

This Is ... Quiz Bowl!

My Beginnings as a Trivia Lover

by Nancy Cashman

Editor's Note: This article presents the Quiz Bowl program as it was conducted during 1984-1986. Since that time, some Quiz Bowl rules and procedures have been changed.

Quick!! Name the three golfers who dominated the Masters tournament for seven years in the 1960s... Don't know that one? How about the subjects and author of the bestsellers *The Agony and the Ecstasy* and *Lust for Life*? Not a literature aficionado? Okay, here's an easy 10-pointer. Name the capitals and leaders of America's two nearest neighbors. If these questions and their answers seem like common knowledge, you may be a trivia buff! If useless information, thinking on your feet and a willingness to display your total ignorance to a crowd of people seem appealing, then a spot on your local Quiz Bowl team may be for you!

Quiz Bowl? Properly defined, Quiz Bowl is a competition which pits teams against each other in matches where correct answers are the prizes and knowledge nerds are the champions. In North Carolina, the Quiz Bowl system is found in high schools statewide. Participating schools pick teams each year to compete in a spring time contest where county winners advance to a regional meet and then to a state contest televised on UNC-Center for Public Television. North Carolina Quiz Bowls are organized by county public library personnel who coordinate local and district competitions with the area schools' advisors and teams.

What comprises a team? In competition, teams are allowed only four members, but most squads are made up of a core team and several alternates. More important than the number of individuals on any given team is the proper attitude of its members and their dedication to the sport of Quiz Bowl. Quizzers are not afraid to display their intelligence, not always an easy task for high school students concerned with the pressure to assimilate themselves to a popular norm. Quiz Bowl is an outlet for many bright students to exercise their minds and have fun simultaneously.

My personal knowledge of Quiz Bowl comes from spending three years on Wilmington's New Hanover High School team, including two years as its captain. As a sophomore and newcomer to high school, I was determined to try everything that seemed interesting or challenging. At the time, Quiz Bowl was captained by a close friend who encouraged me to try out. I remember that I was one of a very small group of underclasspeople to take the short-answer test. Leaving the room afterwards, I felt sure that I had failed. I couldn't even recall the questions that were asked! I was to find that this became a familiar phenomenon of future Quiz Bowls, both in competition and in practice.

Despite my uncertainties, I made the team on my first try, the lone sophomore amidst three seniors. Soon we were practicing several times a week aided by our exemplary advisor, Colonel Ray Brackett, and several team parents who made up questions for us. Our homework was to watch the news and read newspapers and magazines, such as *Newsweek* and *Time*. I tried to bone up on my weak areas of sports and science, as others concentrated on cultural facts and historical data. We held several practice meets with other students and had marathon sessions of *Trivial Pursuit*®. Our first challenge, the local bowl, was scheduled for February. Colonel Brackett spied on our competition from the three other schools, two public and one private, and we assessed our chances at emerging victorious. New Hanover had not won in a few years, and we were really hungry for a triumph.

The appointed day arrived, and I was shocked by my nervousness. What if I disgraced myself by not remembering an easy fact or missing obvious current events questions? As the youngest member I felt I had to prove myself as being a valuable element in the team's success. We were to be broadcast live on WHQR, Wilmington's public radio station, which necessitated the use of microphones, a factor which

contributed to everyone's anxieties. An untold, invisible audience, in addition to the huge crowd assembled, would be privy to our performance.

However, the competition was held at the New Hanover County Public Library, a comforting, familiar place, and was moderated by library personnel whom I had known for years based on my status as a true bookworm. These well-known faces and the setting allayed some of my fears, as did the lengthy reading of Quiz Bowl rules. Our team was impatient to play, eager to test ourselves, and hopeful of displaying our hard-won knowledge.

I have to be honest and say that I don't remember many of the questions. Our concentration was so absolute on each query that after an answer was given, the

If useless information, thinking on your feet and a willingness to display your total ignorance to a crowd of people seem appealing, then a spot on your local Quiz Bowl team may be for you!

preceding question was immediately forgotten in favor of the next. I recall a feeling of superiority when I was positive I knew the right answer, and the thrill when I guessed at a question and was correct. I do remember one question in that first match involving sports. The question dealt with the most recent World Series, and I was asked to name one of the two teams that took part. Aware of my teammates' eyes on me and conscious that the three of them, all sports buffs, knew the correct answers, I frantically searched the recesses of my mind for names of baseball teams. From somewhere, a source still unidentified, came a name. I uttered the fateful team and hysterical laughter broke out from the audience and from my compatriots on both teams. Mystified, I looked at the judges and saw them trying to hide their smiles as one of them intoned "...That is

incorrect." Later, a team member told me that not only had the *Brooklyn Dodgers* not won the World Series in recent memory, but that the *Brooklyn Dodgers* were no longer a baseball team! Despite this fiasco New Hanover went on to win the local Bowl, pulled through by our team's strength in the 30-point question round.

Perhaps I should explain the scoring system and the different types of questions used in Quiz Bowl. Questions are divided into 10-, 20-, and 30-point categories according to difficulty. Ten-point questions are supposedly the easiest and are typically short answer; either you know the answer or you don't. Twenty-point questions are harder and require a little more thought. Thirty-point questions are the hardest. Time limits are imposed on answer periods, 5 seconds for 10- and 20-point questions, and 10 seconds for 30-point questions.

Questions are asked to one person on one team. The questions rotate from team to team and from person to person on each team. A round is completed when everyone on each team has been asked a question.

During rounds one and two of 10- and 20-point questions, only the person questioned can answer, and there is no consulting among team members. During round three, the 30-point questions, any member of the team may answer, and consulting is allowed among members of the team. Consulting may begin only after the question has been asked. If a question is incorrectly answered by one team, or not answered at all, the question goes to the other team. However the question is not repeated and if correctly answered by the other team, only half the point value is awarded.

Thirty-point questions really show the team's strength, and they were New Hanover's secret weapon. We were successful with these, and they were the deciding factor in many wins for us. We were relatively cool under pressure, which served us well in the 30-point rounds and during tie-breakers. The latter occurred if the third round ended with a tied score. One question was asked,

and both teams were allowed to consult and write an answer. Obviously the team with the correct answer won the match.

In my first year with Quiz Bowl, New Hanover's team was successful in winning the county bowl and then the district bowl in Laurinburg before losing in the semi-finals at the state competition in Raleigh. Our trip to the district bowl was exhilarating. We quizzed each other all the way to Laurinburg, getting more and more excited as we neared the competition site. All the team members, including the alternates, several parents, and our library coordinators were with us, so New Hanover made an impressive group. We had elected a team mascot, a pink bunny, whose origin I have forgotten, but it was along for the trip too.

The district bowl included teams from Bladen, Brunswick, Columbus, Duplin, Scotland, and Robeson County, as well as our team representing New Hanover County. This competition was to be taped for public television, so we were all dressed up. The other teams seemed to blur together as we won our first match and then our second. Suddenly, we were in the finals and after two tiebreakers, New Hanover emerged the District champion and we were on our way to Raleigh. It hardly seemed real as we drove home, and I was more nervous about the competition to come than I had been for either of the preceding ones.

In the few weeks separating the district and state bowls, our team practiced in earnest. We played *Trivial Pursuit*® endlessly and new questions were culled from all sources. We became minor celebrities at school; what had been known as a slightly odd extracurricular activity for the "smart crowd" became an acceptable pastime. I began to dream about Raleigh, and my dreams always ended inconclusively. I would wake up in a cold sweat with a correct answer on my lips, hearing a mythical moderator saying..."You are out of time..."

The day arrived, and our caravan of supporters left Wilmington for the drive to Raleigh. In the days before I-40 our trip took three hours, and every second was utilized for questions. We arrived at the Museum of History in downtown Raleigh in plenty of time. Assessing our setting, I explored the museum to calm myself. Our first round arrived, and we took our places on the stage. I positioned my name tag, so that the moderator could read it and took a big swallow of water. The questions began. Looking at the video tape my parents recorded of the bowl, my fuchsia pink suit seemed garish and my nervousness was evident in my jerky movements. However, we won that first match and the second one to reach the semifinals. Suddenly a state championship was in reach, and my head swam. However, it was not the Wildcats' year, and we were defeated narrowly in this third round. We comforted ourselves with the fact that our opponents went on to win the championship.

I would love to be able to say that New Hanover High School went on to win the state championship the following year; however, this did not occur. Indeed, the Quiz Bowl team of 1984 was the best that New Hanover County has produced in its history of Quiz Bowl sponsorship. I became captain of the team in 1985 as a junior. We had a good team that year and the next, but luck and the right questions were not with us. Much to my sorrow, New Hanover did not win the county championship in 1985 or 1986.

Quiz Bowl taught me several valuable lessons, as I believe that it can teach other young adults. Most importantly, Quiz Bowl gave me confidence and a lot of poise. I learned to take pride in my intelligence and not be afraid to show it outside the classroom or the privacy of my own home. I learned to work with others as a unit and to rely on other individuals' support for strength and confidence. Last, but by no means least, my appreciation for library personnel increased tenfold. Although libraries, librarians, and the world that they encompass have always been a comfortable environment for me personally, through Quiz Bowl and my interaction with participating library personnel the North Carolina library system took on new stature for my teammates and me.

Ben Byrd

*Distributor of Small Press Books
Videos*

Select Distributed Lines

"THE BEST in SMALL PRESS"

Unique Books, Inc.

104 Big Oak Circle
Madison, AL 35758
205-837-1891

4230 Grove Avenue
Gurnee, IL 60031
708-623-9171
Fax 708-623-7238

