

Sun Kings and Sore Thumbs

If Versailles was built to impress foreign diplomats, it definitely worked on us. On Wednesday, after a few nail-biter matches in the International History Bowl, a troop of slightly fatigued but enthusiastic students swapped buzzers for Baroque splendor, catching the N Train to the Sun King's famous château. Our trip leaders Pieter and Emilio were amazing– the kind of people who ask where you're from and actually care about the answer. One plans to teach in Ghana; the other lives in Berlin and speaks enough languages to moderate a UN debate.

Inside, Versailles was as opulent as advertised, with gold accents, hall-of-mirrors glamor, and a shocking number of statues of Louis XIV rocking what can only be described as Pantene commercial hair. One of us genuinely said, “Haircut inspo.” Valid.

The only real complaint? Not enough time in the gardens. They stretch on like a royal labyrinth, and classical music blares from mysterious hedges. You could almost see a duchess ghost gliding by in a silk gown. We could’ve wandered there for hours, but instead, we hustled back for what was arguably the highlight of the day: interviewing some of the top IHO competitors. (No spoilers, but the quotes are gold.)

Back at the bowl, Day 1 of the International History Bowl (Rounds 1–3) introduced a twist: three teams per match instead of the usual two. A curveball for many of us used to head-to-head duels. My teammate and I held our own but lost a few heartbreakers by just a question or two. It felt like intellectual ping-pong with high stakes and history facts flying in every direction. Not our strongest day, but not a disaster either.

Thursday brought Rounds 4–6 and redemption. We won two out of three matches, including one that was decided by a pronunciation protest over a Chinese region. Our protest was accepted– justice served! (Helpful when one teammate’s parent is actually from said region.)

Then came the surprise hit of the day: the *Spanish Language History Bee*. Four of us signed up. One was a native speaker. The rest of us... tried our best. Our moderator, Norman, was an absolute gem, encouraging and good-humored as we stumbled through conjugations and occasionally made up Spanglish versions of English words. (“Oui!... I mean yes... I mean sí”) What we lacked in fluency, we made up for in laughs. It was the most fun many of us had all week.

Two days down, plenty of memories, and one very real Versailles-induced hair envy. Stay tuned– the best is yet to come.