

RANDOM SAMPLES

ANOTHER GAME OF BOGGLE, ANOTHER WIN FOR HIS WIFE

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BY RYAN E. SMITH
BLADE STAFF WRITER

I am a loser.

To some of you, this admission will come as no surprise. You saw the big glasses I wore in junior high school and you knew.

To me, it was a startling revelation, one that I'm reminded of every time my wife and I play the word game Boggle®.

The rules of the game are simple: Shake a tray full of 16 letter dice so that they settle randomly into a grid. Then you have three minutes to form as many words as possible using letters that touch each other. We play until someone gets 100 points.

I have never beaten my wife at this. Ever. I've become so obsessed with this that for the past month I've insisted on playing almost nightly for at least an hour, even though I never come close to winning.

Do you know what it's like to live with that kind of consistent failure? In the world of great rivalries, it places me right alongside Wile E. Coyote, Captain Ahab, and anyone swimming against Michael Phelps.

CAN YOU BEAT RYAN OR HIS WIFE AT BOGGLE?

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Or better yet: it makes me the Washington Generals, the basketball team that hasn't beaten the Harlem Globetrotters since 1971.

"It's been a few years since we won a game," admits John Ferrari, general manager of the squad that will have yet another chance to break its losing streak tonight at Anderson Arena in Bowling Green.

Since its creation in the early '50s, the team has lost more than 15,000 games. None of them was rigged, Mr. Ferrari says; the Generals just keep coming up short, sometimes by as little as one point.

"The reality is that we have to play a really great team [but] there is no head hanging, feeling of inferiority," he told me. "We go out there every single night with the idea that we will win this basketball game."

That is the same attitude I bring to my nightly Boggle battles, but as in the case of the Generals, it doesn't seem to matter. I always end up at a loss for words: While I'm struggling to find something as short as "cat" (1 point) my wife is spelling high-scoring whoppers like "flattens" (11 points).

An experience like this is humbling and frustrating. I work with words for a living and was an English major in college. Surely, with a lot of practice, I could defeat my lovely wife — even just once, maybe late at night when she's getting sleepy.

Things haven't played out that way. The interesting thing is that facing defeat after defeat after defeat has only deepened my resolve to keep playing. I half-expected to hate the game by now; instead, I've become completely preoccupied with it.

When my wife comes home from work, I don't ask how her day was; I ask if she's ready to lose at Boggle. (She always replies with a polite: "Sure.") One night, determined to end her string of vocabulary beat-downs, I insisted that we play for three hours straight. It was a massacre.



Everyone must have something like this, right? Like my boss who can't seem to beat his wife at badminton. And yet many of us keep playing, even insist on it, despite the fact that it makes us perpetual losers. Why?

I won't deny that pride has something to do with it. I want to win at least once. So you could look at my mind-boggling quest here as a sad reflection of the American attitude that winning is everything. For all the talk of "it's how you play the game," does anyone really believe that mantra if you never, ever win?

The Washington Generals do. They cherish the fact that they're playing a game they love, that they put forward maximum effort every night, and that they push their already great opponents to be better. Best of all, even in loss they always find hope.

"Quite honestly, there's another game to play tomorrow," Mr. Ferrari said.

Of course, tomorrow's game probably won't be necessary for either of us. He's predicting a win tonight and so am I.

Contact Ryan E. Smith at: ryansmith@theblade.com or 419-724-6103

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