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Cape Elizabeth boy wins longest-ever state spelling bee

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Staff Writer

A Cape Elizabeth boy won the Maine State Spelling Bee on Saturday following a marathon three-hour contest -- the longest in recent memory -- that tested the limits of both his abilities and his bladder.

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Nat Jordan, 12, the Cumberland County contestant, spells his final word to win the Maine State Spelling Bee on Saturday.

Photos by John Ewing/Staff Photographer

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Brandon Aponte, a sixth-grader representing Hancock County, finished second in what turned out to be a marathon 50-round bee.

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Nat Jordan, a seventh-grader at Cape Elizabeth Middle School, was declared victor after spelling words correctly for 50 consecutive rounds, for more than half of which he stood alone on stage with one other boy, Brandon Aponte, a sixth-grader from Hancock County.

Nat Jordan is the brother of Lily Jordan, who last year took the state spelling bee title for her second year in a row. They are the children of Glenn and Nancy Jordan. Glenn Jordan is a sportswriter with The Portland Press Herald and Maine Sunday Telegram.

Meanwhile, the mano-a-mano match Saturday between the last two regional spelling champs dragged on so long that the judges were flipping through lists trying to find words that might stump them.

In the end, Jeannine Diddle-Uzzi, a classics professor at the University of Southern Maine, flipped too far and stumbled upon some relatively easy words.

It was one of those words, "deceitful," that cost Brandon the title. He had previously correctly spelled "hemerocallis," "rejoneador" and "mynheer."

To win, all Nat needed to do was to correctly spell "coincidence" -- a slam dunk in the world of

competitive spelling -- and that is exactly what he did, staying focused even as he badly needed to go to the bathroom.

"What a relief," he said in an interview after the contest.

Last year, the spelling bee was over after 16 rounds. In 2010, it lasted 19 rounds.

Next, 12-year-old Nat Jordan will fly to Washington, D.C., in May to compete for the national title.

Fourteen children from around the state competed in the spelling bee, which was sponsored by MaineToday Media and held at the University of Southern Maine's Portland campus.

Besides Nat and Brandon, Ben Philbrook, an eighth-grader from the Ashland School District in Aroostook County, also did well. The three boys competed with each other between rounds 14 and 36, when Philbrook was knocked out for misspelling "Issei," a Japanese term used in Australia and the Americas to describe the first generation of Japanese immigrants.

Representing Kennebec County was Ariana Cousins, an eighth-grader from Stepping Stones Montessori School.

Diddle-Uzzi -- the USM professor, not one of the spelling words -- said after the contest was over that she tried to put an end to it. "I needed to find harder words and harder words," she said. "They were extraordinary. I could not stump them."

The bee was tough on some of the kids. When they misspelled a word, they returned to their seats on stage. Some struggled to keep their composure as parents watched on helplessly.

One judge, Michael Ashmore, had warned everyone at the start of the contest that it would be a stressful experience.

"The awful thing about spelling bees is that almost everyone loses," he said. "That's a fact of life."

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