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TV

## Who will replace Alex Trebek on 'Jeopardy!'? Here are 7 contenders

Alex Trebek is irreplaceable, but experts and fans have floated several names as the next potential "Jeopardy!" host. So who are the contenders?

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**By Randee Dawn**

As the host of "Jeopardy!" for 36 years, Alex Trebek was one of a kind – a comforting presence who proved being smart was seriously cool.

But now that the man with all the answers has passed away – Trebek died from pancreatic cancer on November 8 – there's one big question still outstanding: Who will take his place?



— Alex Trebek on the "Jeopardy!" set in 2010. Amanda Edwards / Getty Images

"Game show hosting is a skill," says Adam Nedeff, a game show historian and author of the book "Game Shows FAQ." "Alex was always introduced as the host of 'Jeopardy!' not the star. Contestants are the star.

"So while there might be thinking that he was such a giant they'll need a 'name,' I don't think the show is suited to be a vehicle for someone," Nedeff says. "It has to be somebody who's willing to

let the game take center stage."

Speculation on social media has been running high, so we reached out to a few game show experts to see who they consider to be the top seven candidates.



— Alex Trebek and Ken Jennings on "Jeopardy!" during Jennings' record-breaking run on the show in 2004.

Getty Images

## Ken Jennings

**Who's that?** At 46, Jennings is the highest-earning American game show contestant ever, and holds the longest winning streak on "Jeopardy!" along with other show-setting records. Earlier this year, he won \$1 million as the winner of the special "Jeopardy! The Greatest of All Time." But Jennings has won in more ways than that, parlaying the celebrity he earned on the show into



books, a vibrant social media presence and a regular on Game Show Network's "Best Ever Trivia Show," among other achievements.

**Why him?** Aside from his vast knowledge and close association with the show, Jennings signed on with the show as a producer this season and has presented categories in pre-taped segments, which seemed to signal he was being groomed for the slot.

**Experts analyze:** "He represents so much of what everyone would want in a 'Jeopardy!' host," says Claire McNear, author of the just-published "Answers in the Form of Questions: A Definitive History and Insider's Guide to 'Jeopardy!'" (Editor's Note: The book features a foreword by Jennings). "He's somebody who's synonymous with the show."





— Tom Bergeron hosting "Dancing with the Stars: All-Stars." Kelsey McNeal / ABC

## Tom Bergeron

**Who's that?** Bergeron, 65, has the most TV hosting experience of anyone who has been mentioned as a possible Trebek successor. In addition to hosting "America's Funniest Home Videos" from 2001-15, he also held that slot on "Dancing With the Stars" from 2005-2020. He's also hosted "Hollywood Squares" and has one Emmy for hosting "DWTS"

**Why him?** Certainly, he's got the classic presence for a stately TV game show like "Jeopardy!" and, at least right now, he's free: "DWTS" let him go ahead of its most recent 29th season. We could easily see him sliding into Trebek's spot on the stage.

**Experts analyze:** "Bergeron fits into a classic, broadcasters mode of the people who've hosted 'Jeopardy!' so far," says Nedeff. "Tom definitely fits the mold of what the show has had in the past, and there's a chance they'll go with what has already worked."

But, McNear adds, "They are looking for someone who can offer stability and have audiences feel comfortable with them. They don't want a situation where a host leaves or retires after a few years. There is a strong attraction to younger candidates for this job."

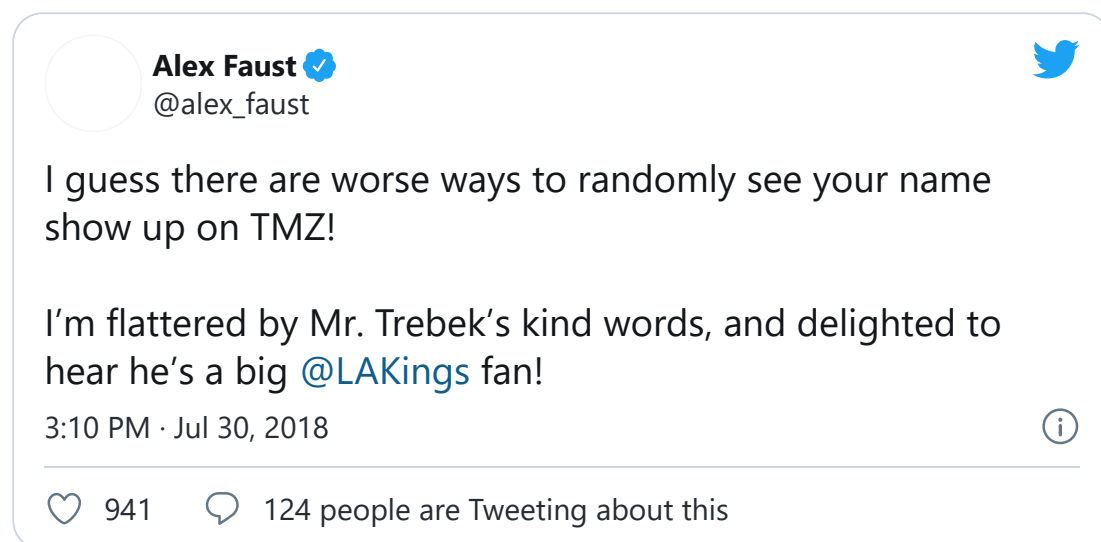
— Alex Faust before a Los Angeles Kings game in 2017. Trebek mentioned the NHL broadcaster as a possible replacement. Juan Ocampo / NHLI via Getty Images

## Alex Faust

**Who's that?** Faust, 31, does play-by-play for the Los Angeles Kings during NHL games. He's also called games for NBC Sports and the Boston Red Sox on NESN. Faust stepped in to replace Hall of Fame broadcaster Bob Miller, who left calling games for the Kings after 44 seasons.

**Why him?** As a sportscaster, he certainly has the smooth chops to take over a game show position. But the reason his name specifically comes up is that during a [2018 interview with TMZ](#), Trebek said Faust might work as a replacement. "They should consider him," he said.

After the interview aired, Faust tweeted that he was flattered by the mention.



"I guess there are worse ways to randomly see your name show up on TMZ!" he wrote. "I'm flattered by Mr. Trebek's kind words, and delighted to hear he's a big @LAKings fan!"

**Experts analyze:** "Being a sports broadcaster prepares you for a job like 'Jeopardy!'" says McNear. "So much of what Trebek was doing was this play-by-play announcing, speaking quickly and switching up the rhythm of the game. It makes a lot of sense to me that (Trebek) was thinking of someone who had that kind of experience."

— LeVar Burton at the Emmy Awards in 2016. The "Reading Rainbow" host has been a popular choice for Trebek's replacement among "Jeopardy!" fans. David Livingston / Getty Images

## LeVar Burton

**Who's that?** Whether you know him as the longtime host of "Reading Rainbow" or his acting turns in "Roots" and "Star Trek: The Next Generation," Burton, 63, is a longtime presence on the big and small screen alike, and has a solid brand when it comes to just plain being smart.

**Why him?** It appears "Jeopardy!" fans would love him; he's possibly the only candidate who has a petition supporting his ascendancy. And in September, he tweeted that he was definitely up for the gig.



"Not gonna lie, I feel like I've been preparing my whole life to occupy the @Jeopardy host podium when Alex retires," he wrote.

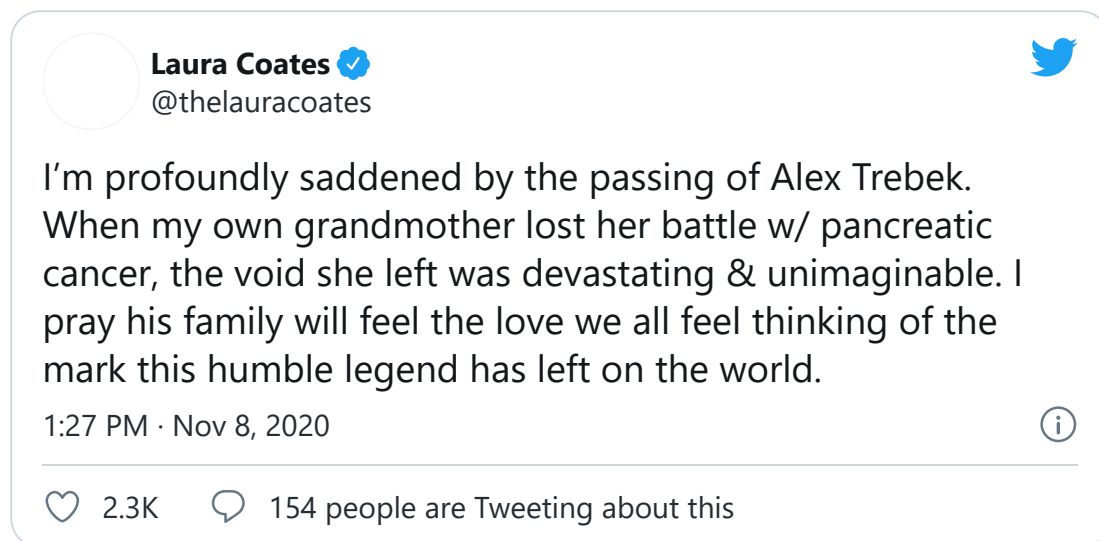
**Experts analyze:** "There's so much about this choice that makes sense," says McNear. "He's this beloved, trusted, universal figure, and coming from 'Reading Rainbow' he has that academic intelligent side to him. This has been an obsession of fans for years."

— Laura Coates at her SiriusXM show launch in 2017. Larry French / Getty Images

## Laura Coates

**Who's that?** CNN legal analyst Coates, 40, also has a talk radio show on SiriusXM, and an adjunct law professor position at George Washington University School of Law. She's also an author of the 2016 legal guide, "You have the Right: A Constitutional Guide to Policing the Police."

**Why her?** In the same TMZ interview as he mentioned Faust as a possible replacement, Trebek also spoke up for Coates, who sent out her own tweet after the host's death.



"I'm profoundly saddened by the passing of Alex Trebek," she wrote. "When my own grandmother lost her battle w/ pancreatic cancer, the void she left was devastating & unimaginable. I pray his family will feel the love we all feel thinking of the mark this humble legend has left on the world."

**Experts analyze:** "We're in a kind of golden age for women hosting game shows," says Nedeff. "If there was a time for her to come on, now would be that time. She'd be taken more seriously as a consideration than in the past."



— Anderson Cooper at the WarnerMedia 2019 Upfront in 2019 in New York. Jim Spellman / WireImage

## Anderson Cooper

**Who's that?** The two-time Emmy-winning journalist and host of "Anderson Cooper 360" is also a new dad and has hosted CNN's New Year's Eve special since 2002. He's also appeared on "Jeopardy!" as a celebrity contestant three times.

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**Why him?** Though Cooper, 53, might seem to be a left field candidate, back in 2014 he was reportedly in discussions with Sony Pictures Television (the distributors of "Jeopardy!") to be a possible replacement after Trebek's retirement, as emails released during the Sony email hack that year revealed.

**Experts analyze:** "Cooper said he was definitely interested at that time," says McNear. "He'd be a more traditional game show host to some degree, because he comes from a newscaster model like Trebek. Having someone with that background comes with gravitas and neutrality, and they can do the traffic control that the show requires."

— Betty White in Los Angeles in 2015. Vincent Sandoval / WireImage

## Betty White

**Who's that?** At 98, multiple Emmy winner and national treasure White may not quite be ready for the rigors of taping a weeknightly game show, but the former "Golden Girls" star remains the host of our hearts.

**Why her?** All right, all right, she's not a *serious* contender, but we learned that White and Trebek had something of a mutual admiration society going on: In 2018 she told The New York Post that she loves watching "Jeopardy!" because "I happen to have a huge crush on the host, Alex Trebek." In 2019 during a 92nd Street Y event in New York City, Trebek nominated her as his successor: "It's probably going to be a woman, somebody younger, somebody bright, somebody personable, somebody with a great sense of humor." Plus, the pair were pals in real life, too.

**Experts analyze:** Nedeff says, "It ain't gonna happen, but of all the names that get bandied about, she's the only one who's got an Emmy for a game show."

White earned a 1983 Daytime Emmy for "Just Men!" and became the first woman to win a hosting prize in that arena.

"At the very least," he adds, "why not a temp job?"

Trebek taped episodes of "Jeopardy!" that will continue to run into December – his last will air on Christmas Day – but the show traditionally tapes in the early part of any given year. McNear says that if they're not building in some kind of hiatus, new episodes would need to start taping by the end of 2020.

But whoever takes over, we wish them lots of luck: They have some pretty big shoes to fill.

'Jeopardy!' host Alex Trebek's legacy: Grace and style



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