

# Journal Regional Spelling Bee winner sure knows his Pachinko

Jackson Hunter from Ministik school wins 10-round  
bout

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Grade 6 student Jackson Hunter, 11, proves unbeatable on the U of A stage.

**Photograph by:** Ed Kaiser , The Journal

It took 10 rounds and two potential championship words, but Jackson Hunter, 11, from Sherwood Park's Ministik Elementary, was crowned the winner Sunday at the seventh annual Edmonton Journal Regional Spelling Bee.

Jackson's winning word was 'Pachinko,' a Japanese gaming machine similar to pinball.

"It's just so amazing and it's so special right now," said Jackson. "I thought I would at least do well enough to get 25th place."

Jackson was one of only four competitors who survived a brutal fifth round, which eliminated 19 of his competitors. The other spellers in the final four were: Bilal Ali, 11, from Westview Elementary in Fort McMurray; Adrian Ong, 12, from Calmar Elementary and Emily Koslo, 11, from New Sarepta Elementary.

In the sixth round, Jackson had a chance to win, but misspelled 'garrulous,' which sent the event to another round.

"I was pretty sure I was going to get it wrong," said Jackson after hearing pronouncer Craig Monk say the word.

Jackson regrouped and in round 10 correctly spelled 'triforium' and watched as his two remaining competitors heard the elimination bell. After spelling 'Pachinko' he put his hands on either side of his face, full of elation.

His father, Jim Hunter, said following the fifth round Jackson came and told him that he thought he could win the bee. Hunter remained fairly relaxed.

"(Jackson) came in here wanting to win it. I just tried to temper his expectations," Hunter said. "My wife took all the nervous energy."

It was the second consecutive year Jackson competed in the event, but last year he heard the bell in the second round.

Spelling accuracy apparently runs in the Hunter family. Jackson's sister Hannah also competed in last year's bee and finished 12th.

Musabe Bwimba, 11, from Brander Gardens School, was optimistic about her chances before the event started, but she was one of the unlucky spellers eliminated in the fifth round.

"At first I was really nervous, but it was really fun and I'm glad I did it," Musabe said.

Musabe is hoping that she has an opportunity next year to spell her way to the national competition. She is grateful to have made some new friends and improved her language skills.

Maria Schaade, the vice-principal at Tofield School, said the event is more than students spelling words that the common person would find challenging.

"It teaches them persistence and is a real character-building process," she said. "They're also given a chance to build on their public speaking skills."

Edmonton Journal publisher John Connolly said it's great to celebrate the accomplishments of young students outside of sports.

"Some of these kids are way smarter than me," Connolly said with a laugh.

"It's important for the Edmonton Journal to be involved in promoting listening and education for kids in the community."

At the start of the competition, 66 students from across northern Alberta were vying for a \$5,000 education award and a trip to Toronto to compete in the national Postmedia Canspell finals in March.

They qualified for the event by beating others at their own schools. Nine of the spellers were at the bee for the second time.

Jackson's own experience paid off and he left the U of A's Myer Horowitz Theatre with the trophy, but still shocked that he'd won. Despite winning, he knows he's still got work to do before the national finals.

"I'm going to have to study pretty much way harder than I did for this event," Jackson said. "It's a big step ahead for me."

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