



## This is Jeopardy: The Story of America's Favorite Quiz Show

### Episode Seventeen: The Making of a Jeopardy! Champion

A Production of Sony Music Entertainment, and Sony Pictures TV

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**Buzzy Cohen:** In 2003, at the start of *Jeopardy!*'s 20th season, Alex Trebek announced a rule change that would permanently alter the DNA of America's favorite quiz show.

**ARCHIVAL:**

*Alex Trebek: One bit of important information for all of you who enjoy watching our program at home, and it has to do with how we treat our champions. In the past, whenever a champion, either he or she won five games, that individual would leave the program, but that is no longer the case. Now they can win as many games as their talents will allow.*

**Buzzy Cohen:** That season saw a handful of contestants surpass the five-game marker. Sean Ryan made it to game seven. Tom Walsh made it to game eight. And of course, there was the GOAT himself, Ken Jennings, whose 74-game winning streak is still pretty hard to fathom.

There have been plenty of impressive contestants in *Jeopardy!* history. But in the last few years, it seems we've seen more and more players that steal the stage for games — and weeks — on end.

**MUSIC: Exciting suspenseful music begins**

**ARCHIVAL:**

*Johnny Gilbert: And our returning champion...a professional sports gambler...James Holzhauer, whose 32-day cash winnings total \$2,462,216.*

**Mayim Bialik:** *Goodbye to Matt Amodio with an unbelievable 38-day winning streak.*

**Johnny Gilbert:** *Jason Zuffranieri, whose 19-day cash winnings total \$532,496.*

**Mayim Bialik:** *The impressive run of Jonathan Fisher with his big wins and extreme facial expressions continues. Can he make it 12 in a row?*

**Ken Jennings:** *Our 23-year-old champion, Mattea Roach, is now a 23-day Jeopardy! winner...*

**Johnny Gilbert:** *Our returning champion...Ryan Long...whose 16-days cash winnings total...*

**Johnny Gilbert:** *Chris Pannullo, whose 21-day cash winnings total \$748,286.*

**Johnny Gilbert:** *From Toronto, Ontario, Canada, Ray Lalonde, whose 13-day cash winnings total...*

**Ken Jennings:** *Our returning champion, Amy Schneider, has now been with us 40 days and 40 nights. She has amassed over \$1.3 million dollars and answered over 1300 clues correctly. It's been a remarkable run, one for the books, and at this point, only one question remains. How long can it go on?*

**Buzzy Cohen:** We know their names, we've seen their stats, but now it's time to explore *Jeopardy!* through their eyes. Who are these superchamps? Who are some of the greats who have inspired them?

And how might these longer winning streaks change the way the game is played today?

## **THEME MUSIC**

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

Today, we're talking strategy and gameplay with some of the greatest *Jeopardy!* players of all time.

## **THEME MUSIC**

## ACT 1

**Buzzy Cohen:** This might come as a surprise to you...but even the greats had first-day jitters.

**Brad Rutter: The first game of *Jeopardy!* I played, I was so nervous.**

**Buzzy Cohen:** Brad Rutter, who first appeared on *Jeopardy!* in 2000, has returned for many tournaments. He also holds the title for the all-time money winner on *Jeopardy!*

Almost five million dollars.

**Brad Rutter: It didn't start well. I remember being below zero at the first commercial break, but then I got a hang of the buzzer.**

**Matt Amodio: It is a very isolating experience because you are on the podium alone and you don't really get a whole lot of feedback on how it's going.**

**Buzzy Cohen:** That's Matt Amodio — who had a 38-game streak in 2021, and competed in the 2023 Masters Tournament — where he made it to the finals, but hasn't forgotten that first-game feeling...

**Matt Amodio: It is a scary experience. I felt like I was on a boat in the middle of the ocean alone and it was a storm and I had to figure out for myself where, where to go and how to proceed.**

**Buzzy Cohen:** First centering activity: a warm-up playlist.

**MUSIC: Bright, optimistic beat**

**Amy Schneider: I think it was actually that morning I had made a playlist that was called "Victory Morning."**

**Buzzy Cohen:** You know Amy Schneider: second-highest streak for consecutive wins on the show with 40 games. She also competed in the 2023 Masters.

**Amy Schneider: Listening to Eminem's Lose Yourself that morning where I was, like, this is actually perfect, that this is exactly the message I want to be telling myself...that *this is it. You get one shot. This is my one shot. You know, do not miss your chance. Lose yourself in the moment. Everything can wait for half an hour. Everything can wait. This is the only thing I need to focus on.***

**And...to this day, whenever I'm on the show, that is my mantra, is — *stay focused*.**

**Buzzy Cohen:** And sometimes, that laser focus has to span an entire tape day.

**Matt Amodio:** **There are five games in a tape day, and you get there at 7:30 AM. And for some of my games, I did not leave until after 7:00 PM and so I have to both be prepared to play a full 12 hours or be prepared for it to end at the next minute.**

**Buzzy Cohen:** The waiting, the whiplash, the back-to-back games — it's no wonder that some rely on strict routines to help them through.

**Matt Amodio:** **I would have an energy bar and an energy drink before every game. I guess caffeine takes maybe 15 minutes to, to go through my system and start to trigger. So I would have that energy drink about 15 minutes before taping the next game.**

**Buzzy Cohen:** Skinny Red Bulls, to be precise.

**Matt Amodio:** **Yeah, it was probably about five — like five cups of coffee worth throughout the day.**

**Mattea Roach:** **I get the same snacks and drinks to have with me.**

**Buzzy Cohen:** Cue Mattea Roach: 23 game champ and runner up in the 2023 Masters.

**Mattea Roach:** **I get my, like, little cans of cold brew coffee and my dried mango slices from Trader Joe's. And I know that like no matter what the food is on set that day, I'll have those things.**

**Buzzy Cohen:** And then there's the on-stage creature comforts.

**Amy Schneider:** **The superstition was wearing the pearl necklace every time, which wasn't something that I planned on originally. But, like, suddenly in the moment I realized, yes, I want this every game, as something to like, you know, as a kind of grounding thing to remind myself that I've got a great happy world back home.**

**Brad Rutter:** **I did have lucky shoes, uh, that I wore for a while.**

**Buzzy Cohen:** Brad again.

**Brad Rutter: Although I guess I must have lost them somewhere, or donated them to Goodwill or something like that, and then I won without them.**

**So I didn't need those.**

**Buzzy Cohen:** Yup. Mango slices, talismans, lucky charms — or shoes — they only get you so far.

Because once you step onto the Alex Trebek stage. It's just you, your reflexes, and your noggin.

Which brings us back to that question of...prep. We've done an entire episode on the many ways people prep for *Jeopardy!* It's a subject near and dear to my heart.

And there are some tried and true methods. Brad swears by flashcards.

**Brad Rutter: I still do use three by five cards. I'm that old school.**

**Buzzy Cohen:** Or the slow and steady approach.

**Mattea Roach: I've gotten a lot of value out of reading books.**

**Buzzy Cohen:** Mattea Roach again.

**Mattea Roach: Like I've been reading lately, *Palo Alto* by Malcolm Harris, um, which is like a history basically of the Palo Alto region going back to gold rush days. And then the end of the book is talking about kind of like contemporary Silicon Valley stuff.**

**And I think already there have been three or four things that have come up in this book that are responses to clues that were in Masters.**

**Buzzy Cohen:** Then, there's the Internet — where you can scour online forums, study betting strategies, and of course, spend lots and lots of time combing through the J-archive. An invaluable fan-built website that catalogs *Jeopardy!* games.

**Robert Knecht Schmidt: If you go to J-archive.com, what you will see is a splash screen with a logo and a couple of boxes where they have, uh, the most recent Final Jeopardy! on the show.**

**Buzzy Cohen:** That's Robert Knecht Schmidt, *Jeopardy!* contestant, fan, and one of the founders of J-archive.

**Robert Knecht Schmidt:** If you click on the logo or one of the numbers in the season listing on the splash screen, it will take you into a big list of all of the episodes that we have in the archive going back to 1984.

**MUSIC:** Bright optimistic beat

**Buzzy Cohen:** If you click on one of those episodes — it takes you to a *Jeopardy!* game board. You can see all the clues in that game. There's also access to player information, stats, wagering calculators...

The initial concept of an online *Jeopardy!* archive started with former contestant and fan Ronnie O'Rourke in 2003, and then Robert Knecht Schmidt took up the mantle a year later.

And what started as an act of preservation became a mind-gym for *Jeopardy!* hopefuls.

**Robert Knecht Schmidt:** Just page after page, clue after clue. Kind of like the way Arnold Schwarzenegger described doing reps to build up his muscles. You just think of them as each, each one of them just a little soldier in an army and, uh, you know, soldier after soldier, you, you sort of build — instead of a muscle memory, a brain memory for all the things that *Jeopardy!* might ask for.

**Buzzy Cohen:** If you go to J-Archive, you can scroll through decades of *Jeopardy!* boards, checking out clues — and maybe picking up some patterns.

In fact, there's a trick of the trade that J-Archive helps with when it comes to preparing to go on *Jeopardy!* something called Pavlovs.

**Robert Knecht Schmidt:** In general, a Pavlov is one or two words in a clue that will lead you almost certainly to a correct response.

**Would you mind if I...?**

**Buzzy Cohen:** That's Robert, pulling out his phone, and going through old *Jeopardy!* clues on the site he created.

**Robert Knecht Schmidt:** Polish composer. That's gonna be Chopin every time. I mean Hungarian Composer — Liszt. Finnish composer — Sibelius. Post-war plan. That's gonna be the Marshall Plan.

**Buzzy Cohen:** There are entire subreddits dedicated to Pavlovs...

**Robert Knecht Schmidt: Nonsense poet. That's gonna be Edward Lear. Norwegian artist? Munch. Welsh poet? Dylan Thomas.**

**These sorts of clues are ones that you have to sort of commit to memory, almost like if you're studying chemistry...you have to know the — the chemical formula and the reactions.**

**If you get the Pavlovs and a few other things, you're more than halfway there to being a *Jeopardy!* champion.**

**Buzzy Cohen:** Of course, future champs should be a bit cautious. The writers know about the Pavlovs chatter, and they might take that into account the next time they write a clue about a Welsh poet.

But there are other resources to test your esoteric trivia knowledge in the digital age like Learned League and Sporkle. And of course, there's always the tried and true pub quiz.

But some even take the step of trying to recreate the experience of being on stage. Here's James Holzhauer, 2023 Masters champ, who holds the title for highest single-game winnings.

**James Holzhauer: So I tried my best to kind of simulate the studio conditions at home. I would turn the thermostat down. It's really cold on that stage. I'd turn all the lights up, I'd, uh, get a little clicky pen or something in my hand to, to simulate trying to click in at the right time.**

## **MUSIC: Fun and suspenseful beat**

**Buzzy Cohen:** So do all *Jeopardy!* champions take strategy to this extreme degree?

Find out after the break.

## **ACT 2**

**Buzzy Cohen:** If you're one of the contestants rolling up to Stage 10 day after day, your skills and your stamina are being tested. When you get to this level of playing, how you approach gameplay *matters*. Even if those approaches differ. Which, of course, they do.

If you think of the pros in any sport, creative field, professional endeavor — some are out there grinding — doing intensive reps, keeping to strict and extreme regimens. And others just have a natural affinity for the game.

**Mattea Roach:** I do not come from the school of, like, intensive *Jeopardy!* preparation.

**Buzzy Cohen:** This is Mattea.

**Mattea Roach:** The way that I look at it is that as it stands, playing *Jeopardy!* is not my job, right?

I think there are people who take a really workman-like approach to playing *Jeopardy!* and they treat it like their job, and they are able to do that without losing their sort of joy and inspiration for playing the game. And I have huge admiration for those people. Their minds are on a level that, like, I can't even comprehend cuz that's just like...I can't do that. Um, so I have to approach studying and acquiring more knowledge in a way that works for me.

**Buzzy Cohen:** Some prep can be done by making flashcards — or identifying material that you might not necessarily be drawn to. But what Mattea is talking about is the type of prep you do that might not even look like prep, in the traditional way: following your interests, and absorbing information around you.

That's the kind of prep that shows up in a *Jeopardy!* category — the information that's gleaned by pure curiosity and exposure.

**Mattea Roach:** There was a horror movies category in Masters and the \$2,000 clue was about *Eyes Without a Face*, which is like a French movie from the sixties.

**ARCHIVAL:**

**Mattea Roach:** All right, horror movies, 2000.

**Ken Jennings:** This Georges Franju classic about plastic surgery inspired a Billy Idol song and an Almodovar film. Mattea.

**Mattea Roach:** What's *Eyes Without a Face*?

**Ken Jennings:** Yeah. Good job.

**Mattea Roach:** And I only knew it because GIFs of it were really popular on Tumblr for some reason, in, like, 2013 when I was in high school. There's no world in which me doing flashcards would've ever led to me knowing *Eyes Without a Face* was a movie. [Laughs.]

Um, that's something that you, like, probably are only gonna get through the more experiential or like in-depth learning of following your own interests. And I think it's

**beautiful that there are, like, things still in this higher level form of trivia that it's just incredibly unlikely that you learned by wrote.**

**Buzzy Cohen:** Ok, so prep. Still, choose your own adventure. But there's something *all* contestants have to practice.

**Matt Amodio: I think about this probably more than the average person and get very into the weeds.**

**MUSIC: Whimsical spacey music**

**Buzzy Cohen:** This is Matt Amodio, talking about the buzzer.

**Matt Amodio: You're told that you should wait on the buzzer until the time is opened up. And then once time is opened up, don't press it once. Press it as many times as you can. Just hammer away at the buzzer because if you are accidentally a little bit too early, you're going to get locked out. And then it's whichever buzzer press is the closest after your brief lockout period has ended that will get you in. And so you want to press it in as, as many times as you can.**

**Buzzy Cohen:** Every player is going to have something they dive into the weeds on. I mean, think about it, the people who want to go on *Jeopardy!*, and who are successful on *Jeopardy!* are people who like to learn, or really go deep on something.

That can influence the way the game is played. And if there's one part of *Jeopardy!* that's inspired incredible feats of focus and practice, it's the buzzer.

We did an entire episode about it, but there is always more to say about that little piece of plastic.

It's your sidekick, your victory torch — or the thorn in your streak...it just depends on how you look at it. For Matt, the buzzer opens up a window of incredible opportunity.

**Matt Amodio: You have about six seconds before you are ruled incorrect for not having answered in time.**

**I decided that I would use that six seconds as best I could by ringing in. Coming up with the answer in my head and double checking that, *Okay, it was this person and not this person, right?* And I would use that because maybe 95% of the time, the first thing that came to mind would be correct.**

**But if I can get that extra 5% accuracy by just taking a beat, giving myself a chance to double check, then I was absolutely going to do that.**

**Buzzy Cohen:** Matt actually got a fair amount of flack from *Jeopardy!* viewers for his habit of buzzing in, and then pausing to give a few seconds before his answer.

**Matt Amodio:** It was entertaining to see some of the very positive and very negative reactions to my style of play. Uh, of course my, my phrasing, my what's, uh, strategy was, was a big part of that.

**ARCHIVAL:**

**Ken Jennings:** *She co starred in Green Lantern with Ryan Reynolds before the pair married. Matt.*

**Matt Amodio:** *Uh, what's Lively?*

**Ken Jennings:** *Blake Lively.*

**Ken Jennings:** *Yes.*

**Ken Jennings:** *Select again, Matt.*

**Matt Amodio:** *600.*

**Ken Jennings:** *In 2022, this rapper and Rihanna welcomed their first child together. Matt.*

**Matt Amodio:** *What's A\$AP Rocky?*

**Ken Jennings:** *That's correct.*

**Matt Amodio Interview:** *I went about the approach of saying 'the fewer things to think about the better' if you have a moving part, that moving part can go hard. So I found the simplest most repeatable approach I could and went with it*

**Buzzy Cohen:**...and it worked.

**Matt Amodio:** **This is the one period on the show where you have control.**

**You press that buzzer and you can do whatever you want for the next six seconds. You can do mental gymnastics. You could just breathe and relax for the first time since before the show started. You can use that time. And if you're not using that time wisely, I think you're playing a suboptimal game.**

**Buzzy Cohen:** Move over Madonna, it's not four minutes to save the world. It's just *six seconds*.

The buzzer is consistently cited as one of the hardest parts of playing *Jeopardy!* — ring in too early, you're penalized. Too late, you're toast. The timing — whether you go by lights, voice, or some combination of both — is the determining factor for a game.

But then there's also the game material itself...

**Amy Schneider: One thing I sort of do, like, starting out is if there's a category I don't like, try to get it off the board early so that if there's, like, a Daily Double in it or whatever, there's less money at stake.**

**Buzzy Cohen:** This is Amy Schneider.

**Amy Schneider: You know, beyond that, you know, I, I don't have as much of a strategy about gameplay. I'm trying to kind of develop more of one as I, as, as I, you know, move on and I'm, I'm playing better players now.**

**But my, you know, I sort of call it my meta strategy, which is just to give myself as few things to think about — as few decisions to make as possible so that I can put my entire focus on the next clue and the next answer.**

**Buzzy Cohen:** I don't need to tell you this, but just in case...the categories on the *Jeopardy!* board are laid out vertically with harder, higher value clues at the bottom.

The *Jeopardy!* writers often design categories so that the clues feed off of each other, which means that sometimes, it can be easier then to complete a category before moving on to the next.

Not all players want to do that though, and not all *Jeopardy!* champions play the board linearly.

**MUSIC: Bright optimistic beat**

The notion of moving around the board before completing a category started back in 1985 with a law student by the name of Chuck Forrest.

**ARCHIVAL:**

***Johnny Gilbert: This is Jeopardy! Now entering the studio are today's contestants...a law firm purchasing agent from Culver City, California...René Garcia. An advertising copywriter originally from Chevy Chase, Maryland...Claudia Wolfe and our returning champion, a student from Grand Blanc, Michigan...Chuck Forrest, whose head winnings after three matches total \$45,000. And now here is the host of Jeopardy!***

**Chuck Forrest:** Before I went out and when I was playing at home with my friends in law school, one of them suggested this strategy...which is, you know, to, to, uh, to jump around from one category to another. Without going from top to bottom and then moving onto the next one.

**Buzzy Cohen:** Chuck's style of playing — jumping around from category to category — is now referred to as “the Forrest Bounce” among contestants who have followed his example.

For Chuck, it was a way to throw off his competitors.

**Chuck Forrest:** They don't know where you're going...they don't know what to expect...and that little advantage of, uh, you know, maybe a second or less. Um, puts you in, in control. It's something which, uh, the psychological I think, uh, gives the, the person who, who has control the advantage.

**Buzzy Cohen:** The Forrest Bounce hasn't always been well received by fans...some said it was disrupting the flow of the beloved game they knew so well.

But it's inspired a range of players over the years like Arthur Chu, and of course the self-described game show villain, James Holzhauer, who also is known to hop around the board — but not confuse his opponents. It's to hunt for those Daily Doubles.

**James Holzhauer:** I will only change categories if I know the daily double can't be a certain place. Otherwise, I just tend to stick with what's there.

**Buzzy Cohen:** James, a professional gambler, quickly made a name for himself in 2019 with his aggressive style of play — big, big bets on Daily Doubles.

**James Holzhauer:** I was, like, just playing around with, *oh, you know what, if I tried this strategy, what if I tried that strategy?* And at some point I just, like, grew frustrated with the process and said, *Hey, what if I just go all in on every Daily Double?* And, you know, I found that in, in my, uh, rudimentary simulation that worked really well, it turned out, you know. If you get to a point where you are confident you can get the Daily Double, why not just press your advantage?

**Buzzy Cohen:** This is what puts the *Jeopardy!* into *Jeopardy!*: the question of how to wager, how much to wager. The risk of trusting your own abilities and appropriately assessing those of your competitors.

**James Holzhauser: I think this is a big advantage of being a gambler. You don't think about the money as money. You think about it as game pieces.**

**Buzzy Cohen:** But if you're not literally a professional gambler, the wagering can feel pretty intimidating.

**Mattea Roach: In the syndicated show, when you're in a regular game, you know whether you're a challenger, returning champion, you're wagering real...like it is real money, I think, psychologically to a lot of players. Right?**

**Buzzy Cohen:** This is Mattea.

**Mattea Roach: And I think that that does affect people's willingness to make even decisions that they might know are optimal. Like I knew when I was coming down to play for the first time that it was usually good to make larger Daily Double wagers than you would expect. But I just couldn't bring myself to do it 'cause I was like, well, if I lose this money I just, I don't know if I can, like, forgive myself and recover in the course of the game, right? That's like — the psychological element is a huge part of it.**

**So I think pregame, it's like knowing what your comfort level is with making certain wagers. And I had to sort of work myself up to being more comfortable to wager, you know, like 7, 8,000 points, whatever, even when it wasn't real money, 'cause it just felt so unnatural to me.**

**Buzzy Cohen:** Mattea isn't the only one to shift strategies. Here's Brad Rutter.

**Brad Rutter: In the old days, if I saw something in a category I liked, I might bet, you know, uh, five, six thousand dollars. That seemed like a big bet at the time, but in the finals of the All-Star Games, uh, against Ken and Pam, um, I got the Daily Double with a pretty big lead in a category that I really like — the American Revolution.**

**So I figured out, you know what can I bet to wrap it up if I get it right or not be too far behind that I can't come back if I get it wrong? And that ended up being \$10,000, and that's bigger than I ever would've bet back in the old days...I wouldn't even, wouldn't even have thought of that.**

**Buzzy Cohen:** But playing against big names like Ken Jennings and Pam Mueller made Brad a more daring wagerer...and it paid off.

**ARCHIVAL:**

**Brad Rutter:** Colonial 1600.

**Alex Trebek:** Answer there, the other Daily Double.

**Brad Rutter:** 10,000.

**Alex Trebek:** Okay, here's the clue. The 1764 Sugar Act taxed molasses imports to help pay for this recently concluded war.

**Brad Rutter:** What is the French and Indian War?

**Alex Trebek:** You have just added to your score. [Audience clapping and cheering.]

**Brad Rutter:** And I got it right and that basically, you know, Ken made a good run at it, trying to catch up at the end, but that basically ended the game right there.

**Mattea Roach:** When I was first playing I almost, like, looked at the board as, like, 60 opportunities to make a mistake. Um, and I don't really look at it that way anymore.

**Buzzy Cohen:** Wagers can, of course, go awry. While the odds are generally high any given *Jeopardy!* contestant will get a Daily Double correct, they do get them wrong.

Which is where another critical component comes in: mindset.

More on that, after the break.

### ACT 3

**MUSIC:** Bright, curious beat

**Amy Schneider:** I think, like, at some point I got *The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius* or something like that.

**Buzzy Cohen:** This is Amy Schneider, who first discovered Stoicism in college.

**Amy Schneider:** I was so unhappy at that point of my life. And Stoicism was a way of saying all of that can be true, and none of that has to make me miserable. Like it is all entirely up to me to make the best of my situation.

**Buzzy Cohen:** This was well before her first appearance on *Jeopardy!* in 2021 — but that philosophy would stay with her, and inform how she approached the quiz show.

Because ultimately when you're up there on stage: the prep, the strategy — all of that control you're trying to maintain — it all starts to fall away — and what's left is you. How you stay calm for the competition. How you ultimately let go. Which is maybe the hardest thing to accept.

**Mattea Roach: There are so many things that are gonna happen in this next, like, 30 minutes that I fundamentally can't control and have nothing to do with me.**

**Buzzy Cohen:** Mattea again.

**Mattea Roach: I don't know what my categories are gonna be. I don't know really how fast my opponents are gonna be on the buzzer, and if you're playing in the regular syndicated season, you also don't know what their strengths and weaknesses are, what their strategies are gonna be at all. You don't know how your buzzer timing is gonna be compared to your opponents.**

**And so what I'm thinking is, like, I need to focus exclusively on what I can control, which is basically just like, do I ring in or not? Anything else you just need to completely put out of your mind. Any fear that you have about saying something silly, just like, forget it.**

**Amy Schneider: In the Tournament of Champions in the finals, one of the last two or three games, maybe the last game, it was down to the wire, me and Andrew, in Double Jeopardy! The Daily Doubles were gone and it was just, like, the last six or seven clues that were all the, like, low dollar amounts, but it was gonna come down to those clues, which one of us was in the lead going into Final.**

**ARCHIVAL:**

***Ken Jennings: Serrano and other chilies help flavor and name this cheese. Amy.***

***Amy Schneider: What is Pepperjack?***

***Ken Jennings: Yes.***

***Amy Schneider: Hegel, eight.***

***Ken Jennings: Much of Hegel's work reacts to this older German philosopher, though his son Emmanuel was named for someone else. Amy.***

***Amy Schneider: Who is Kant?***

***Ken Jennings: Right!***

***Hegel, four....***

**Amy Schneider: What I remember is not being stressed about it. What I remember is not like getting worked up and keyed up about it, or, or even like, even really**

**changing my approach at all. Just like being there, being in the moment, trying to get the buzzer and, and, you know, I would either, either win or, or I wouldn't.**

**Buzzy Cohen:** All of that prep, strategy, buzzer practice, studying...it's all about putting you in the right mindset, putting you at ease, and hopefully giving you a sense of peace. You've done what you can, and now all you can do is play and see what happens.

**Mattea Roach:** I think that the thing that makes a *Jeopardy!* player able to go from somebody who's, like, smart and good at trivia to someone who really succeeds on the show has, like, very little to do with their actual gameplay strategy and has much more to do with where they're at mentally and psychologically when they go to play the game.

People go on and they are known for being really strong trivia players. Like they did really high level quiz bowl in high school and university, or they do these, like, recreational competitions as adults where they perform incredibly well and they spend a ton of time on it.

And then they show up and they just, like, it's not even necessarily that they don't do well, but they underperform relative to, like, how you would expect someone who spends that much time thinking about these things would do.

**Buzzy Cohen:** Ask elite athletes — really, pros in any respective field — and most will tell you that what it all boils down to is mindset.

**Mattea Roach:** And I think that the difference is going in being okay with any outcome and being very aware of what is within your power to act upon in the game. And I think that people get there through different routes.

**Buzzy Cohen:** So is *that* how to make sense of the recent spate of super champions in the last few years?

**Michael Davies:** Our elite players raise themselves to a level, um, that is otherworldly. It's like pros playing amateurs sometimes on our game. Even when our amateurs are brilliant themselves, they behave like athletes.

They have a consistency, a calmness under pressure, a bounceback ability, a way that they prepare mentally for this game that takes it to a new level.

**Buzzy Cohen:** This is *Jeopardy!* executive producer Michael Davies.

**Michael Davies:** *Jeopardy!* has some elements of chance in it, but it's mainly a game of skill, which is why I think of it as a sport.

**Buzzy Cohen:** *Jeopardy!* as a sport. This is Michael's dogma. What he gets fired up about, day in and day out.

**Michael Davies:** The thing that I found remarkable when I took the job is that when I was watching Super Champions, ultra Champions like Matt Amodio or Amy Schneider or Mattea Roach...is that we would take all of our best players who've been on the show, these amazing champions we'd put on the show all year.

And yes, we'd bring them back for the ToC, which was inconsistent, historically, on the show. It sometimes happened, it sometimes didn't. But we would essentially throw out everybody who played on *Jeopardy!* and we would start the next season with all new players.

And I think part of my thing is in any sport, they would never do that. We would never in the NBA wipe out the rosters of every NBA franchise and say, *Okay, LeBron, you were great in your rookie year, but now next year we're gonna have somebody else go and play for the Cleveland Cavaliers* or, um, you know, just wipe out everybody on an NFL franchise.

**Buzzy Cohen:** For some, Michael has hit the nail on the head, and they're ready for the sport-ification of *Jeopardy!*.

**Michael Davies:** I think the reason we're second to the NFL on television is because we rate like a sport and we rate like a sport because we are a sport because people watch us in, in that kind of a way. I think there's a step to go, which is probably to go live at some point as opposed to on tape.

Um, that terrifies, uh, my people. So I'm probably alone in that. But I think in terms of what I've done so far and certainly *Jeopardy! Masters* and getting that developed and sold to ABC, I think that's a very big, that's a very big step, uh, for the show.

**Buzzy Cohen:** But for others, *Jeopardy!* will always be the place where anyone can step on stage and for 30 minutes, prove that they're capable of just about anything. Testing the capacity of their curiosities, indulging in the joy — and thrill — of America's Favorite Quiz Show.

## THEME MUSIC

Next time, on *This Is Jeopardy!*

**Keenan Thompson: When my phone blows up from like my people, that's when I know we hit, you know, a bullseye in the culture. Black Jeopardy was just strong, you know it's just chock full of jokes.**

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 Julia Doyle.

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

Associate producer is Serena Chow.

Our series editor is Sarah Kramer. Executive producers are Lizzie Jacobs, Tom Koenig, Sarah Kramer, Michael Davies, and Suzanne Preté.

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

Our theme song was composed by Hannis Brown. Cedric Wilson is our engineer.

Special thanks to Charlie Yedor and Steve Ackerman.

And a big, big thank you to the *Jeopardy!* staff and crew for all of 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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