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Most wives wouldn't appreciate having their Valentine's Day plans torpedoed. But I'm not married to most wives, and when the torpedo is a phone call telling me I've been invited to compete in the "Jeopardy!" Teachers Tournament, she was more than willing to indulge my lifelong dream.

For as long as I can remember, "Jeopardy!" has been a part of my life. One of my earliest memories is sitting down with my mother and grandmother at our small kitchen table, tuning into our local ABC affiliate in Baltimore and watching both "Jeopardy!" and "Wheel of Fortune."

While I enjoyed the word game with the big spinning wheel, it was always "Jeopardy!" with its big board, mustachioed host and impossibly hard questions that really grabbed my attention.

Of course, time goes on. Tastes evolve, mustaches get shaved, and people change. I became a teacher at AcadeMir Charter School Middle in west Miami-Dade (hello to all my students and colleagues)! But my desire to watch, and compete, on "Jeopardy!" never went away. I was always adept at trivia competitions, playing on teams in middle school and high school.

Sometime in the last decade, "Jeopardy!" began to offer an online test, which allowed many more people to try out than the old system which involved an in-person interview in Los Angeles or the hope that the tryouts would come to your town. After taking it more than five times, I finally got an in-person interview, which led to that lovely phone call on St. Valentine's Day.

At the end of March, I flew out to Los Angeles to begin my journey. The show treats its "VITs" (Very Important Teachers) tremendously well. Our flights and hotels were covered, which left us time to enjoy the city and prepare for the show.



CAROL KAELSON/PHOTOGRAPHER

Matthew Bunch, a teacher at AcadeMir Charter School Middle in west Miami-Dade, will appear on 'Jeopardy!' on Tuesday night, May 7, as part of the annual Teachers Tournament. He is also a digital producer at the Miami Herald.

## TELEVISION

# A Miami-Dade teacher lives out his dream on this game show: What is, 'Jeopardy?'

I attended college at the University of Miami and got my degree in broadcast journalism, so I assumed I was ready for bright lights and big cameras. However, nothing prepares you for walking out on the stage, seeing the board and speaking with the host Alex Trebek. The nerves were there. But seeing my wife and best man in the audience, thinking of my mom back in Baltimore and remembering my grandmother allowed me to calm down.

Two other factors helped me get comfortable with the challenge and opportunity in front of me. First, the "Jeopardy!" staff includes some of the kindest

people in show business, if not the entire world. That extends from Trebek to the producers and other support staff. It made me feel good that the show I've watched and supported for more than two decades is made by people who are so kind and helpful to everybody.

Second, the other 14 teachers who were picked to participate in the tournament were, to a man and woman, sweet people who genuinely cared how everyone else was doing. Even though we were all competing with one another for \$100,000, there was never a cross word or anxious moment. It was good to learn that in classrooms

across America our children are being led by people who are so kind and supportive (not to mention funny).

If you are a "Jeopardy!" fan, I'll try to address some questions you might have:

- Alex? Witty, and extremely open and honest when he speaks to the audience between tapings.

- The buzzer? Easy to understand, impossible to master (Unless you are James Holzhauer, who might bankrupt the show before I make my appearance).

- The think music in Final Jeopardy? Very catchy, until you're actually competing in Final Jeopardy and you feel like your

brain is going to jump out of your head. Then it sounds like an approaching train.

I can't share how I did (you have to tune in and watch on Tuesday, May 7, at 7:30 on WPLG-10), but I've come to the conclusion that my final performance is one of the least important aspects of the entire experience. I got to live one of my greatest dreams. I did it with a group of people that I hope will remain friends for the rest of my life, and I got to share it with the people I care about the most.

If I'm asking for more than that out of an opportunity, my greed is on a Biblical level.