



# WINNING BIG

## at the National History Bee and Bowl



by Hari Parameswaran

*One student's competitive streak and dogged pursuit of historical facts led him to a new appreciation for history and a place in the spotlight at a national competition.*

**W**hen I was younger, I never really enjoyed history. I thought of it as mundane names and dates with no relevance to the present day. Geography made a lot more sense to me. As a family, we travelled around the world, which helped keep my interest in geography alive. So it was natural that the first big competition in which I participated in middle school was the National Geography Bee, a contest organized by the National Geographic Society and open to U.S. students in grades four through eight. Little did I know at the time where it would lead me or what I would learn along the way.

In seventh grade, a winning score in the school geography bee qualified me for the state competition. After losing in a tie-breaker, however, I missed making finals. Undaunted, I returned in eighth grade to snatch a spot at the state finals, where I got knocked out quickly after missing questions on San Antonio and India—both places my family has lived. Heartbroken, I thought it would be my last chance at success in a middle school competition. But then I learned about the National History Bee.

### Showing off My History Knowledge

The National History Bee is a buzzer-based competition in which thousands of students in elementary and middle schools across the United States compete against their peers to show off their history knowledge. In our middle school, interested students take a test to see who will represent the school at the regional history bee. In eighth grade, I tried out on a whim and, much to my surprise, scored the highest, qualifying for regionals.

When my parents and I arrived at the regional competition in Columbus, Ohio, I did not expect to make the finals, much less win. But I advanced comfortably, clinching the regional championship by answering a question on the Iran-Contra Affair—something I had learned about while watching a television series the week before.

Winning the regionals boosted my confidence and motivated me to prepare for the next level of competition. After spending hours reading history books and having my mom quiz me, I finally felt ready for the national championship in Louisville, Kentucky.

On Memorial Day weekend, I arrived in Louisville for the National History Bee. Structured a bit differently than the regional competition, it contains eight preliminary rounds, as compared to five in the regionals. The top 128 players in the preliminaries are then pitted against each other in a playoff elimination system (quarterfinals, semifinals, finals). The competition proved exhilarating. I came out as one of the top 10 competitors in the preliminary rounds and ended up placing in the quarterfinals (top 32) overall.

### Moving on Up

With middle school behind me, I sought out new activities at the high school level. I signed up for the high school quiz bowl team. I also informed our coach, Madame Spence, about the National History Bowl, in which teams of up to six members from a given high school compete at either the JV or Varsity level against other high school students. She quickly rounded up my friend, David, a sophomore, to partner with me in the JV division. I continued to read more

### Rules of the Game

In the **National History Bee**, elementary and middle school students take an online exam to qualify for the regional bee. Top-scoring students travel to one of 40 regional finals, where they answer questions on historical topics. Top finishers advance to national finals to compete for the title of National History Bee champion and the opportunity to compete in the International History Olympiad.

In the **National History Bowl**, teams of up to six high school students answer questions on a broad range of historical topics at the regional, national, and international level.



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books and have my mom quiz me. Before I knew it, the National History Bowl was just around the corner, and we were on our way to Arlington, Virginia, to take part in the tournament.

The competition and questions were much tougher than they had been in middle school. For example, they started asking questions about topics that were unfamiliar to me, such as the history of Poland. We lost two rounds in the playoffs, finishing 12th nationally. While 12th place wasn't bad for my second time at the History Bowl, I felt driven to do better.

After years of being oh-so-close to taking home the gold, I was tired of losing out. I spent much of that summer studying intensely, reading several books on European History (my weakest subject at the time) and having my mom inundate me with tons of questions.

### The Big Time

This time, our school's JV team arrived at the National History Bowl in Washington, DC, with a full roster of four players, including two eighth-graders. My coach picked me to captain the team. The morning of the first day went by smoothly as our team swept past the others. Next came the afternoon rounds, where I was surprised to find so many "A" teams—unusual this early in the competition. Luckily though, we managed to get past them without too much trouble.

Then came the evening matches, which is where you make the quarterfinals—or not. The teams that make it this far are all very good, and you always have to be on your toes. In the three matches we played, I dug out of some deep holes to come back and win games. The most exhilarating moment came when I clutched a lightning round on *Brown v. Board of Education*, correctly answering all of the questions for a comeback. Following those nerve-wracking rounds, we made it to the quarterfinals.

We played our quarterfinal game that night at 9 p.m. I was extremely exhausted and ready to call it quits, but I managed to keep my composure and rally my team to win and move on to the semifinals. I was ecstatic! Never having reached the semifinals before, I was more determined than ever to make it to the finish line. With newfound focus, I walked on stage for the finals of the JV History Bowl. To my surprise, we beat the other team by a significant margin. Fortunately, I'd learned about General Nathaniel Greene in my U.S. History class that year—the topic of the winning question!

Our team put Beaver Creek High School on the map as National History Bowl champions. Our team, parents, and coach were all proud of the win we brought home. Especially gratifying was when the tournament director, David Madden, awarded me MVP of the JV History Bowl.

**M**y experience with the National History Bowl has completely changed my outlook toward history. I now realize the important role history plays in how countries make decisions. I also find history fascinating, especially learning about innovative battle strategies (Hannibal's double envelopment strategy used at Cannae!) and underrated laws our presidents have passed (like Woodrow Wilson's passage of the Clayton Anti-Trust act, decreasing the power of monopolies). Armed with a newfound appreciation of history and confidence in our team's ability, I hope that this year, we can repeat last year's feat. ■

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Learn more about the National History Bee at [historybee.com](http://historybee.com).  
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