

# State spelling bee victor wins with 'imperilment'

**By Travis Gulbrandson**  
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Can you spell imperilment?

The ability to do so resulted in a first-place win for Maria Henebry at the Scripps National Spelling Bee for South Dakota, which was held Saturday in Aalfs Auditorium on the University of South Dakota campus.

The seventh-grader – who represented the Greater Sioux Falls Home School Association – won after going head-to-head with two other South Dakota spellers for more than half the tournament.

Henebry said she's looking forward to the national tournament, which is set to be held May 28 through June 1 in Washington, DC.

"I think it'll be fun," she said.

Although the oral portion of the spelling bee ran approximately 30 rounds, most of the contestants were eliminated by the 11th round, with Henebry competing against two – and then one – others.

"This was highly unusual, the amount of time we spent with the last few spellers, and then the fact that they were going back and forth," said pronouncer Nels Truelson. "I believe all three of the last spellers all had a shot at a championship round – they all had a chance to win at one point.

"It just shows how very

close it was," he said. "When it's very close, it sometimes does go on for a while, but I don't recall it going on quite in this fashion before."

Yankton Middle School sixth-grader Bailey Sejnoha and Newell Middle School eighth-grader Ryder Heitz were the second- and third-place winners, respectively.

"After a while, I was just thinking, 'Oh my gosh, just get it over with,'" Sejnoha said with a laugh.

"I was, too," Henebry agreed.

Both girls said they did a fair amount of studying beforehand.

"At the end of the school bee they gave us a list, and I studied that," Henebry said.

"I just went online and picked out some harder words, just to practice on those," Sejnoha added.

Although Henebry said she has not decided if she will participate in the spelling bee next year, Sejnoha said it definitely is in her future plans.

"I could still do it the next two years," she said. "I didn't expect to get this far this year, being a sixth-grader."

Prior to the oral portion of the bee, the 10 participants undertook a written test, the winners of which were Heitz, with Lillie Dennis of Patrick Henry Middle School winning second, and Matt Oesterling of the South Dakota Christian Home Educators winning third.

This was the first year



Maria Henebry, a seventh-grader representing the Greater Sioux Falls Home School Association, accepts the first-place trophy at the Scripps National Spelling Bee for South Dakota, which was held Saturday in Aalfs Auditorium.

(Photo by Travis Gulbrandson)

the program was overseen by the University of South Dakota, following many years where it was headed by the South Dakota Newspaper Association.

"It went well," said program assistant Cheryl Havermann. "Everybody

seemed to have a good experience. The kids were great, and I've gotten some e-mails from parents thanking us for taking up the sponsorship and organizing it."

Other than the extended ending rounds,

the event went "pretty much as planned," she said.

"It took longer to get a winner, which is a good thing, because they were top-notch kids," Havermann said.

Other participants included Danielle Gillis of

Yankton Middle School, Tara McEldowney of Castlewood School, April Will of Parkston Elementary School, Jason Schnabel of Tripp Delmont Public School and Lexis Sherron of Brandon Valley Middle School.

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