

# The Math Genius

One day, in Reno, Nevada, there lived a quite peculiar boy. He was named Michael J Davis, ironically after the legendary Michael Jordan of the Chicago Bulls. Michael's parents were huge basketball fans and always dreamed that their son would share in that love. The Davises were one happy family, except for one thing, Mr. and Mrs. Davis hate math and are horrible at it. 12-year old Michael, however is a math genius.

Michael won the Northwestern Nevada Math Tournament two weeks ago. On March 20, in two weeks, he was set to participate in the Nevada State Math Tournament. Here's how the tournament works: On March 20, the semis will take place. Michael, representing the Northwest, will play the winner of the Southwest, Tyler Burkener. Whoever wins the southeast[John Havien] vs. northeast[Matt Jonathan] will play in the State Finals on March 22nd.

Each match there are five questions. The two contestants sit in booths on opposite sides of the stage. When they figure out the answer (using mental math) they enter the answer into the computer provided and press the buzzer provided. The first is adding in the billions, the second is subtracting in the billions, the third is multiplying 8-digit by four-digit, the fourth is long division, and the fifth is a mystery. The fifth is usually the hardest question. The tournament takes place in Las Vegas Microsoft Arena.

Michael was very nervous about the tournament. He dreaded being embarrassed in public. He wished the day would never come. But soon enough, it was March 20, and the Davises were driving to Las Vegas. Later that day, the semis started. Each round question is worth 1 point, except the final round, which is worth 4 points. That means if you lost every round but the last one, you would tie. So, basically you are never out of the match until it ends. If the match ends in a tie, a bonus sudden death question is given, whoever wins sudden death is the winner.

John Havien beat Matt Jonathan 5-3. The addition question in that match was arguably the best addition question in the tournament. The question was  $4,299,689,321 + 4,567,890,123 = 8,867,579,444$ . John Havien got it. The subtraction, multiplication, and division went to Matt, who acted like those questions were a piece of cake. So, it was 3-1 Matt going into the final question. The final question was: what is  $399 \times 1,456,789,012$ ? John answered it first and correctly, so he was in the finals. The answer was 581,258,815,788.

Two hours later the announcer's voice boomed like a tuba over the loudspeaker: "It is time for the second semifinal match get started!!!! From the northwest we have Michael Davis!!!!" People cheered enthusiastically as Michael walked to his booth. "And from the southwest we have Tyler Burkener!!!" More enthusiastic cheering as Tyler walked to his booth.

It started off great for Tyler, and bad for Michael, who was so nervous his palms were covered in sweat. After the first three rounds he was down 3-0. When the division problem came, it was  $329,987,067/121$ . Michael did it quickly, but not quickly enough. Over on the over side of the room he heard the ring that meant Tyler had won the round. He was down 4-0 going into the last round. He thought to himself now: it'll take a miracle to win the semifinal match now!

Michael waited silently for the problem. Everyone else in the arena was dead quiet too. Then the announcer said the problem: "what is 4 to the power of 6???" Michael thought long and hard about this problem. Then it came to him. It felt like a wave of happiness washing over him. He knew it was 4,096. It had to be. He entered it in and pressed the buzzer. He had just tied it. People in the crowd cheered for Michael as they waited for the bonus question. The announcer's voice came back on: " Michael Davis has just tied it at 4-all. The next question is the overtime or bonus question. Which ever person gets it right first will advance to the finals, good luck contestants. The question is: what's 7 to the power of 9???"

A sudden hush fell over the crowd like they were scared prey about to be eaten. Michael thought even longer and harder about this problem. He felt sweat drip down his face. He thought and thought and just like before, it came to him. It was 40,353,607. It had to be. He entered it in and pressed the buzzer. Cheering erupted like a volcano from the crowd telling him he had won.

Everything after that happened in a blur. He shook hands with Tyler telling him he had been a great opponent. Then he hugged his mom and dad, who were very excited and extremely happy for him, even though they hate math. The intercom blared like a high-pitched record saying the finals were in 2 days here at 6:40pm.

The next two days were as just as fast as it had been in the semis and before Michael knew it he was walking to his booth to even more enthusiastic cheering on Wednesday night. He was playing against John Havien. Michael knew that John was great at showing his work, while Michael did most math problems in his head.

The intercom now blared like a lion's roar, "The National Anthem" was playing, Michael's heart felt like it was beating out of his chest. After the national anthem the crowd cheered. Then the intercom gave an opening speech and said good luck to the contestants Michael and John. It then gave out the first problem. The first problem was  $4,000,999,675 + 5,789,987,879$ . John got this one dead easy like he had in the semis against Matt. He answered 9,790,987,554. 0.89 seconds before Michael. Then Michael got the subtraction one correct. So it was 1-1 going into the multiplication problem. It was silent in the arena for a very long time because this happened to be the time when the computers broke down. Michael was smart with his time and thought about the problem during the break. So when the computers started up again, Michael just entered the answer and pressed the buzzer. So just like that, he was up 2-1.

The second part of the finals was much more interesting than the first part. First of all, while solving the long division problem, someone set off the fire alarm because they saw a small fire across the street. There was a lot of commotion about this and it was 8:30 when they started again. This time, John was more productive during the break than Michael and entered the answer as soon as they got back into their booths. It was now 2-2 going into the final question. This particular question would determine who will be the 12 year-old math champion of Nevada.

For the first time all night, it was dead silent inside the arena. Then suddenly the announcer's voice boomed "the final round's question is: "what is 7 to the power of 4??" There was even more tension in the arena. Michael thought very long and very hard, the hardest he'd ever thought about a math problem. Then it came to him. It came to him. He knew the answer. He entered it in and pressed the buzzer. The crowd erupted in cheers. He was right. The answer was 2,401.

His Mom and Dad ran down and were crying tears of joy as they hugged him. The judge presented him the cup that gleamed like a shiny plate. It read: Nevada State Math Tournament Champion on it. Michael was as happy as had ever been. He shook hands with John, telling him he'd been a very good opponent. The scoreboard gleamed 6-2 and Michael felt like the happiest kid in the world.

The next day the Davises packed up and went back to Reno. When they got home, Michael had a small party with all his friends. They were all very excited for Michael. He continued to love math. When he grew up he went to Stanford and continued to learn and study math. For all the years Michael lived the one he enjoyed most was when he won The Nevada State Math Tournament.