THE HIGHEST ONE-MOVE SCRABBLE SCORE

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The November 1972 issue of Word Ways reported that the British monthly magazine Games & Puzzles had just launched a year-long search among its readers for the highest possible single-move score in the game of Scrabble. As an incentive, the editors of the magazine offered two prizes: 5 pounds sterling to be awarded at the middle of every month to the highest Scrabble score received since the beginning of the contest, and 100 pounds sterling to be awarded to the first Scrabble score to exceed a single-move score devised by Darryl Francis (the value of this score, however, was not revealed).

With a total of 160 pounds to be won, interest in the contest was very high; Games & Puzzles was flooded with entries. The first month saw a solution scoring 1700 points, but it was not until the tenth month that Ron E. Jerome of Bracknell, Berkshire won the 100 pounds by exceeding the secret Games & Puzzles score of 1935 by ten points.

In the eleventh month, W. E. R. Bone (apparently a pseudonym for a group in the Department of Pure Mathematics at Cambridge University) raised the score to 1949 points; this score was the highest one received when the contest ended a month later.

The Bone solution, achieved by placing B, Z, X, Y, C, H and S in the word BENZOXYCAMPHORS, is detailed below:

Letters marked with an asterisk are represented by the two blank Scrabble tiles. The moves leading up to this were as follows:

1. ie 2. squander 3. squandermania 4. etna 5. eu, ou 6. ai, did
The rules of the contest stipulated that allowable words had to be listed in either Webster's Third, Webster's Second, or the Oxford English Dictionary; in addition, plural forms of nouns listed and inflected forms (ending in -ED, -ING or -S) of verbs listed were allowed. No proper names, hyphenated words, or apostrophized words were allowed. This led to the rejection of the plausible word SESQUIOXIDIZING, used by several readers to achieve scores of more than 2000 points. The verb SESQUIOXIDIZE does not appear in any of these dictionaries, although the OED lists the past participle SESQUIOXIDIZED. Darryl Francis wrote to Merriam-Webster to find whether or not SESQUIOXIDIZE might have appeared in certain printings of Webster's Second; they replied that the word had been considered for entry in the 1934 edition but had too few citations.

Nevertheless, Word Ways readers may be interested in seeing the highest Scrabble score using this word, a 2037-point solution devised by Josefa Heifetz of Mill Valley, California. Parenthetically, it is worth noting that Josefa is the one who started the whole high-scoring single-Scrabble-move business in 1967, when a move of 1175 points devised by her was published in Dmitri Borgmann's Beyond Language (Scribner's, 1967). Unpublished efforts go back even earlier; Prince Djoli Kansil of Hawaii devised a 1413-point solution in 1961. The Heifetz solution, achieved by placing S, Q, U, X, I, Z and G in SESQUIOXIDIZING, is detailed below:

The moves leading up to this were as follows:
During the summer of 1973, the search for the highest one-move Scrabble score received additional recognition when the 20th edition of the Guinness Book of Records added a section to deal with this topic.

A detailed examination of the various high-scoring solutions received by Games & Puzzles has confirmed the strategy outlined in the November 1972 Word Ways. In all solutions, seven tiles from the Scrabble player's hand are added to eight letters already on the board to form a fifteen-letter word along the board edge; five of the seven tiles are placed in the first, fourth, eighth, twelfth and fifteenth positions, in addition, these seven tiles complete seven words in the perpendicular direction, all as long as possible.

The choice of a suitable fifteen-letter word is far more crucial than the choice of the seven words perpendicular to it; the value of the tiles forming the fifteen-letter word is multiplied by 27, but the other seven words typically add only 275 to 325 points. Since the fourth and twelfth positions fall on double-letter-value squares, it is important to have one or both of these letters represented by high-scoring tiles such as Z, X, J or Q. During the first eight months of the Scrabble contest, the winning fifteen-letter words were PHENYLHYDRAZIDE, PREZY-GAPOPHYSIS and DIAZOHYDROXIDES, each worth 51 points before multiplication; BENZOXYCAMPHORS, at 59 points, represented a great leap forward, but it in turn was eclipsed by SESQUIOXIDIZING with 62 points. (The only other known Scrabble word of 50 points or more is PSYCHOANALYZERS.)

By examining the variation in the scores achieved with the seven perpendicular words, one can speculate on the likelihood of either of the above solutions being bettered. The Bone solution adds 306 points to the basic 1593, and the Helfetz solution adds 313 points to the basic 1674 (the missing 50 points in both solutions is the seven-tile bonus). Earlier in the year, one Games & Puzzles contest winner was able to add 324 points to her basic solution; however, it should be noted that her task of finding perpendicular words may have been made a bit easier with the terminal letters D, A, Z, Y, D, I and S. My guess is that it would be extraordinarily difficult, perhaps impossible, to improve either solution by as much as ten points.