

Inside Jeopardy! – Who is Scott Riccardi? – 7.29.25

[00:00:00] From the Alex Trebek Stage at Sony Picture Studios, this is Inside Jeopardy.

Sarah: Scott Riccardi, our 16 game champion, our engineer from Somerville. I have to ask, how's the summer going for you?

Scott: Uh, has to be one of the best summers I've ever had. Not a lot to compare it to.

Sarah: I can't imagine that you were actually able to keep the secret.

I know when we talked, when you left the studio back in May, you said, I'm gonna keep this secret. Only my friend Jason, who's here knows this has happened. What's that been like as your game after game victories continued?

Scott: It's been really fun to, uh, to watch it kind of slowly dawn on people. Because there was definitely like sort of a shift about halfway through the run where every night everyone who came to watch was, uh, really stressed out all game.

They were like, Hey, could you maybe get a runaway or two so we don't have to be so worried? [00:01:00] And there were a lot of just real nailbiter games all through the first half of the run for sure. And uh, at a certain point I think things shifted where people got more confident and they. It's almost thing where you kind of start to worry because people start to assume you're going to win, which is a little too much to put on someone's shoulders.

And uh, it's kinda a double-edged sword, but it's been really interesting to see people, like early on they kind of see you and they're worried that you might not have won at all.

Sarah: Yes. And

Scott: they try to kind of, uh, hedge their bets with how they try to congratulate you. And, uh, they're like, well, you know, if it didn't work out, that's fine.

And then. Once a few winds start to come in, you just kind of get this feeling. It really just dawns on people in a different way, you know?

Sarah: Yeah. Well, I wanna paint a picture for people, because obviously we often talk about Jeopardy airtime versus Jeopardy production time. So you first came out to [00:02:00] Los Angeles, your first tape day was May 1st, it was a Thursday.

You brought all your family and you just played those last two games of the day. Obviously we tape five shows in a day, and you played in the last two games. So. Your family was here, they know you're a two game champion and you know, you had to be feeling pretty good at that point, heading back to New Jersey.

Scott: Oh, definitely. I'm sure. Uh, like I'm, I'm sure if it hadn't gone well, they would've, they would've felt excited just to have gone. But yeah, I. I was glad I got to really like give them something to look forward to for the next several months. Just not knowing what would happen. It was tough to not tell anybody and even especially, you know, with my roommates, I feel like they had a sort of sense of how things went, just in the sense of when is he gonna get back where?

I think, I like to think that every night I didn't return, you know, from the airport. They got a little more optimistic. Or they maybe thought that I was trying to conceal my movements, you [00:03:00] know?

Sarah: Yeah. So you're a two game champion. You leave you head home on that Friday, but not for very long because you were back taping on May 6th, a Tuesday, just a few short days later.

And oftentimes we tape two consecutive days. So, you know, multi game champions like yourself have to play. 10 consecutive shows, but, oh no, we're wrapping up the season, so we're actually gonna tape three consecutive days. And as it turned out, you then had to play in 15 straight games. That's a lot of jeopardy.

Scott: Yeah, I, I think it's just the most exhausted I've ever felt physically and mentally. It was a thing where the momentum kind of really kept me going. Through the games, and then as soon as I got back to the hotel room, every time there was just nothing left.

Sarah: Yeah. It gives you an appreciation for Ken Jennings ever going on a run where he actually competed in 75 straight games, right?

Scott: Oh, yeah. Whenever someone would be like, so like, are you coming for Ken [00:04:00] Jennings's record? I obviously, I, I don't tell them anything specific, but I do try to make sure that they're aware of just what 74 wins looks like, and. How unbelievable is that. Anyone ever did that? Could possibly do that again.

Sarah: Well, I think one thing that has been consistent throughout your run is that people really enjoy watching you.

They're rooting for you. I think so many people, although they were happy for Jonathan, were really disappointed to see you lose last Friday, because of course they were thinking, this is it. He's gonna win through the season. He's gonna come back as the champion as we start season 42. You know, you had won so many games at that point.

Did that final game. Come at all as a shock to you?

Scott: Yeah. The pacing of that final game was really interesting. I remember feeling obviously very good in the jeopardy round. Opened up a lead pretty early, and he was making [00:05:00] a lot of incorrect guesses, I think, just due to nerves. Yeah,

Sarah: and

Scott: it was almost kind of, I feel like a lot of games in the past, my jeopardy round would be a little bit weaker than the rest of them, and then things would kind of pick up with the buzzer, especially in the double jeopardy round.

In this case, I guess I should have known maybe it, it was a bad sign that the jeopardy round was going well. There were signs of something, things to come and I just remember I, I am kind of kicking myself for not going straight to that Greek category because I think it's a pretty strong one for me. But I guess I really, literature had been treating me very well for the entire run.

So I think I just kept going back to that one. I might've even, even after like in the top row clues, I think I was still going back to that literature category. Then he hit those daily doubles. It felt like it was kind of a one-two punch. And then there's just a feeling of, oh, wait a minute, this game is still very much in play.

I don't know how many, you know, bottom row clues I can rack up to possibly still put this out of reach. And I remember [00:06:00] vividly. Really kicking myself for not knowing the name of the Pharrell Lego biopic. Ah, because he's

by peace. I know. I had been telling people like it's, I think it's really funny that for some reason Pharrell made a Lego biopic, even though he's not necessarily like known for being a fan of Legos or associated with Legos.

Something that came up, I was like, oh no. I've told so many people about this Pharrell movie and I have no idea what it's called. Then the other thing I think really sealed it was there was a \$2,000 TS Elliot clue about the wasteland. Mm-hmm. Where I just kind of hung for a while. No one rang in my mind, went to all of the wrong two obscure TS Elliot stuff like, like the book that inspired Kaz and all of that.

And then right before time around, Jonathan got in it on that and he got it right. And that's when I could tell that he was like really getting his momentum back and was not gonna let me run away with the game. So final hit. And I remember thinking, okay, I just, [00:07:00] well, the same thing. I always think I need to get this right.

I can't assume the opponents are gonna get it wrong.

Sarah: Which throughout your run you always did. I mean, when final came up, when you needed it, you always got it correct in those moments when you needed to.

Scott: That's right. Yeah. I, it was an interesting, I think it was an interesting case where. Yeah, it was just very unfortunate timing where there were finals.

I feel like I know I had a good final run early on in my streak where I didn't get any wrong for some time, and then it felt like a lot of the ones. That I did end up getting wrong. They were, they were pretty tricky or they were, you know, there were ones that, when I get them wrong, my opponents, yeah.

When I get them wrong, my opponents would also, um, get them wrong as well. So at least felt like, okay, like maybe it's okay that I didn't get that right. I feel, you know, some sense of consolation. But this one in particular, oh, I saw the category and I thought that's really broad. That's concerning.

Sarah: Yes.

20th century names. Yeah. 20th century names. What's in a name?

Scott: 20th century. It's a lot. It's a hundred years. [00:08:00] There's a lot of names. It's one, and you try to, it's one of the, obviously when you see the

category, you try to sort of preload some possible answers during the wagering and like the commercial break.

But that one is just so broad. There's so many possible names. It could be, and really there was kind of a fateful thing that happened where before I even flew out for the show, I had kind of reminded myself, okay, there's a few obvious clues that I'm always getting. Wrong in when they appear, you know, in like past games in the final or just as clues.

And I noticed I'm always missing things like, I'm always missing the Tower of London and I'm always missing Citizen Kane, even though those are really big things that are kind of in the cannon. And I remember during a, an ear much earlier game, I, I thought to myself, what were those two things I always forget?

And I remember Tower of London and Citizen Kane just completely escaped me. I forgot that was something I needed to kind of remind myself to have on my mind. And for this particular clue, because Citizen Kane was based on the life of William Randolph Hearst. If I had just queued up in my mind, citizen [00:09:00] Kane, you know, in time for that, I think maybe I would've gotten there.

Sarah: Let's remind everyone of the clue, according to what obituary in 1935, he owned 13 magazines, eight radio stations, two movie companies, and \$56 million in real estate. So what went through your mind, you know, as you're reading that clue and trying to come up with the correct response?

Scott: Yeah, so I think an unfortunate thing happened there where, uh, generally when there's these, there were a lot of things to choose from in terms of what was really.

The most important factor.

Sarah: Yeah. One of the clue of the pins in that clue. Yeah. Yeah.

Scott: And you gotta figure out which one usually, like when they give you that much, everything's in there for a reason, first of all. And unfortunately, I had read, I had been reading more recently about Howard Hughes and I think my entire, uh, jeopardy prep, I had com either like completely skipped over William Randolph Hearst, or I confused him with some other three named [00:10:00] Williams out there in history.

'cause you know, it's just like. It's one of those names that just sometimes can wash over you. Unfortunately. And I remember seeing, I remember thinking I was really onto something 'cause I saw the movie studio part of that clue and it really jumped out at me that I had just been reading about, uh, Howard Hughes and how later in life, I think it might've just been maybe one movie studio.

But he got really into movies as something he did like once he really got his fortune. So I latched onto that way too hard, wrote. Uhon wrote Howard Hughes very confidently

Sarah: quickly. I mean, you wrote it so quickly, and of course I can see as everyone is writing their responses, and when I see the H I'm like, he's got it.

He ends the season as a champion. And then the other letters where I was like, oh, oh. And then I thought, you know, because you are a very reflective champion, I thought. You might change it. You know, you, you write something quickly, then you think about it. Maybe he's gonna cross it out and change it.

Meanwhile, we've seen Jonathan [00:11:00] has rode Herst and it was a long 30 seconds, let me say that, Scott.

Scott: Oh, I'm sure. Yeah. That clue I, I think I was just so confident that I didn't give it the amount of reflection that I should have. And also in hindsight, I couldn't remember if there was something about like Hearst Castle in there, that real estate clue really.

That was, there was, I think there was something there. Had this famously Hearst Castle in, uh, San Semon. Mm-hmm. Which I guess I should have visited when I was over here.

Sarah: Yeah. You should have just stayed, not gone home in between tapings and visited the Hearst Castle. Who knew?

Scott: Yeah. Well, the problem is I didn't go home between tapings, but what I did Oh, was go to Disneyland and.

Six Flags.

Sarah: I'm not gonna question that. Those are also really great choices.

Scott: Thanks. Yeah. And you love

Sarah: rollercoasters, so I do. Did you ride all the rollercoasters in Six Flags, even like XI rode 'em all. Yep. Wow. Okay. And you didn't get stuck on any, 'cause we know you had told us in previous interviews during the run that you had a couple of rollercoaster rollercoaster [00:12:00] mishaps.

Scott: That's true. A lot of people have been, uh, telling me about how it feels like every two or three games I just. Have a new like mishap or bad thing that happened to me from my anecdote. And there's a concern that like before this, nothing good was happening to me, which I can assure people is not true. But I've just got a lot of, uh, I guess I've been stuck a lot of places that really stood out to me as a good thing to tell a story about.

Sarah: I don't know if you saw it, but people online were discussing how so many of your stories were about high school and, you know, then Mateo Roach actually came to your defense and they said, look, as a 20 something year old Jeopardy champion, you have had less than a decade of adult life, and there are only so many things you can talk about.

Scott: Wow. I didn't realize that that happened. Oh, yeah. I have so much respect for Matea as a player. I'm, it's so cool to hear that from them. Uh, yeah. But I totally agree with, I, I totally agree with that. Where. Especially 'cause yeah, for me, I am 26, so kind of disproportionately I've been, [00:13:00] I've been out of college for not that long and uh, it's kinda an extra special case for me where.

I actually, I turned 21 on what I call like COVID Eve.

Sarah: Yes. And that's what else Mateo said So many people in their mid twenties, so much of their adult life was COVID.

Scott: Exactly. There's just kind of a void there where no new stories really happening. I guess there were COVID stories, but you figure people aren't watching Jeopardy to hear about.

No.

Sarah: People don't wanna hear that. No. Alright, well let's talk about some of your other stories I have to know. What's the update on the marimba? Has it been purchased? Is it causing your top Florida collapse? What is the update?

Scott: Uh, so at this point, um, it's really just more of a logistics thing where we're hoping I'm, I'm, I'm hoping to, you know, be able to get a little bit more room for it or figure out a better space situation than I currently have now.

Um, my friends and roommates did take. My dig at their floor. [00:14:00] Very personally though, they said, Hey, like this floor can hold up a marimba. Like it's, it's fine. Uh, and yeah, actually this, I didn't realize this kind of thing happens, but I guess it does where as soon as the marimba was mentioned by can on the show.

Mm-hmm. Like I had a, like a marimba company just reach out to me and be like, Hey, you know?

Sarah: Yeah. You thinking

Scott: of anybody, we're right here.

Sarah: Yeah.

Scott: Just so you know,

Sarah: that happens. They also know you've earned nearly a half a million dollars', so you know, they know that you could be in the market.

Scott: I know people were like, oh, do they offer you a discount?

And I was like, I doubt it. I don't think they know. I don't need one apparently.

Sarah: Alright. How about the baking? Has there been any new creations happening? Are you continuing to do the baking? We, we wanna know. Yeah,

Scott: so I'm actually doing something really, uh, extra for my 16th win. 'cause I remember after coming back, I tried to remember like, which shows did I even mention?

I was trying to place when I mentioned each anecdote.

Sarah: Yeah. Because there were so

Scott: many of them and it kind of was hard to really piece them together. And I was like, I think I mentioned desserts in some of those. It could be fun

[00:15:00] to just make the desserts as they come out on the show and then just have like a kind of like, look under your, your seats.

Oprah situation. The

Sarah: cheesecake with the carrot cake.

Scott: That's exactly right. For the 16th show, the cheesecake inside of the carrot cake made an appearance. I had to do a mad dash to get it done in time. I left the cheesecake out overnight by mistake. And had to redo it. So in, in a way, it was, I kind of had to, I smuggled the cake into the watch party, and then in that cake, which was smuggled into the watch party, I smuggled a cheesecake.

So it's a double Trojan horse carrot cake situation.

Sarah: I love this. Do your friends know how lucky they are? I've never heard of any viewing party in the history of Jeopardy. Champions where the champion is bringing the dessert and they're baking it.

Scott: I, yeah, I think they, uh, I, they always have a lot of really nice things to say about it.

I just thought it would be fun to make it like a weird four dimensional experience. I was worried that I might. Not remember [00:16:00] which game had the dessert in it, and that I would sort of walk in, in the background, find out I'm telling a story not about the dessert, and have to really awkwardly backpedal out with a whole carrot cake.

But luckily that didn't happen.

Sarah: Yeah, well we, we probably would've given you, you know, if you, if you didn't remember, you could've reached out to us. We would've confirmed for you. But I love that your memory was perfect. And now a quick word from our sponsor. If you've shopped online, chances are you've bought from a business powered by Shopify.

You know that Purple shop pay button you see at checkout, the one that makes buying so incredibly easy? That's Shopify, and there's a reason so many businesses sell with it because Shopify makes it incredibly easy to start and run your business. Shopify is the commerce platform behind 10% of all e-commerce

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And now back to Inside Jeopardy. What's it like in Somerville when you're walking down the streets? Are you starting to get noticed? Are people like, Hey, are you that guy from Jeopardy? [00:18:00] That's usually about how it goes.

Scott: Yeah, it's exactly, you really nailed the impression there. It's definitely, uh, yeah, starting to gain traction like that where, um, I will run into people sometimes and they will have watched Jeopardy the night before and they'll see me and they will not put two and two together that I'm the same person sometimes.

Sarah: Yep.

Scott: I will say the first, uh, recognition that I got was, I've mentioned like some obviously is the place on the show that, uh, I'm, that's where I currently live. I need to really shout out everyone in my hometown of South Plainfield.

Sarah: Okay. South Plainfield.

Scott: South Plainfield. Everyone there has been so excited and so supportive, and the first person to, uh, recognize me was actually the local pizza place in South Plainfield.

I went in to just grab a pie to pick up from my parents, and then behind the counter, I, I was pointed out to everyone in the restaurant, which felt really interesting.

Sarah: I gotta know, do they make a good pie in South Plainfield?

Scott: Oh yeah. Oh, actually, they sure do because South Plainfield has a population of [00:19:00] like 24,000 I think.

And in spite of that, there are about 10 pizzerias.

Sarah: Okay.

Scott: And interestingly, actually, my best friend Jason, who stayed throughout the whole taping. Yes.

Sarah: Friend Jason, he knew it all. He kept the secret with you.

Scott: That's right. He was, he was at the taping and uh, for the first two shows, his fiance and my good friend Emily was also there.

And they did a pre-wedding event where we blind taste, tested all of the pizzas in South Plainfield to definitively figure out which one is the best.

Sarah: Wow. You guys have a lot of fun. I love this. I wanna do a blind pizza taste testing. This is incredible. Yeah. So one thing you said every time we would talk throughout your run was.

It's just, this is just so hard to believe. Has it sunk in at this point? You know, where months out from when you actually taped these shows? Can you believe it happened at this point?

Scott: I think it's a, it's sunk in a little bit more [00:20:00] than when I was there, but it still feels like my brain is kind of. Putting it, it's not really classifying it as a real memory of something that happened.

It feels like more like the way that you remember a dream where your brain thinks it's a memory, but you're like, no, like that wasn't real. That's too far outside of what's normal to have been a real thing. But I mean, now that I'm hearing from so many people, people that I haven't spoken to in such a long time and so many high school teachers.

Actually just teachers on all, all the way down to kindergarten actually. Yeah.

Sarah: They all wanna take credit for this. Come on. Yeah. It helped you get there.

Scott: Exactly. I think now that it's more out there and people know about it, it does feel more real. 'cause before it was so strange because it was, I, you know, I came back from the airport from a really long flight and just think, just thinking, okay, I won all these games of Jeopardy and.

Almost no one actually knows that it happened. So like, did it really happen? It's kind of a dream that falls in the woods situation. Yeah. [00:21:00]

Sarah: Well, I remember at the end of your last episode you were talking with Ken and you said, I think I can, I can finally relax. And Ken shared that he remembered that was kind of his feeling at the end.

It's like you're just, you're going and you're going and you're going and you almost can kind of give a sigh of relief when it's over. Do you feel like you've kind of been able to, to relax, to turn off that, uh, jeopardy brain for a little bit?

Scott: I think so, and I think what helps with the delay between taping and airing is that you kind of have like, you sort of get a full month or two to just privately It's, it's great.

It really just, it does feel like grieving, which feels a little dramatic, especially considering it was after winning 16 games. So I shouldn't, I shouldn't be sad about anything, but you kind of have some time to privately move on. First you sort of. Wake up multiple days in a row thinking about William Randolph Hurst.

Um, just first thing on the mind and you try to, you know, you gotta stop yourself from going over all the things you could have done [00:22:00] differently in that last game. Part of what was really nice about, yeah, like at the end there was that, that really just ties into how good Ken is with empathizing with the players.

He put himself in my shoes there. The fact that, you know, he was at the end of the game just able to really. Even with me and with other players, I, I always noticed that when there were players that where you could really tell that they were taking things pretty hard after the game, you could really sense that he focused extra hard on really emphasizing the things that they did strongly chances for them to potentially return, you know, in second chance you could really see the wheels turning in terms of like, how do I let these players know

that what I did was, how do I let these players know that what they just did was so.

Special and that they are. Also talented, you know?

Sarah: Yeah. Well you mentioned Second Chance. There were certainly some competitors along your run who we took notice of for Second Chance. There were some you, you beat [00:23:00] some great players, you know, and then we look ahead past Second Chance, of course. We'll have champions wall card, and then we'll have this little thing.

You may have heard of it. We call it the Tournament of Champions. Now, when I asked you, you know, right after you had lost, you said, I'm gonna just take some time, but I'm gonna continue to, you know, learn about things that I am curious about or things that I come across in the world. I thought was such a great approach.

How has your preparation been? Are you, are you ramping up yet? Are you still kind of just going through life and being curious?

Scott: At this point, it's really just more, I'm just sticking with Yeah, like any sort of natural curiosity stuff that comes up. I'm definitely not aggressively tearing through Wikipedia pages the way I was getting ready for the show.

I think I've really just been focused on experiencing the run happening in real, I guess, not real time experiencing the run happening as it actually. [00:24:00] And, and

Sarah: JT versus JPT. Yeah. That

Scott: right? Yeah. So I'm sure, I'm sure anyone else, uh, who's going to be in the turn of Champs is probably relieved to hear that.

I've been taking it pretty easy. The foot is, I think so. Yeah. The foot has been off the gas pedal. And I will, I'm like just, I'm just as worried about all the people who could come up through Second Chance and Champions Wild Card as the other champions also. 'cause there are a lot of. If there are a lot of players where, just looking back on some of these games, I wonder, I, I wonder how I even won some of those games because everyone, everyone there is just, I guess everyone there is so good.

I guess really part of what comes down to the buzzer is so tricky and most people have one game to figure it out. Most people get the privilege of after seven games being like, wait, I think I understand the buzzer. That's great. Normally it's, it's tough. You're just, you're just thrown into it and it's.

It's really hard.

Sarah: Yeah. And even in your first game, you know, you were not in the lead heading into final, you needed final [00:25:00] and you needed for Jason Singer to miss final Yellow Jackets. You come up with it and that's how your run began. And as we look back, there are so many champions, just like Ken Jennings, who in that first game, you know, before they go on a long run, they needed to get final.

It was not a lock for them. And then it really sets the story into motion. But I do wanna just point out some of your incredible stats throughout your run. First of all, you're on the Leaderboard of Legends. I remember asking you, do you even know what that is? And you were like, well, I kind of looked it up and thought maybe I'm gonna, no, I'm not gonna get there.

But you did get there. You are obviously there for two categories. You are tied for 10th with Ryan, long for most consecutive games, one, and then of course, you're in eighth place for total earnings in regular season play. I also remember you saying that, you know, you're 10th in one of the categories, so you can easily see how someone else will come along and that you'll be right there cheering for them.

Scott: Yeah, absolutely. If [00:26:00] whoever gets on that leaderboard just stayed there forever, then there wouldn't be that much excitement for any new players, you know, getting their chance at it. Part, part of why that the last few games for me were so. Exciting was it. The fact that I wasn't on there at all. And then with that really big \$40,000 game that I had, I went from not on it to eighth.

Yes.

Sarah: You knocked off like four people. Yes.

Scott: Yeah. And that I like, I think that was, that was maybe the moment that I, I didn't realize it was even, it could even happen that day or that it would happen ever. And it's the, yeah, it's the really, the type of thing and, and the people on there. Names were, I, I just think these are such amazing players.

I couldn't possibly, I couldn't possibly rise to that level. Like there's just no way.

Sarah: Yeah, you were knocking off champions like David Madden and Julia Collins and, you know, big, big, big champions. Alright, let's take a look at some of your season high stats. So, first off, [00:27:00] correct responses. 39 in a single game.

That's the highest we saw all season. A record that hasn't. Been reached since Amy Schneider, so that's just kind of setting it up how good you really are. Corey at 36001st in that category as well. Then we've got your double jeopardy score, \$40,000, another first, your final score, so that's \$50,400. You're tied with yourself in second place only surpassed just so slightly by Will Yancy.

So another great stat there. And then you just look at you throughout. You're just really consistent. Uh, correct response is your average is 27. I wanna bring up in the game you lost in that final game. You had 31 correct responses. So I think even in that game you were playing great and it's just, it's Jeopardy.

It came down to those daily doubles and you didn't get [00:28:00] them, and so you didn't have the runaway. But a, as you hear me say these stats and you think about, you know, the mark that you've left on Jeopardy history, how does that feel?

Scott: I don't know when I'm gonna totally process it, because it's one of those things where I'm still.

It feels like I'm, I'm so, I'm just so used to Jeopardy being something that I'm just an observer for and it feels so, it just feels not possible that I could like, like, like, like reading game recaps, but there are recaps about me just doesn't compute at all. 'cause you know, I, I'm just really, I'm, I'm so happy I could be a part of it 'cause Jeopardy.

It's been a part of my life as far back as I can remember. And it's, it's just, it's, I think it's such an important part. Honestly, I feel like it feels like it's an important part of the culture. It's one of the few things that's been a constant for [00:29:00] decades, and I can't believe I get to be a part of that.

And it really has been the fact that this made other people in my life and people that I don't even know, just so excited. Has been really heartwarming to see,

Sarah: well, as I told you, after you lost that final game, we get very lucky here at Jeopardy. Our super champions are also just incredible humans and we're so

excited to share in this success with you to watch everyone talking about Scott Riccardi, the Super Champion, and we cannot wait to welcome you back for the Tournament of Champions.

Congratulations on everything. Thank you. I'm

Scott: so excited.

Sarah: We'll see you then.