

Chuck Yarborough takes turn as host of bar trivia at Scorekeepers in Parma Heights: On the Job Training

by [Chuck Yarborough/Plain Dealer Reporter](#)

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Gus Chan/The Plain DealerJournalism trivia question: How do you stump a reporter? Ask him to do math. Which is why Pasquale DiMassa Jr., right, the trial lawyer, stand-up comedian and motivational speaker who runs a barroom trivia-game enterprise, handled the math chores for reporter Chuck Yarborough.



Gus Chan/The Plain DealerReporter Chuck Yarborough, in his professorial specs and wielding a microphone as if he actually knows what it's for, reads a trivia question to players at Scorekeepers in Parma Heights.

OJT FACTS

Barroom trivia-game emcee

Fear factor: 0. Between readily available liquid courage and a deep affinity for the spotlight, this was a cakewalk.

Oops: You'd think someone who writes for living would know how to read.

Wasted brain cell: What crucial knowledge have I lost by now knowing that Feline Eve Drink is an anagram of Kevin Federline's name?

Collecting dust in my basement bar is a 3-foot-tall trophy denoting my role on a team that won the

Abilene, Texas, city championship in a Trivial Pursuit tournament in the mid-1980s.

I got hooked on the game by the first question I got, which totally stumped me: "What was the name of Sir Isaac Newton's dog?" My household became infatuated with the game, so much so that one year's favorite Christmas present was a set of gold-plated Trivial Pursuit game pieces.

Clearly, I feel a bond with people who know a whole lot about nothing. It's an affection so strong that it even supplants my distrust of lawyers. That's why, I think, I got along so well with Pasquale DiMassa Jr., the stand-up comedian, motivational speaker, entrepreneur, cancer survivor and -- say it slowly -- lawyer who runs Final Score Ohio: Trivia Live. DiMassa and several hosts emcee the games in taverns across Northeast Ohio. Figures that an attorney would oversee a bar exam.

DiMassa is the proverbial guy who doesn't let grass grow under his feet. A scare with brain cancer -- the surgery scar is visible through the thick thatch of hair crowning his noggin -- left him determined to live life to the fullest.

It takes an infectious personality like DiMassa's to pull it off, and I was crazy enough to try to fill in for him one night at Scorekeepers in Parma Heights.

The game itself is pretty simple: There are two halves, each with three rounds. Each round has three questions. Then there's a halftime question and a final question. Point values increase with each round. For that final question, players or teams can risk as much as 20 points of their total ... provided, of course, their total is 20 or more.

The first-, second- and third-place teams -- few people opt to play alone, but teams are limited to groups of 10 -- win \$30, \$20 and \$10 gift certificates to the bar, respectively, to be used on the next visit. So in that sense, it's sort of self-perpetuating enterprise for player and bar owner.

You eat and drink while playing, then come back the next week to use the previous week's winnings - - assuming you had some -- and eat and drink again.

The fun part, at least for me, was combining my inner Alex Trebek and George Carlin personas to come up with Game Show Host Chuck. Unfortunately, I tend to be hokey, which is why I read one science question -- "What does a volcanologist study?" -- as Mr. Spock, complete with the Vulcan gang sign for "live long and prosper."

I guess it threw some folks off. Nobody actually said, "Old 'Star Trek' episodes," but several of the 10 teams were not aware that a volcanologist studies volcanoes. The dolts. (See what I mean about the inner Trebek? Though friends who've met him say it's not true, the guy always seems to greet incorrect "Jeopardy!" answers with the condescending smirk of a banker on eviction day at the orphanage.)

Some teams are really serious about this, and most are regulars. And it could surprise you what ends up being common knowledge.

If someone said, "Matt, Mary, Lucy, Simon, Ruthie, Sam and David are characters on what television show," would you know "Seventh Heaven"? Every team got that one right. On the other hand, nobody knew that "He who transplanted still sustains" is the official state motto of Connecticut.

I did have a lot of fun with one of the sports questions, although I'm afraid it won't be quite as enjoyable come Super Bowl Sunday.

My beloved Dallas Cowboys, despite their recent troubles, are No. 1 in the NFL in postseason victories. Trivia players were asked to name the next four teams on the list. The Cowboys have 32. That team in black and gold to our east is next on the list with 31 now and probably will have 32 in the next couple of weeks.

But it was gratifying to hear, as I read out the list, a word that rhymes with "ducks" every time I said Pittsburgh, which, of course, I said over and over, with increasing enthusiasm each time.

Of course, I wasn't infallible. I confess that in reading the answer to the final question -- "Rank in age, from oldest to youngest: Melanie Griffith, Melissa Etheridge and Magic Johnson" -- I botched it, which sent up howls of laughter and/or derision from the players.

To which I can say, sure, they all know that the correct answer is Melanie Griffith (born in 1957), Magic Johnson (1959) and Melissa Etheridge (1961).

But do they know that Newton's pooch was named Diamond?

Plain Dealer reporter Chuck Yarborough is moonlighting at a variety of unusual, scary and dirty jobs. Got something you'd like him to do? Call 216-999-4534 or write Chuck Yarborough, c/o The Plain Dealer, 1801 Superior Ave., Cleveland, OH 44114.