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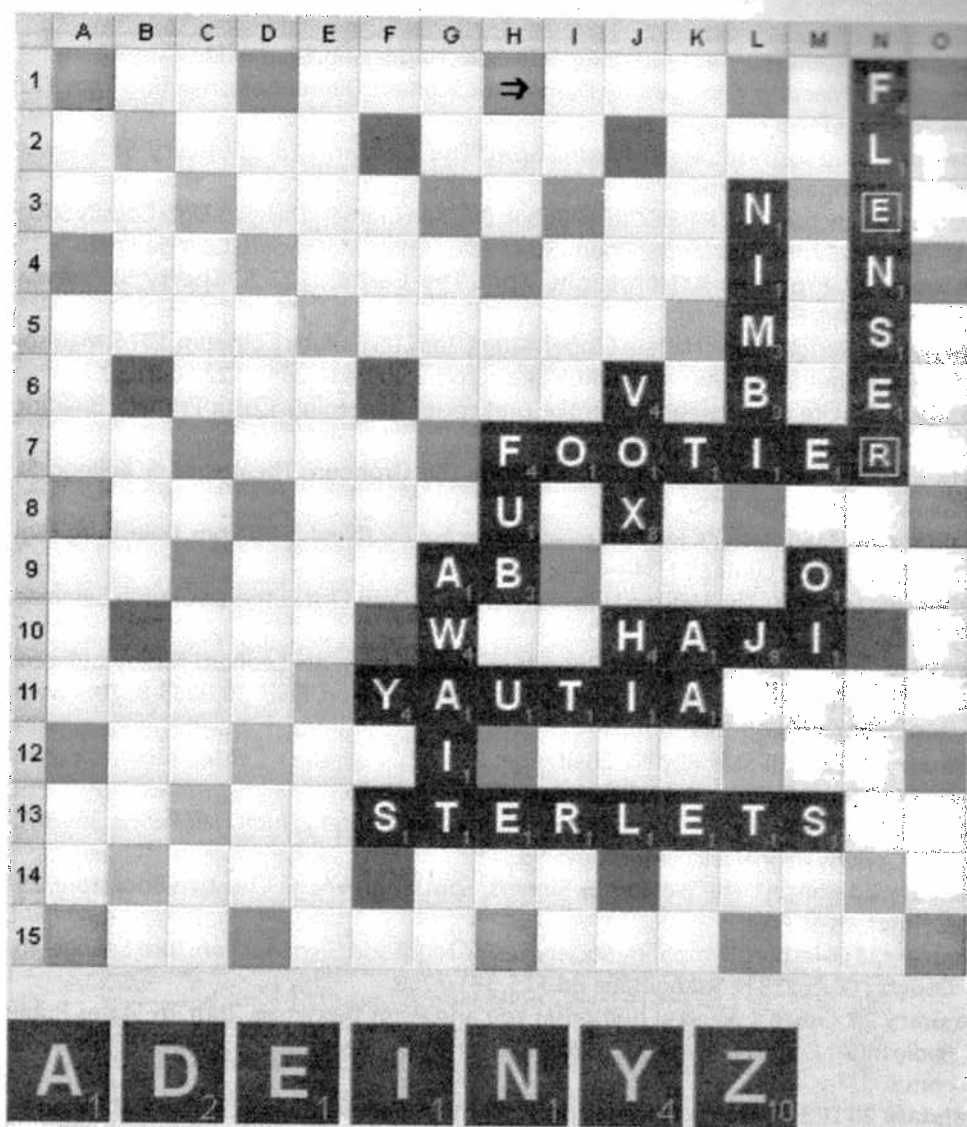
Missing my chance at Scrabble® infamy

They say everyone gets 15 seconds of fame or at least an opportunity for it. Well, last Saturday, I had a chance to set a national record. During game #12 of a thirty game marathon Scrabble® tournament, I had these seven letters on my rack: ADEINYZ. And with an open F on a "triple line" in the top right corner of the board, after my opponent played FLENSER for 79 points, my mouth began to salivate at the prospects of responding with a high scoring play myself, one covering the corner red "triple word score" square. So when I saw NAZIFY for 93 points (the 10-point "Z" gets doubled on the blue square before the entire word gets tripled), I got really excited. So I immediately threw it down and called out the score. But, for some reason I didn't hit the clock which is the official way to end one's turn. Rather, I looked down at my rack and saw DE sitting on it. Then I thought, "Isn't DENAZIFY a word too?" Normally one doesn't talk about one's hidden tiles, but I muttered something like, "oh my God," and put these two letters on the board completing the seemingly magical 8-letter play. I didn't count the new score of the play but I knew it was going to be something unimaginable for a Scrabble® player of any ilk. You see, if you cover both red squares on the same play, the word isn't tripled but triple-tripled for nine times the original score. Plus, since I was now going to get rid of all seven letters on my rack, I would be playing a "bingo" which yields another 50 point bonus. So, had I counted, the score for playing DENAZIFY was going to be 356 points!

I left the word on the board and contemplated whether to "go for it" or just take my 93 for NAZIFY which I was 100% sure of. But just as DENAZIFY seemed to "ring a bell," I thought I might be confusing it with DETOXIFY, a word I run across quite often in my environmental work. Taking the

93 points was going to give me a 32 point lead against a very strong word guru, Mark Kenas, who had recently come back from competing in the World Championships in Indonesia. I knew that he would challenge DENAZIFY if it wasn't good and I would not only lose my turn but also the 93 points I was guaranteed to get for playing NAZIFY. Also, if I lost my turn, not only would I now be over 60 points behind against Mark but I'd also definitely not get to play anything nearly as lucrative on the following play since he would block the 90+ point play. He'd also get another turn and probably be up close to 90 points, almost certainly ensuring a loss for me. But there was more working on my mind as I decided what to do.

Earlier in the game, I had made two big mistakes, something I had avoided in most of the earlier games. First, I challenged the word FOOTIE which was for only 11 points. Normally, I almost never challenge a play that is less than 20 points unless I am 100% sure. It's good and means the same as FOOTIE (under the table...). Next after the wrong challenge, I played TRESSLE (which happens to be properly spelled TRESSEL) and lost another turn after Mark challenged. To lose two turns in the same game is very rare for me and against top competition usually spells disaster. Clearly after these blunders I was flustered and annoyed with myself. So when two turns later I had the chance to make "history," I wasn't very confident that my mind was working well. Also, since winning is the only thing that matters in terms of improving one's rating (or ranking) and one's winning margin (or the total number of points scored) is not, I felt the need to play the sure thing rather than try something extravagant. Having a chance to win, after having made two big errors, seemed quite an attractive option as well. In order to gauge the likelihood of



DENAZIFY being good, I even looked at my opponent trying to get a read from him. To his credit, Mark gave me the best "blank stare" one could offer. I am sure I wouldn't have been able to do so if our roles had been reversed.

So, why would it have been historical to play DENAZIFY for 356 points? Well, as it turns out, though I didn't know the specifics on this at the time, no player in the American speaking world has ever played a 300 point play in a tournament game; Mark Cresta of Massachusetts did score 365 for QUIXOTRY in 2006 but it was during an unrated club game. Wow, I could have been a name in the Scrabble® history books. All I had to do was

hit the clock. All I had to do was gain enough composure and let my mind regroup but my clock was ticking away (one gets only 25 minutes per game) and causing me extra stress. Oh, well. I'll have to settle with the win (final score: 423-393) and the satisfaction that I almost made history. Funniest thing is ... after I hit my clock and took my 93, Mark plopped down DE in front of NAZIFY and got 72 points for it. I thought of challenging, but figured, at that point, it must be good. So he got to play it and I got the ratings points. I guess we are both winners (or losers).



This week's "freezing fog" coated branches and sidewalks with a thin, slippery, layer of ice but created some ethereal scenes around town