



CHIEFTAIN PHOTO/BRYAN KELSEN

Heroes K-8 Academy student Phillip Jackson looks to the crowd in disbelief after winning the 41st annual Pueblo City School's Middle School Spelling Bee on Thursday night at Centennial High School. Jackson's winning word was 'vogue.'

SPELLING COMPETITION

8th-grader earns back-to-back bees

Phillip Jackson outlasts fellow middle schoolers

BY JON POMPIA
THE PUEBLO CHIEFTAIN

For Heroes K-8 Academy eighth-grader Phillip Jackson, "vogue" and "aristocracy" proved to be the ticket to back-to-back spelling titles.

A scholarly tradition for more than four decades, the Pueblo City Schools (D60) Middle School Spelling Bee drew a stately and well-prepared pool of 22 students — the top spellers from seven D60 institutions — to Centennial High School for an evening of mental combat.

Sponsored by Black Hills Energy with local media personality Laura Wilson serving as pronouncer and hostess, the evening was abuzz as the young scholars vied not only for the right to be called King or Queen Bee, but a chance to represent D60 at the state competition in Denver.

The sharp-dressed, bespectacled Phillip breezed through the field in nine rounds to face Karizma McCord (Pueblo School for Arts and Sciences) in a two-round showdown.

After Karizma nailed "incognito" and Phillip "matriarch," Karizma stumbled on "aristocracy." To capture the crown, Phillip not only had to correctly sequence that word but his final one of the evening, the relatively benign "vogue."

Second straight bee title buzzing

Watch the video >>>

WWW.CHIEFTAIN.COM

in his pocket, a surprised Phillip had to be reassured by Wilson that, indeed, he is once again D60's top middle school speller.

"I still didn't expect to win," the soft spoken Phillip said after the spoils were presented. "I have very low self confidence and just didn't expect to win."

Phillip attributed his love of reading — "my favorite is 'Warriors,' by Erin Hunter, even though it's a little below my grade" — as one key to spelling success.

"Reading and examining roots of words, prefixes, suffixes and origins," Phillip added. "That's how I prepared."

The bee's third-place finisher was Aja Mascarenas (Heaton Middle School), who found "desperado" in Round Nine to be her undoing.

Along with Phillip, Karizma and Aja, the top seven finishers in the field have earned the right to advance to the state spelling bee, sponsored by The Denver Post and slated for March 11 at the University of Denver.

For the record, some of the words that exited contestants in the early going were "loiter," "diorama," "gradient," "stoic," "furlong," "polymer," "fathom," "hyphen," "pundit," "orthodox" and "enchilada."

Serving as judges for Thursday's competition were Steve Henson (*The Pueblo Chieftain*), Julie Rodriguez (Black Hills Energy) and Centennial High School educator David Montera, with D60 literary specialist Shaynee Jesik coordinating.

jpompia@chieftain.com