

Corina speaking to the contestants: No pickups, okay. Thank you. All righty, everybody, grab your pen. In just a second, in the upper left hand corner, you're gonna be right in the word *what*. Just the word *what*. Leave it all the way in the corner, leaving yourself a lot of space, 'cause the rest of your response is gonna go in there as well. So just the word *what*, and I'll let you know when to write it.

Buzzy Cohen: Then, it's time to tape that shot that runs before Final Jeopardy.

Corina speaking to the contestants: We're gonna do a dramatic camera shot of you writing the word *what*.

Jimmy McGuire: Just a little bumper. Stand by and let 'er rip.

Corina speaking to the contestants: All right, everybody, write the word *what*. Go ahead. Write the word *what*. No *is* or *are* 'cause we don't know what's gonna work for this particular response. *What. What. What.*

Buzzy Cohen: The camera pans over the contestants like a bird of prey. Heads down, they scribble the word "what" onto the screen in front of them.

Many moons ago, a contestant failed to write “what is” in Final Jeopardy, and they were ruled wrong because you have to answer in the form of a question. It didn’t feel good to anybody — the contestant, staff, or the fans watching.

So to prevent that from happening again, contestant producers now have each player write “what” or “who.”

Corina speaking to the contestants: While we're revealing responses, we like a poker face until we know if you got it right or wrong. Then emote away, and then at the very end, Ken's gonna come over to have a chat with you. Your mics are live, so don't say anything naughty and no water then either. All right? Good luck everybody. Please check your work. Good luck.

MUSIC: Whimsical spacey music begins

Buzzy Cohen: So much has happened on this tape day.

The returning champ who came in this morning? She fizzled out in the first game.

Crystal Zhao, who beat her, ruled instead — but her reign was brief...because another champ unseated her right before lunch.

Brian Henegar: When I was two years old, I mimicked my way of talking after game show hosts like Bob Barker and Wink Martindale and Alex Trebek. And so that's one of the reasons why I don't really have much of a southern accent, even though I'm a very proud Tennessean.

Buzzy Cohen: That's Brian Henegar.

Brian Henegar: I'm a guest services agent for a chain of gas stations.

Buzzy Cohen: He beat Crystal Zhao in game two of the day. And since then, Brian's gone on a mini-streak of his own. He's held his own throughout the afternoon...and he's feeling:

Brian Henegar: Uh, relief, excitement, um, elation, pure joy. I think about a hundred things I'm feeling at the exact same moment.

Buzzy Cohen: Brian will be back tomorrow morning — a returning champ, ready to fight to continue his streak.

But he won't be the only one returning...of the twelve, the contestants who didn't play...they'll be back too..

Who among them will be up to the task of beating him?

At the end of the day, Jimmy McGuire faces the audience for the last time.

Jimmy: Audience, you guys were terrific. Really on behalf of everyone at the show, uh, it really makes us feel good. If you had a good time, did you enjoy yourself today? [Applause.]

Buzzy Cohen: Game number five has just wrapped. We've gotten to the end of our Friday. A week's worth of *Jeopardy!*, shortened into a day.

At seven in the morning, the twelve started out as strangers on a shuttle. Throughout the day, their numbers have dwindled. But they've also gotten to know each other a bit in the breaks between taping.

By lunch, competitions and rivalries have been borne out and a kinship has emerged.

By four o'clock in the afternoon, they've all become part of something bigger.

Gregory Czaja: Once you're part of the show, you know, you're part of an alumni network that, you know, goes back, what, 39 years now?

Buzzy Cohen: Try 60 years!

MUSIC

Buzzy Cohen: A few months from now, they'll get to relive it all again from home.

They'll switch on their TVs, relax onto the couch, surrounded by friends and family. They'll watch their edited games. They'll celebrate the clues they knew, and regret the wagers they flubbed. Trust me about that one.

All that time, compressed into 30 minutes...and somehow feeling like it's stretched into slow motion...one day, extended out over a whole week.

A day in the life of a *Jeopardy!* contestant.

After 17 years of soothing contestant nerves, Corina Nusu has moved on from her role at Jeopardy! As someone who had their nerves lovingly soothed by Corina, I really want to wish her all the best.

THEME MUSIC

Next time, on *This Is Jeopardy!: The Story Of America's Favorite Quiz Show*: Ken Jennings makes history. But he has to keep quiet about it for a very long time.

Ken Jennings: Having to keep a headline size secret was no fun at all. These are all games that were not gonna air for months. So I had this double life, like, like a spy where I'd have to secretly fly down to LA a couple times a month and then come back with this amazing life changing news and that was it. My parents didn't know, my friends didn't know, my coworkers didn't know.

This Is Jeopardy! The Story Of America's Favorite Quiz Show is a production of Sony Music Entertainment and Sony Pictures TV.

It's hosted by me, Buzzy Cohen.

This episode was produced by Mia Warren. Field Producing by Mia Warren and Sunny Balkin.

The series producers are Julia Doyle, Rob Dozier, Sylvie Lubow, and Mia Warren.

Associate producers are Serena Chow and Sunny Balkin.

Our series editor is Sarah Kramer.

Executive producers are Lizzie Jacobs, Tom Koenig, Sarah Kramer, Michael Davies, and Suzanne Prete.

Production management help from Susonya Davenport and Tameeka Ballance-Kolasny.

Our theme music was composed by Hannis Brown.

Our engineer is Cedric Wilson.

Special thanks to Charlie Yedor and Steve Ackerman.

And a big, big thank you to the Jeopardy! staff and crew for all their time and help on this. Shout out to Alexa Macchia.

If you loved the show, follow us on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, Amazon Music, Stitcher, or wherever you get your podcasts.

CITATION

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