

## **The Michael Jordan of Crossword Puzzles**

**Douglas J. Hoylman (FCAS 1979)**

**1943-2015**

Douglas J. Hoylman, the six-time national champion of the American Crossword Puzzle Tournament, died at his home on November 2, 2015, in Chevy Chase, Maryland. An actuary for GEICO from 1970 to the 1990s, he was born July 2, 1943, in Kalispell, Montana, to Byron G. Hoylman and Nona Marie (Velten) Hoylman.

He earned a mathematics degree at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and completed his doctorate in mathematics at the University of Arizona in Tucson in 1969. In high school, Hoylman won several accolades for his mathematical acumen, including double honors and the highest score in the Mathematics Association of America and the Society of Actuaries' math contest in 1959.

While living in an apartment across the street from his employer, Hoylman rose to fame as a crosswords champion. He was dubbed "the Michael Jordan of crossword puzzles" during a radio interview and was the subject of a November 1998 *Actuarial Review* column, "Nonactuarial Pursuits of Casualty Actuaries." He acquired his love for the word game from his mother and also played Scrabble and Trivial Pursuit competitively.

He is buried at Conrad Memorial Cemetery in Kalispell with a headstone featuring a crossword puzzle connecting the words "Crossword Puzzles Champ." His brother survives him.

The November 1998 *Actuarial Review* article, "A Modest Champion," follows.

# A Modest Champion

by Elizabeth A. Smith

*Editor's note: Brian Haney is taking a break from the column this quarter. He's off to Italy to get married. The Actuarial Review staff wishes Brian and his wife Elizabeth all the best.*

Within GEICO's Washington, DC office, a champion works.

This Fellow got his start competing in the U.S. Open. He was truly surprised when he took 8<sup>th</sup> place—he didn't think that he was that good. Spurred by this early success, he was inspired to compete in his sport's grand tournament. From his competitive beginning in 1987, he was impressive. By 1997 he was a record-breaking champion.

He's not a golfer or a tennis player. What he does is more mind boggling than those sports. His pursuit is one of nuance. It challenges him to decipher the tricky into something familiar. It combines his love of words and of games. He is a crossword puzzle champion.

## A Champ's Beginnings

Our Fellow began solving crossword puzzles as a child. He has enjoyed playing with words and doing puzzles of different types for as long as he remembers. He first read about the U.S. Open Tournament in *Games Magazine* and decided to give it a try. After his strong finish in that competition, our Fellow entered his first American Crossword Puzzle Tournament in 1987, placing 4<sup>th</sup> in Division A. The next year this sleeper won the tournament outright, which started him on his way to becoming the contest's record-holder for most wins.

From 1988 on, our Fellow dominated in the American Crossword Puzzle Tournament. After his first win in 1988, he went on to win the tournament in 1992, 1994, 1996, and 1997, becoming the event's first five-time

champion. He also made impressive placements in his "off" years, winning second place in 1989 and 1995, and third place in 1990, 1991, and 1993.

## Racing the Clock

While the competition is intense at tournaments, it doesn't come from the competitors. They employ no "dirty tricks" or "psyche outs." Beating the

---

**"After his first win in 1988, he went on to win the tournament in 1992, 1994, 1996, and 1997, becoming the event's first five-time champion."**

---

clock to solve the puzzle in time or ahead of time is what drives them. They are a friendly group of people who enjoy getting together every year and solving puzzles. Many have developed friendships from years of competing against one another. Most come back year after year to compete.

In Division A's final round, the contestants solve the puzzles on big boards displayed on stage. Completely calm when it comes to tournament competition, our Fellow finds the final puzzles the most challenging and fun. He shrugs off any indication of nervousness saying, "It's only a game. It's not that big of a deal if I win or lose." The clock is his main competitor.

## Today and the Future

Our Fellow continues to solve crossword puzzles just about every day, mostly from books and magazines. "The puzzles in the daily papers aren't as interesting," he claims. Our mystery actuary has also branched out to include Scrabble tournaments. He has been in several such tournaments and describes himself as somewhere between intermediate and expert. (Just give him a couple of years.)

Following his fifth win in 1997, our Fellow decided to take a break from competition. While he was content to be an observer this year, he does intend to compete next year. Watch for him in 1999.

So the next time you run into **Doug Hoylman**, be sure to congratulate him on his wins. And while you're at it, ask him, "What's a seven-letter word for 'surprise success'?" ■

## The Tournament

Started in 1978, the American Crossword Puzzle Tournament is the first major crossword puzzle competition to be held in the U.S. since the 1930s. The tournament has several different divisions with Division A including everyone—rookies, regional players, young, and old. The tournament awards cash prizes and trophies to winners in all divisions. Division A's prize purse is \$1,000. All tournament crosswords are specially created and edited for the competition.

To learn more about the American Crossword Puzzle Tournament, visit the official Web site at <http://www.crosswordtournament.com/index.htm>. ■

# A Modest Champion

by Elizabeth A. Smith

*Editor's note: Brian Haney is taking a break from the column this quarter. He's off to Italy to get married. The Actuarial Review staff wishes Brian and his wife Elizabeth all the best.*

Within GEICO's Washington, DC office, a champion works.

This Fellow got his start competing in the U.S. Open. He was truly surprised when he took 8<sup>th</sup> place—he didn't think that he was that good. Spurred by this early success, he was inspired to compete in his sport's grand tournament. From his competitive beginning in 1987, he was impressive. By 1997 he was a record-breaking champion.

He's not a golfer or a tennis player. What he does is more mind boggling than those sports. His pursuit is one of nuance. It challenges him to decipher the tricky into something familiar. It combines his love of words and of games. He is a crossword puzzle champion.

## A Champ's Beginnings

Our Fellow began solving crossword puzzles as a child. He has enjoyed playing with words and doing puzzles of different types for as long as he remembers. He first read about the U.S. Open Tournament in *Games Magazine* and decided to give it a try. After his strong finish in that competition, our Fellow entered his first American Crossword Puzzle Tournament in 1987, placing 4<sup>th</sup> in Division A. The next year this sleeper won the tournament outright, which started him on his way to becoming the contest's record-holder for most wins.

From 1988 on, our Fellow dominated in the American Crossword Puzzle Tournament. After his first win in 1988, he went on to win the tournament in 1992, 1994, 1996, and 1997, becoming the event's first five-time

champion. He also made impressive placements in his "off" years, winning second place in 1989 and 1995, and third place in 1990, 1991, and 1993.

## Racing the Clock

While the competition is intense at tournaments, it doesn't come from the competitors. They employ no "dirty tricks" or "psyche outs." Beating the

---

**"After his first win in 1988, he went on to win the tournament in 1992, 1994, 1996, and 1997, becoming the event's first five-time champion."**

---

clock to solve the puzzle in time or ahead of time is what drives them. They are a friendly group of people who enjoy getting together every year and solving puzzles. Many have developed friendships from years of competing against one another. Most come back year after year to compete.

In Division A's final round, the contestants solve the puzzles on big boards displayed on stage. Completely calm when it comes to tournament competition, our Fellow finds the final puzzles the most challenging and fun. He shrugs off any indication of nervousness saying, "It's only a game. It's not that big of a deal if I win or lose." The clock is his main competitor.

## Today and the Future

Our Fellow continues to solve crossword puzzles just about every day, mostly from books and magazines. "The puzzles in the daily papers aren't as interesting," he claims. Our mystery actuary has also branched out to include Scrabble tournaments. He has been in several such tournaments and describes himself as somewhere between intermediate and expert. (Just give him a couple of years.)

Following his fifth win in 1997, our Fellow decided to take a break from competition. While he was content to be an observer this year, he does intend to compete next year. Watch for him in 1999.

So the next time you run into **Doug Hoylman**, be sure to congratulate him on his wins. And while you're at it, ask him, "What's a seven-letter word for 'surprise success'?" ■

## The Tournament

Started in 1978, the American Crossword Puzzle Tournament is the first major crossword puzzle competition to be held in the U.S. since the 1930s. The tournament has several different divisions with Division A including everyone—rookies, regional players, young, and old. The tournament awards cash prizes and trophies to winners in all divisions. Division A's prize purse is \$1,000. All tournament crosswords are specially created and edited for the competition.

To learn more about the American Crossword Puzzle Tournament, visit the official Web site at <http://www.crosswordtournament.com/index.htm>. ■