

Well, Guest Star Times readers, Guest Star fever is upon us.

The finalists have been named, and while, yes, they all hold very vigorous credentials for receiving the honor of Expat of the Year, I'm a little surprised I wasn't among them. Actually, I'm incensed that I didn't make ONE SINGLE category.

This is clearly an oversight of monstrous proportion. Allow me to take you to task here, and set the record straight about my myriad unrecognized talents.

First of all, Culture. Hello! I write this column. True, other foreign members of the Slo Times team write columns, but I write mine one-and-a-half hours before press time. This is my small way of bridging the culture gap; I write about Slovenia on a New York deadline. OK, a lot of the cultural assets I bring to the Slovenian table are mainly of an American bent. I'm the first to admit that I can probably only conjugate three verbs in the present tense properly, but no one is perfect. When the Slovenia Times offers a perfect expat award, I promise to withdraw my name.

Next up, Sport. This, as well, is a no-brainer. Here's the three part breakdown, my Slovenian highlight reel, if you will. One, while playing frisbee with Vid and Robert in front of Le Petit, a fourth player joined us who was too lazy to go after the frisbee. I threw my next toss with such finesse and accuracy that it knocked over his glass of cedevita. Boo-ya. Two, I completed a game of 301 in 4 and one-third rounds. Woot woot. Three, I composed an English fight chant for Union Olimpija. Here's how it goes: "U-N-I-O-N! Bologna isn't gonna win!" Clearly, the visiting team won't always be Bologna, so I haven't worked all the kinks out yet.

Onto Diplomacy...I understand that in order to be a member of any diplomacy corps, you have to go to a special school where you learn how to talk the language and distinguish a fish fork from Neptune's trident and other stuff. To that, I cry "Bullshit!" Diplomacy can go down anywhere. Check out this exchange that I had at K4. A girl comes over to me and says "You come from the most racist country on the planet." I replied "How so? Because we have different races?" See how diplomatic that went? And, I only have a B.A.

And, Economy?! You think this writing gig pays anything? I'm bringing money *into* Slovenia. Hold on.

One of the marketing guys has just pointed out that these aren't exactly Guest Star worthy achievements. Well, la dee da, I'll just start my own award then. I'll call it Home Star.

I'll nominate all my friends for being the best Slovenians ever. Let's see. Tatjana gets a bid for her sense of humor and crazy dance moves. Ana gets one for helping me with Slovene crossword puzzles and learning Tarok. Samo is in for schooling me at hitchhiking and bicycle renovations. Igor and Sabina, for their generosity, hospitality and fun sightseeing trips in Štajerska. Sliva reads my column and always laughs at something. Alojz reads other things I write and buys me a beer when he doesn't find me funny.

I'll hold the awards ceremony in Križanke, because when the *varni* aren't there, it's pretty easy to climb over that wall. And whoever wins will get mentioned in my column as to why I think they're so great... Oh, nuts! Writing on the fly doesn't always yield the best laid plans.

All right, in the spirit of continuing to throw caution to the wind, I'm going to handicap the actual Guest Star finalists.

Because the initial nominees in Culture were overwhelmingly affiliated with music, I see this coming down to Grant Austin and Simon Robinson. As much as I would like to see Austin pull this (We share a Florida/NYC pedigree.), I think the British expats will go with their countryman. And the Slovenians will lean toward high art.

In Diplomacy, Kizildeli showed a singular directness in his responses. John Hagard was the only one to answer every question posed to him. This transparency should be rewarded, but I see perennial favorite Erwan Fouere wearing the laurel this year.

For Economy, I like the cut of Ole Bloch's jib, his nautical metaphors and his most bizarre experience, but the sheer number of my friends who have switched to Si.mobil has me firmly predicting Andreas Maierhofer as winner.

I know *nula* about handball, but last year's Sport Guest Star was a woman, so I'm going to say Edouard Kokcharov takes it, as the female vote is split.

That said, if there's one thing the Sugababes have taught me this year, it's that people are all the same. So, congratulations; we're all Guest Stars...unless we're Home Stars. ■

