

Simply the best!
 (From left) Ken Jennings remains the G.O.A.T., with Brad Rutter and James Holzhauer in second and third, as of 2020.

JEOPARDY!
 THE
 GREATEST OF ALL TIME

KEN JENNINGS

THE BIGGEST WINNERS IN JEOPARDY! HISTORY—AND THOSE WHO ARE REMEMBERED FOR THEIR HILARIOUSLY WRONG ANSWERS.

● **KEN JENNINGS**

WON **\$5,223,414**

Jeopardy!'s most famous champ also boasts the record for highest winnings during the regular season (\$2,520,700) and the longest winning streak, with 74 games. And yet it all ended with a whimper in 2004 when he missed a seemingly easy question in Final Jeopardy!: "Most of this firm's 70,000 seasonal white-collar employees work only four months a year." The answer was H&R Block. Jennings' response: FedEx. But his success didn't end with Final Jeopardy! The Seattle native went on to pen a book about his experience, *Brainiac: Adventures in the Curious, Competitive, Compulsive World of Trivia Buffs*. For the current 37th season, Jennings returned to *Jeopardy!* as a consulting producer and has also been rumored to be in the running as Alex Trebek's successor as host.

Hall of Fame

● JAMES HOLZHAUER

WON \$2,962,216

In third place of all-time winners is a professional sports gambler who had a lot more than luck on his side during his 32-game streak from April to June in 2019. Holzhauer—who holds the record for most single-game winnings: \$131,127—earned a reputation for betting aggressively, with an average wager on Daily Doubles of \$9,000. Perhaps even more impressive: He went 12 games without getting a single question wrong. But pop culture proved to be his Achilles' heel. The Final Jeopardy! category was Celebrities, with the clue: "This inductee into the Video Hall of Fame sold 17 million copies of a videocassette she released in 1982." Holzhauer wrote "Madonna," instead of "Jane Fonda." Like Jennings, his reign on *Jeopardy!* was ended by a female opponent, Emma Boettcher.

"Jeopardy! James," as he's nicknamed, often pulled a "Forrest Bounce," when a player jumps from category to category, a move made famous by Chuck Forrest in 1985.



KNOW AS MUCH AS YOU CAN ABOUT THE CATEGORIES AND CLUES. THE MORE YOU KNOW, THE FASTER YOUR THUMB IS."

—ALEX TREBEK'S ADVICE TO PLAYING JEOPARDY!

● BRAD RUTTER

WON \$4,938,436

Jennings' biggest rival in *Jeopardy!* actually hit it big on the show years before him, during an era when the rules stipulated that those who won five consecutive days retired undefeated. Although Rutter *only* won \$55,102 at the time in 2000, the Lancaster, Pennsylvania, native went on to compete in 17 matches in five tournaments and continued to build upon his total earnings, which are now just under \$5 million. Rutter is a bit of a *Jeopardy!* long-hauler and has relentlessly collected wins, famously beating *Jeopardy!* gods Jennings and Holzhauer in the Tournament of Decades and the Ultimate Tournaments of Champions. He also led his team to victory in the All-Stars Tournament.

After *Jeopardy!*, Rutter appeared on *1 vs. 100*, *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire*, *Grand Slam* and *The Chase*.



● JULIA COLLINS

WON \$478,100

The Wilmette, Illinois, resident made her mark from April 21 to June 2, 2014, when she won a whopping \$429,100 over her 20-day stretch, garnering her the fifth-highest regular play total and third-longest winning streak in *Jeopardy!* history. Back in eighth grade, the show's winningest woman—a supply-chain professional with an undergraduate degree from Wellesley College and a master's degree from MIT—aspired to be a 10-time champion as a self-professed "nerdy" teen. (Collins still has the yearbook with stated claim to prove it!) Her years in academia and astounding memory no doubt helped her run. Yet her champion strategy is actually quite simple: "Buzz like your life depends on it"—and then worry about answering the questions correctly.



● DAVID MADDEN

WON \$773,733

The New Jersey native maintains the fifth-longest winning streak, with 19 days in 2005. Madden, a professional academic-competition organizer and art historian, also holds the titles of founder and executive director of the National History Bee and Bowl, the United States Geography Olympiad, the National Science Bee, the National Humanities Bee and the International Geography Bee. There was one category he didn't know very well, however: Broadway Musicals. Madden narrowly won his 15th straight game when he incorrectly guessed *Les Misérables* during Final Jeopardy!, instead of *Man of La Mancha*. Still, he made a careful wager and got to keep his status for more games.



MOST INSPIRING CONTESTANT

CINDY STOWELL HELD ON TO HER WINNING STREAK WHILE BATTLING STAGE 4 COLON CANCER.

Cindy Stowell had stage 4 colon cancer when she auditioned for *Jeopardy!* in 2016. After passing an online test, she asked a producer if the process could move quickly, "because I just found out that I don't have too much longer to live." Stowell filmed the show while undergoing chemo, and competing was physically difficult as she was heavily medicated on painkillers and struggled to click her buzzer.

During breaks, stylists touched up her makeup, as she was visibly sweating from fever. "But she didn't want us to let the other contestants know," Alex Trebek later revealed. "The only people who knew were our producers and myself. And while we were taping, she had a few bad moments and we had to stop tape and she would go backstage and be ill."

Devastatingly, the 41-year-old science-content developer from Texas passed away three months later on Dec. 5, a week before her episodes aired. Fans of the show were nothing short of inspired, as they learned Stowell's story and watched her six-game winning streak. She donated her \$100,000 winnings to the Cancer Research Institute. "She was just a gem of a person," Trebek said in July 2020, four months before he lost his own battle. "There are degrees in terms of likability for *Jeopardy!* players, and she ranked very high."

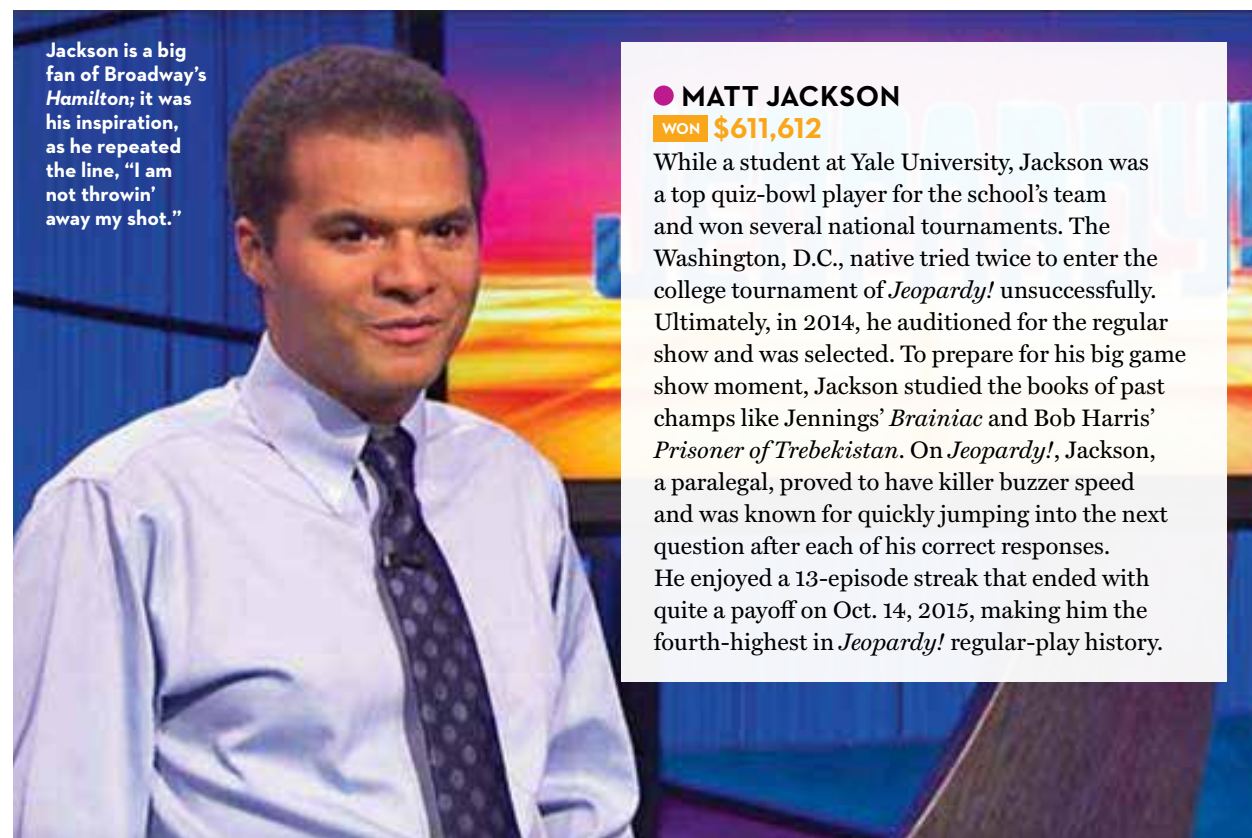
● **LARISSA KELLY**

WON \$660,930

For the Kelly family of Newton, Massachusetts, appearing on *Jeopardy!* is tradition. Larissa Kelly has the distinction of being the third in her family to compete on the show, but she was the only one to actually win. Her husband was creamed by Jennings in the champ's 70th game and her sister was defeated by Aaron Schroeder, who later challenged Larissa in 2009's *Jeopardy!* Tournament of Champions finals in Las Vegas. In that same special, Dan Pawson ended Kelly's run after she wasn't able to identify George II as the last British ruler born outside the UK. Still, she got quite a consolation prize: Her second place finish won her \$100,000. And for six years, she held the record for highest total winnings by a female player in non-tournament play until Julia Collins surpassed her.



One for the books! During her time on *Jeopardy!*, Kelly set four records, all of which were eventually broken, including highest five-game total (\$179,797) and longest winning streak by a female player in non-tournament play (six games).



Jackson is a big fan of Broadway's *Hamilton*; it was his inspiration, as he repeated the line, "I am not throwin' away my shot."

● **MATT JACKSON**

WON \$611,612

While a student at Yale University, Jackson was a top quiz-bowl player for the school's team and won several national tournaments. The Washington, D.C., native tried twice to enter the college tournament of *Jeopardy!* unsuccessfully. Ultimately, in 2014, he auditioned for the regular show and was selected. To prepare for his big game show moment, Jackson studied the books of past champs like Jennings' *Brainiac* and Bob Harris' *Prisoner of Trebekistan*. On *Jeopardy!*, Jackson, a paralegal, proved to have killer buzzer speed and was known for quickly jumping into the next question after each of his correct responses. He enjoyed a 13-episode streak that ended with quite a payoff on Oct. 14, 2015, making him the fourth-highest in *Jeopardy!* regular-play history.



● **ROGER CRAIG**

WON \$530,200

Until "*Jeopardy!* James" came along, the computer scientist held the record for highest single-day winnings upon surpassing Jennings with a single-day record of

\$75,000. Craig held this record from September 2010 until April 2019, when Holzhauer topped him. (Holzhauer has taken over several of Craig's records, including the largest unadjusted Daily Double bet.) With a master's degree and doctorate in computer science, he prepped by studying the online archive of past questions. Craig's strategy was to use data mining and text clustering to determine the topics most likely to pop up. He used Anki, a space-repetition program, to memorize information and tested himself using a program he created himself.



● **COLBY BURNETT**

WON \$408,334

The Oak Park, Illinois, high school teacher is the first—and still only—*Jeopardy!* contestant to win the Teachers Tournament (2012) and the Tournament

of Champions (2013), the latter of which netted him a whopping \$250,000 grand prize. Beyond *Jeopardy!*, Burnett's game show career continued with a stint on the third season of TBS' *King of Nerds*. With his winnings, one of the best things he spent the money on was a new home for his mother in Chicago, where the champion continues to be a local legend. Illinois Governor Pat Quinn designated Dec. 18 Colby Burnett Day to honor the man who "established himself as a role model to his students, the State of Illinois and the entire country."

“AT THIS LEVEL, THERE IS SKILL INVOLVED...YOU’VE GOT TO BE PREPARED. AND ONE MISTAKE CAN COST YOU.”
—BEN INGRAM



● **BEN INGRAM**

WON \$250,000

After becoming a champion all on his own—winning eight straight games (and \$176,535) in 2013 and the Tournament of Champions the following year—Ben Ingram of Florence, South Carolina, was one of just 18 former contestants selected to participate in *Jeopardy!*'s first all-star draft in 2019, and compete as part of a team for the grand prize of \$1 million. "I'm honored to be here," enthused Ingram, who went on to be picked fourth by captain Julia Collins. "This is just going to be a classic tournament. I'm ready to concentrate and do battle." Although the IT consultant put up a good offensive as a member of Team Julia, in the end he went home empty-handed.

Not only did Ingram himself make a splash on *Jeopardy!*, but when his girlfriend later competed on the game show, the champion cheered her on from the audience.

THE GREATEST OF ALL TIME

IN 2020, THE THREE HIGHEST-EARNING CONTESTANTS SQUARED OFF FOR \$1 MILLION.

Sixteen years after Ken Jennings made game show history, he returned for an ultimate showdown with the two contestants who have been nipping at his heels ever since—James Holzhauer and Brad Rutter—on ABC's *Jeopardy! The Greatest of All Time*. Besides bragging rights, the three men, whose combined winnings were \$10.7 million, were all vying for a \$1 million grand prize.

The 2020 championship special was the first time in 30 years that *Jeopardy!* aired in prime time on network television, and for the Jan. 7 premiere, 15 million people tuned in from around the country (plus Canada) to watch the epic battle of wits. *The Greatest of All Time* was slated to play out until March 17 as a best-of-seven series, but they only made it to four: Just a week later, Jennings won his third game (Holzhauer won the trio's second match), becoming the show's G.O.A.T. While not the greatest, Holzhauer and Rutter didn't do too shabby in the end: They each took home a \$250,000 consolation prize.

With the \$1 million jackpot, Jennings' total *Jeopardy!* winnings topped \$5,223,414, allowing him to narrowly surge past Rutter by \$84,978. Making revenge even sweeter, Jennings also took back the title of highest-earning American game show contestant of all time, which Rutter had snatched from him. A decade and a half after Jennings' original 74-game streak, he proved he truly is the greatest *Jeopardy!* player to date.



I HAD A LITTLE JAMES VOODOO DOLL AT HOME, AND I'D POKE HIM IN THE BRAIN WITH THIS PIN!"

—KEN JENNINGS, ON HOLZHAUER

Jennings, who always excelled in literary-related categories, won on a Shakespeare clue.