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SCRABBLE/Sam Orbaum

NEPD IN THE BUD

Scrabble is a game that produces a fair amount of anecdotes, by the nature of the game itself and the people who play it.

True Scrabble nuts are often just a little loony, and usually quick-witted and witty. To them, a good pun is the next best thing to a bad one. But the most memorable stories are the unintentional bloopers, the etymological errors and linguistic flubs.

At a tournament some years ago attended by the elite of New York's Scrabble community, one of the more renowned players issued a challenge to her opponents **RESTING**, reasoning that, well, you can certainly sting, but can you re-sting? She lost the challenge. Puzzled, she figured what-the-heck: If re-sting is good then it obviously takes an **S** at the end. She was challenged and lost. By the time she realized her pronunciation-inspired gaffe, she had become a little piece of Scrabble folklore.

A similar challenge in the Jerusalem Scrabble Club piqued a confused mispronouncer, who read **APPLY** with the first syllable accented, and determined that nothing but an apple could resemble an apple. The dictionary showed no mercy.

Would you challenge **DO**? I did. It was the first word played against me in the first game of the first tournament I ever played. Nerves, I guess. Later, my opponent confided that when I called "Challenge!" he was horrified, thinking that he'd misspelled it!

A homonym is one word that sounds exactly like another. A 79-year-old Scrabble enthusiast from Herzliya — whose English is very heavily German-accented — seems to have invented the 'unhomonym,' or a word that sounds like another but does not exist. When challenged on the world **NEPD**, she explained that it is derived from the well-known phrase, 'nepd in the bud.'

"I had 'adenoids' yesterday." "Wonderful!" exclaimed a fellow word-whiz. A perplexed eavesdropper, unfamiliar with 'Scrabble-talk,' wondered aloud what could be so wonderful about having one's breath hindered so...

A classic case of 'when in Rome' was reported in the *Scrabble Players Newsletter* recently. A blissfully ignorant player was not well versed in the tricky two-letter words on his first visit to a Scrabble club, a problem of most novices, but he was determined to learn. After seeing the world **XI** (a Greek letter) played, he deduced that all such worlds must be permissible — and promptly cleared his rack

of miserable letters with the play **VIII**, insisting that: “If you can play Roman numerals, so can I!”

And this one from a New York City tournament some years back: One player scored only 95 points, which is pretty hard to do. A fellow contestant commiserated, but was told: “Oh, I don’t think I did too badly, considering I just came here to use the men’s room...”

Scrabble players would not make good radio announcers who, according to comedian Fred Allen’s description, “don’t know anything, but can always pronounce it.” (I know it’s a word, but I don’t know what it means, and I can’t pronounce it, but I think that’s how it’s spelled.)

An elderly gentleman had been playing Scrabble with his wife for over 25 years. After thousands of games with his dearly beloved, he was about to break the magical 500-point mark for the first time in his life. Barely able to contain his excitement, he put down a seven-letter word that would virtually assure him his place in heaven. His wife glowered.

“Well, that’s enough of *that*,” she said calmly, and sent the uncompleted board flying. An indication of things to come for an anonymous bride in England transpired as her wedding ceremony was about to begin. The groom was missing. Missing in action, you might say, as he was at that moment finishing off a Scrabble game with his brother-in-law-to-be.

And fittingly, the last word on Scrabble goes to William Shakespeare. King John, in Act III, quoth: “Zounds, I was never so bethump’d with words!”