

Rolling Credits on Paris

By Friday morning, everyone was feeling the fatigue– the kind that settles in your bones, the kind that no amount of authentic Parisian croissants can cure. The day’s main event for me: the Film History Bee, one final trial for those of us who thought watching movies obsessively might one day pay off.

Turns out, that dream only pays off if your name is Ramona. She breezed through both the written and buzzer rounds like it was a director’s cut made just for her. Her top score on the exam qualified her for finals, which she then won with the same ease one might use to fast forward through the ads on YouTube. I wouldn’t be surprised if she ends up on Criterion Closet Picks one day.

The buzzer rounds featured movie clips, but some of the more seasoned players didn’t even need them. If the screen froze on a single frame, that was enough for someone to slap the buzzer and say *The Boy and the Heron* or *Parasite* before the audio even loaded. It was ruthless in the most cinematic way. Before finals began, the staff was still testing the clip projection system, and for whatever reason, they left *Firework* by Katy Perry paused on the smart board. Everyone walked in to see a close-up of Katy’s face frozen mid-lyric, which somehow felt more surreal than any experimental short film we’d studied all week.

Saturday wrapped the whole week in gold (literally, for some). I took the Visual History Bee prelim exam and didn’t qualify, which was disappointing only until I found out that I scored higher than both my dad and the guy who actually *won* the Family & Friends division. So. Not qualifying? Not that deep.

Varsity-level players are built different. The field is stacked, but no one’s cutthroat about it. Watching Bobby Wang and JV champ Luke Ng go head-to-head during the final championship showdown between division winners was proof. People had been whispering about Luke all week. He’s from Singapore and has a kind of eerie buzz precision. There was a rumor that he doesn’t miss.

But Bobby held his ground. This was his final History Bowl ever, and you could feel the weight of that as he hoisted the New Jersey flag in the air. Yes, I’m from New York. Yes, I cheered anyway.

There was a moment during the closing ceremony when they played the Singapore national anthem so many times it started echoing in people’s heads like an earworm. I caught myself humming it in the elevator that night. But for all the medals, trophies, and bragging rights, that final face-off between the two prodigies felt like a victory for everyone watching. A reminder of how much you can love something as “uncool” as history and make it cool anyway.

Thank you, IHO gang. See you in two years!