

# Who is... Hannah Sage

# JEOPARDY!

For two weeks in April, 2016 Saint Stephen's graduate Hannah Sage had every member of the campus community sitting on the edge of their seats as we all tuned in for four nights to watch her exploits on the iconic television game show, Jeopardy!

The poised, articulate sophomore at the University of Central Florida was one of 15 qualifiers for the show's annual College Championship Tournament. Displaying knowledge ranging from Harry Potter and pop music to the Bible and Russian culture, Sage buzzed her way past students from Stanford, Dartmouth, RIT and Oklahoma into the final round.

Although she eventually finished third, \$1 behind Tufts University freshman William Scott for second place, and chasing overall winner Dhruv Gaur of Brown, Sage made her mark. She was just the ninth student from a Florida university to compete and only the third to reach the final round in the 29-year history of the nationally televised tournament.

During her years at Saint Stephen's – she came to the school as a sixth grader – Sage was a National Merit Scholar and a member of the Academic Team. She was one of five SSES students on the six-member Manatee County team that won the 2016 Florida Commissioner's Academic Challenge.

With the Jeopardy! hoopla complete, we spoke with Hannah about her experience:

**Q:** So how did this whole process start? Are you a Jeopardy fan?

**A:** I've always watched it with family, since I was in elementary school. It was our dinner-time television. After doing Academic Team at Saint Stephen's, I've continued with Quiz Bowl here at UCF. One day at practice someone mentioned that the College

Tournament quiz was online and that we should try it. I think we all just wanted to see what would happen, so we took it. They post the correct answers, but you never actually find out your score. About two weeks later, I got a call and was invited with two others from UCF to audition in Atlanta, so we drove up together. We did an interview, a written test and played a mock game. They said once you get home you'd either get a call to be on the show or hear nothing and you could try again next year. I didn't think

much about it other than I'm a sophomore and I'd have two more years to try when I didn't make it. But I got a call and they asked me if I wanted to be on the show. I couldn't believe it. I remember jumping up and down in my room.

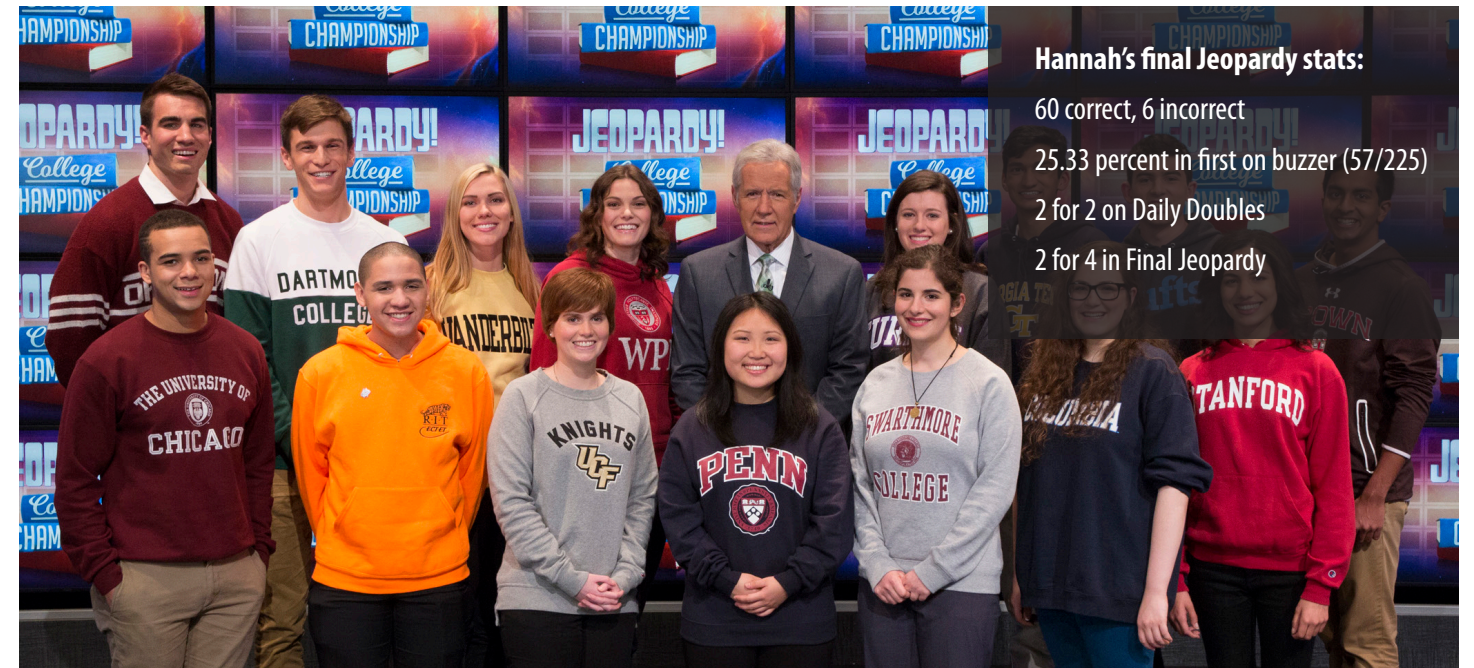
**Q:** So then you were on your way to California?

**A:** We were originally supposed to film in January and I was going to have to miss the first two weeks of classes after the (holiday) break. I went around to my professors to let them know I would be out, but then they called and said the tournament had to be moved back until March because Alex Trebek was having brain surgery. The timing worked out better because it was during my spring break. We filmed in Los Angeles at SONY

Studios. They sent me a plane ticket and paid for my hotel. My Mom went with me. We flew in on a Saturday, had Sunday to look around, and then filmed everything on Monday and Tuesday. They shoot a week's worth of episodes in one day. I really didn't believe it was happening the whole time I was there.



Photos courtesy of Jeopardy! Productions, Inc.



## Hannah's final Jeopardy stats:

60 correct, 6 incorrect  
 25.33 percent in first on buzzer (57/225)  
 2 for 2 on Daily Doubles  
 2 for 4 in Final Jeopardy

**Q:** Did you get any preparation, or did they just put you on the set and let it rip?

**A:** We did get to do a practice round to get experience with a microphone on and using the buzzer, and to make sure we could see the board. They also did a tutorial with us about the block that we stood on behind our spot on the stage. It would raise up so that we all looked about the same height. Everyone I played with was taller than me, so I was up about four inches on the block.

**Q:** You appeared so poised and calm. Were you nervous at all?

**A:** I was terrified. The morning of the first taping I woke up in the hotel and said to my Mom, "What if I don't know the answers to anything?"

**Q:** Did your experience with the Academic Team at SSES provide any help?

**A:** It definitely did. The material I learned at Saint Stephen's and UCF were a great foundation. The buzzers we used at Saint Stephen's were very similar to what we had on Jeopardy.

**Q:** Is there one memory that stands out to you from the competition?

**A:** I guess it was making Alex cry. I don't know why, really. After I won the semi-final game, he came over and he was crying. You probably couldn't see that, but if you watched the next round you might remember him saying at the beginning that we were so good that it made him cry.

**Q:** Did you get to spend any time with him aside from the taping?

**A:** All the time we spent with him was on the set. We would take commercial breaks like the ones you see on TV and he'd come over and talk with us. There would also be breaks where he'd re-tape if he messed up at all reading any of the questions. He was just very nice and very funny. I remember him coming over one time and saying to one of the contestants, "You did a pretty good job for a jock!"

**Q:** I imagine it was pretty tough to know the outcome but to have to keep it secret until after the shows aired in April?

**A:** It was really hard. I couldn't tell anybody. When the first episode aired, I had friends from Saint Stephen's come to UCF and watch with me and support me and I wanted so bad to tell them I'd won, but I couldn't say a word. My Mom came with me, so she knew, but I couldn't say anything to my Dad when I got back. That was so hard! I tutor on campus and one of the other tutors said, "You can tell me, right?" I said, "Sorry! No."

**Q:** Have you had anyone recognize you from being on the show?

**A:** I was on campus and a girl walked past me one day, stopped, pointed at me and said, "Oh my God!" That was definitely a little weird. I still feel weird talking about myself.

**Q:** Have you kept in touch with any of the other students who competed?

**A:** We did get to know each other. Being in the Green Room we'd all play UNO and Jenga and it was really nice. We have a group text that we use. We weren't allowed to have our phones with us so we didn't give anything away, but after the first day when we went back to the hotel, we all friended each other on Facebook.

**Q:** So you won \$25,000, right? Any plans for those winnings?

**A:** That's right. I'll probably splurge on some travel and go to Italy. Maybe go to Disney. The rest I'll save for medical school.

**Q:** Can you audition again or is that it for Jeopardy?

**A:** I'm not allowed to be on it again. I also can't be on Wheel of Fortune because it's owned by the same company.

**Q:** Do you have any message for all of your fans at Saint Stephen's?

**A:** Thanks for watching and supporting me. It really means a lot. And thanks to all of my teachers. I couldn't have done it without you.