

FAMU Student Makes It to Jeopardy! Semifinals

Contributed by Angelica R. Roberts -- Black College Wire
Sunday, 15 June 2008

Business major Gabrielle McMahan wins \$10,000

A Florida A&M University Rattler recently slithered her way to the Jeopardy! semifinals leaving the game show with \$10,000. As one of 15 contestants, Gabrielle McMahan was chosen out of 4,000 applicants to participate in the Jeopardy! College Championship in Madison, Wis. She was also the only student from an HBCU. "I am so glad I got the opportunity to go," McMahan told Black College Wire. "It's my favorite game show and I've always wanted to be on it," said the third-year business and marketing student from Springfield, Va. McMahan, 20, has been a faithful viewer of Jeopardy! for years, and said she could not miss a chance to audition for the show when they came to FAMU's campus. To be on the show was a major dream for her. Arthur McMahan, Gabrielle's father, said he "started her playing when she was 6-years-old." "We've played family Jeopardy! since she was young," said Arthur McMahan, 56, from Springfield, Va. In order to prepare for the competition, Gabrielle said she "watched the show every day and reviewed old episodes online." She also participated on the Honda Campus All-Star Challenge team which she said helped her to perform well. McMahan made her TV debut on May 5 at the quarter finals, where she beat Meredith Johnson of University of Minnesota and Brandon Hensley of the California Institute of Technology. She appeared in the semifinals on May 12. With the support of family, friends and classmates, she received many messages on Facebook as well as calls from people congratulating and cheering her on. "Many of my fellow students were excited to see me on TV wearing the orange and green, and I was proud to represent them," McMahan said. Although 20-year-old FAMU student Derrick McMahon had never met McMahan, despite their similar last names, he wrote on her Facebook wall cheering her on during the game. "The moment I heard a Rattler was going to be on Jeopardy! I got in school spirit mode," McMahon said. "Watching her on Jeopardy! was an event at my apartment," said McMahon, a healthcare management student from Frostproof, Fla. "I got me and all my friends together and we ate food and watched her on TV. We called all our family members the moment we found out she won in celebration of her." Despite the fact that she was on TV, McMahan loved the rush the show brought her.

"There was so much adrenaline with a crowd of 3,000, Alex Trebek and the possibility to win \$100,000," she said. "I wasn't nervous at all but very excited and confident. McMahan's journey on Jeopardy! came to an end when she lost in the semifinals. She finished third place in the semifinal round of the college edition of Jeopardy! taking home \$10,000. "If I could have done anything different, it would have been to trust my gut instinct and only wager \$0 in final jeopardy, as I originally planned," McMahan said. In addition to the cash reward, she received a glossy picture of herself posing with Jeopardy! host Alex Trebek. Trebek has been the show's host for 23 years. "Alex Trebek was great!" McMahan said. "He is so funny and knowledgeable. It was amazing to watch him host five shows in one day." McMahan's game show accomplishments are looked upon proudly by family and students alike. "As a dad I was very happy for her," McMahan said. "She really held her own, and I really felt good for FAMU and HBCU's." "She did an excellent job serving as a representative for Florida A&M University," McMahon said. Though her time on the game show has come to an end, McMahan would like to return one day. "I would go back tomorrow if they let me," McMahan said. "I loved every minute of it...being on the show was one of the greatest experiences of my life." Angelica R. Roberts is a 2008 Black College Wire summer intern and a student at Florida A&M University.