

Published August 29th, 2012

## Moraga Native Places Ninth at Scrabble Championship

By Jennifer Wake



Conrad Bassett-Bouchard concentrates during the recent National Championships Photo Provided

Although so sick he could barely stand, Moraga native Conrad Bassett-Bouchard finished in the top 10 among 73 world-class competitive Scrabble players for his division at the National Scrabble Championships (NSC) August 11-15 in Orlando, Florida. The 22-year-old former Campolindo High School student is currently ranked No. 7 in the top division for North America.

Bassett-Bouchard started competing at age 14 in 2004 and one year later was the youngest competitive Scrabble player to reach "expert" ranking at the time. Bassett-Bouchard has competed in approximately 100 tournaments across the globe since then, including a trip to Thailand and Malaysia last year.

"Scrabble is gigantic there," said Bassett-Bouchard. "We were in a crowded mall with loud, crazy rock music playing in the background. It was much different than tournaments here where there are just a bunch of people quietly thinking in a ballroom."

Unlike the casual game of Scrabble played on family room tables, competitive Scrabble is much different. An article in the Journal of Experimental Psychology stated successful competitive Scrabble players require three cognitive abilities: word fluency, because the game requires the rapid retrieval of appropriate words from memory; visuospatial ability, because the spatial layout of words and letters on particular squares on the board determines the point value of a play; and numerical ability, because players need to calculate probabilities and rapidly use the numerical properties associated with different combinations of words located in different places on the board. Tournaments are timed, with an average of 11 to 13 plays per player in the

game or about two minutes per play. Points are deducted for each minute players go over their allotted 25 minutes of playing time.

"Competitive Scrabble is more about probability and expected value," said Bassett-Bouchard. Expert players need to estimate the probability of retrieving certain remaining tiles, and rapidly add the point values for different possible words placed on different squares on the board to determine which of several possible words will yield the highest point value, noted the article.

To prepare for competition, Bassett-Bouchard practices about the same amount of time each day deciphering anagrams using a word-study program called "Zyzyva" and the Leitner Cardbox Method to study the dictionary, but said it would take thousands and thousands of hours to memorize the entire thing. "I haven't memorized it," he quipped.

What Bassett-Bouchard likes most about competitive Scrabble are the many people he's met over the years. "Jerry Lerman from Foster City has had a huge impact on me, and I learned everything online from Kenji Matsumoto in Berkeley," he said. "Nationals is like a family reunion in a sense. It's really cool to know so many people. I can pretty much show up anywhere in the country and know someone."

Bassett-Bouchard's next major tournament will be at the California Open November 2-4 in San Francisco. If you have any questions about competitive Scrabble, you can contact Bassett-Bouchard at [conradbb@gmail.com](mailto:conradbb@gmail.com).

Reach the reporter at: [jennifer@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:jennifer@lamorindaweekly.com)

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA