



James Holzhauer on an episode that aired April 17.

# Man or cyborg? ‘Jeopardy!’ champ passes \$1 million mark

By DAVID BAUDER  
Associated Press

NEW YORK — There’s no truth to the rumor that James Holzhauer is a cyborg created to be the perfect “Jeopardy!” contestant. But given how he’s made a level of excellence rarely seen on the television quiz show appear almost mundane, it sometimes seems that way. Holzhauer eclipsed the \$1 million mark in winnings Tuesday on his 14th appearance. Not only has he won \$131,127 to shatter the program’s previous one-day record of \$77,000, he already has the top five one-day scores in the history of a game that has aired regularly since 1984.

The professional gambler from Las Vegas is quick on his feet and quick with the buzzer, displays an extraordinary breadth of knowledge and — true to his profession — is cold-blooded in his willingness to risk big sums of money.

The show’s most hallowed records, set in 2004 when Ken Jennings won 74 games in a row and earned more than \$2.5 million, seem like a plausible goal.

“James is just a perfect ‘Jeopardy!’ machine,” Jennings told The Associated Press this week.

Like most of the game’s best players, he did his share of studying in advance, finding that books geared to young people were a good way to learn about unfamiliar topics. He built a replica of the show’s buzzer and practiced while playing along on TV, standing in his living room like he has to do now in front of a podium. Holzhauer says he rarely guesses — he doesn’t like those odds — but seems never to have forgotten a fact.

“My goal was just to be less nervous than the other players,” he said. “Whenever I felt overwhelmed, I snapped my fingers three times and pictured a fun snow festival with my daughter.”

He did have one audacious goal: to honor his daughter by winning \$110,914 in a single episode, since her birthday was Nov. 9, 2014. He accomplished that on his fourth show.

His strategy is to begin games with the highest-value clues, hoping to quickly build winnings and

land on the one “Daily Double” in the first round. When he does, he usually bets everything, punctuating it with a motion that makes it seem like he’s pushing in all his chips. If he’s wrong, there’s enough time to earn more money. But he’s rarely wrong.

The two “Daily Doubles” in the game’s second round are also coveted. He doesn’t bet everything then, but he puts a lot on the line.

Holzhauer said show host Alex Trebek once told him that he doesn’t gamble because he could win \$1,000 and not care, but that losing \$20 annoys him.

“I’m not surprised that most contestants don’t gamble the way I do,” he said. “Loss aversion is a very real factor.”

The Final Jeopardy round gives him one more chance to place a big bet. On the show that aired April 17, Holzhauer bet \$60,000 on the category of 20th Century literary figures. The clue was: His first name refers to the ancient district in which you’d find the Greek capital; his surname is a bird.

He correctly answered: Who is Atticus Finch?

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