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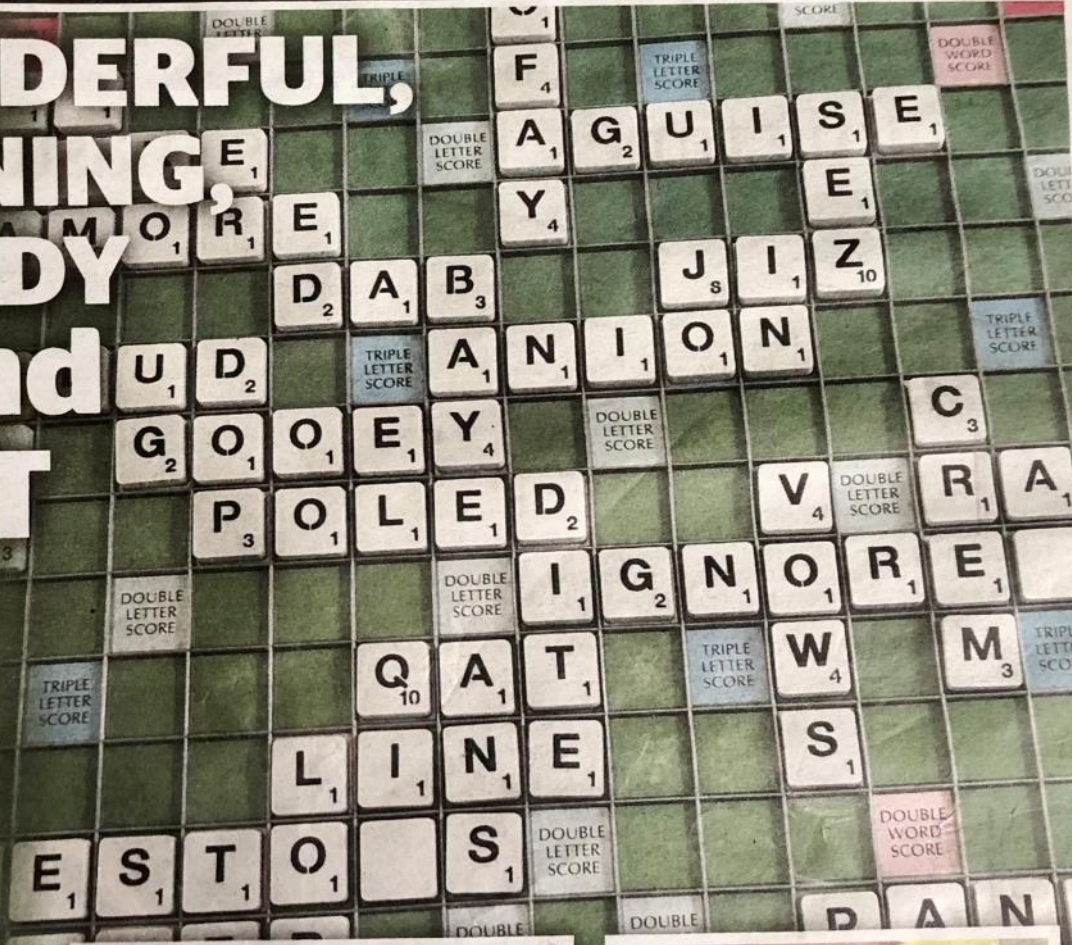
Wairarapa Times-Age

Wairarapa Midweek

Ngā Kōrero o te Hapori Wednesday, October 2, 2024

WONDERFUL, INNING, MORE WORDY weekend at WOST

What on earth is a Waqf? Is a Qin the key to a triple word score? Did Wairarapa's newest Scrabblers feel "booy" (hopelessly lost) at the region's first nationally-recognised tournament? Turn to P10 for all the winning details from the inaugural Wairarapa Open Scrabble Tournament.



Ofay? Testons? A-grade player Stanley Ngundi, from Wellington, puts his knowledge of playable Scrabble words to the test. Inset right: Wairarapa players Glenys Hansen (Martinborough) and David Robinson (Carterton) square off in the debut grade; while the top three players in the A-grade were Dylan Early, left, Lawson Sue and Stanley Ngundi.



CARTERTON NEWS

Big wins at inaugural competition

ERIN KAVANAGH-HALL

WOST: A playable Scrabble word, meaning "the ability to use words or ideas in a clever and amusing way".

It was also the name of Wairarapa's first ever competitive Scrabble showdown – the Wairarapa Open Scrabble Tournament. Where clever usage of words propelled lexophiles of all experience levels to the top of the podium.

Late last month, Club Carterton played host to 37 Scrabblers, travelling from throughout the North Island to showcase their prowess on their board – and their vast knowledge of extraordinary, score-boosting idioms.

The two-day tournament, organised by Wairarapa's three Scrabble clubs, was the region's first competition recognised by and open to members of the national competitive Scrabble body, NZ Association of Scrabble Players.

Twelve Scrabblers from Wairarapa threw their tiles in the ring, joining players from Auckland, Rotorua, Waitara, Wanganui and Wellington. Players ranged from "newbies" nabbing surprising wins, to A-grade New Zealand representatives, soon to play in next month's Scrabble Australia's Trans-Tasman Tournament.

Among the seasoned pros was reigning New Zealand champion and Carterton local Howard Warner, who, on his home turf, came away with the highest game score for the weekend.

For 10 players, on the other hand, it was their first ever competitive outing – including for several Wairarapa players, who emerged with enviable scores in the D (debutante) grade.

Spot prizes were also given out for the most unusual and interesting words played – noteworthy examples being BOOAY (hopelessly lost), LEUKOSES (blood cell abnormalities), KVETCH (to complain), and WAQF (an endowment in Muslim law).

Competitive Scrabble has undergone a recent renaissance in Wairarapa: With the Masterton Scrabble Club established in 2020 (after a decade-long hiatus), and the satellite Martinborough and Featherston Clubs following shortly afterwards.

Tournament organiser and Masterton club founder Sue McRae said WOST was a "nerve-wracking" but, on the whole, positive experience for the Wairarapa newbies.

"Often club players are scared to make the step up to tournaments because they think they'll be out of their depth. But if they're all coming in at the same level, that makes it much less daunting," McRae said.

"Plus, it was great for them to be able to rub shoulders with some of the best in New Zealand – who they never thought they'd



Players are all concentration at the inaugural WOST at Club Carterton.

end up in the same room with. Some of those guys are really quite brilliant, so it was a bit of a thrill to be able to walk past their boards.

"We had a few people come in off the street to have a look as well – and were keen to find out about our clubs. There's always a real buzz at competitive Scrabble tournaments, and it's great to see people catch the bug."

The tournament, held on September 21 and 22, consisted of 14 games over two days, with competitors squaring off in four grades: A, B, C and D.

At the top tier, Wellington Scabbler Lawson Sue was the supreme winner, snatching victory on both days – and securing a comfortable lead with words such as TESTONS (a 16th century European coin), QIN (a Chinese stringed instrument) and OFAY (an offensive word for a Caucasian person).

"OFAY was actually one of the words taken out of the American version of the Official Scrabble Players Dictionary, as it was considered offensive. But we were playing with the New Zealand edition, which allows it," McRae said.

To achieve an A-grade win, McRae

added, takes "a lot of practice".

"The top players would probably spend at least a couple of hours a day, poring over all the lists of playable words, and committing them to memory.

"A word like 'testons', for example, you wouldn't know unless you've read Don Quixote. They spend a lot of time swotting up. They're very diligent learners."

On the other end of the spectrum, some of the newcomers did "extremely well" – a particular stand-out being Carterton local David Robinson, who walked away with a near-landslide victory in the D-grade on the Sunday.

"He'd mostly been just a household player before this. He did pretty well on the first day, but absolutely trounced the field the next day. Everyone was gobsmacked," McRae said.

"He's now hoping to set up a new Scrabble club in Carterton."

Fellow debutante Rosemary Sutton, from Masterton, won the D Grade on the Saturday tournament, with Martinborough player Glenys Hansen coming second on both days. The youngest player, 21-year-old Laura-Rose Holden from Greytown, also won a prize for the



Players in the B and C grades get stuck into a round.



Greytown's Laura-Rose Holden received the highest score in a single game in debut grade.

highest game score (429) in her grade.

McRae said the competition attracted players from "all walks of life": from retirees, to psychologists and professional chefs, to entrepreneurs, to new migrants.

"We've got people with university degrees, and people who never finished high school. We've got players with English as a second language, and others who grew up here but don't always use correct grammar when they speak. But they play a brilliant game. It's about being super intellectual."

McRae said the Wairarapa Clubs hoped to make WOST an annual event: "But we need a bit of time to rest and recover first!"

For further information about the Wairarapa Scrabble Clubs, contact Sue McRae (027 449 0601 – Masterton), Fran Lowe (021 055 4897 – Featherston) or Vicki Jones (021 054 0212 – Martinborough).