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'Aiea pupil wins 14-round head-to-head battle

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'AIEA — Joshua Echols and Jim Kevin Bendijo battled head-to-head for the final 14 rounds of the 2006 Central District Spelling Bee last night before Echols prevailed to win the district title.

Echols, 13, an eighth-grader at Our Savior Lutheran School in 'Aiea, spelled "haggis" and "taphonomy" correctly in Round 19 to win the meet at 'Aiea Intermediate School.

Bendijo, 13, an eighth-grader at Moanalua Middle School, misspelled "lieutenant."

Both advance to The Honolulu Advertiser's 21st Hawai'i State Spelling Bee on March 26. The state bee will be aired on KFVE. The state champion will earn a trip to the Scripps National Spelling Bee May 31-June 1 in Washington, D.C.

Echols' coach is Margaret Lum. Bendijo's coach is Uilani Hirao.

Last night's bee began with 36 contestants from 18 Central District schools. After five rounds, only Echols and Bendijo were left on stage to battle it out for the title.

In Round 6, Bendijo misspelled "bolshevize," leaving the door open for Echols to win it. But Echols would have to spell two words consecutively to be declared the champion. Spelling the first word, "emaciation," came fairly easily. But he misspelled the second word, "oratorio."

In Round 13 Bendijo misspelled "trumeau." Echols then spelled "armistice" correctly but misspelled "dulcinea." The bee continued.

In the 19th round, Bendijo misspelled "lieutenant." Echols then spelled two words consecutively, claiming the district title.

The Central District contest was the second of seven district spelling bees around the state, in which a field of sixth-, seventh- and eighth-graders from 100 schools will be narrowed to 14 state finalists.

Each finalist will receive gifts from Sears, Island Heritage, Consolidated Theatres and Enjoy Snacks.

Travel for Neighbor Island participants will be provided by Aloha Airlines.

The state Spelling Bee champion will win an all-expense-paid trip for two to Washington and a \$100 U.S. Savings Bond from Jay Sugarman. Merriam-Webster is donating a Third New International Dictionary to the winner and a Collegiate Dictionary, 11th Edition, to the runner-up.

Other prize sponsors include Radio Shack, Dede and James Sutherland, the Hawaii Court Reporters and Captioners Association, and Scripps National Spelling Bee. Spellers who compete in the national Spelling Bee win prizes ranging from \$50 to \$12,000.

The remaining district spelling bees:

- Today: Maui District, 'Iao Intermediate School, 6 p.m.
- Saturday: Honolulu District, Sacred Hearts Academy, 2 p.m.
- Feb. 16: Leeward District, Nanakuli High & Intermediate School, 6:30 p.m.

- Feb. 21: Windward District, Le Jardin Academy, 6:30 p.m.
- Feb. 25: Hawai'i District, Kamehameha Schools-Kea'au, 1 p.m.

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