

Reflections from My First MathFest: People, Posters, and Possibilities

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Standing in the registration line, I wondered if I would meet other students at MathFest. Just then, I heard a voice: another high school student waiting to be registered. We immediately connected and shared our backgrounds and interests; I felt right at home, in a community of like-minded people.

MathFest 2026, held at the Marriott in downtown Boston, was a celebration of the joy and curiosity of math. From student events like Math Jeopardy and the poster session, to contributed paper sessions, workshops, invited paper sessions, and the exhibit hall, each event gave me a new sense of excitement and inspiration to pursue math from a whole new perspective.

One of the most memorable experiences was attending Dr. Art Benjamin's talk on Math Magic. His talk was surprising, entertaining, and truly magical. The highlight of the talk came when Dr. Benjamin invited me on stage to demonstrate a magic square whose first row was 2, 5, 20, 14, the date on which I was born. As a souvenir, Dr. Benjamin let me take the poster with the magic square drawing home (I can finally tell my friend, who received a magic square from Dr. Benjamin at math camp two years ago, that I have one, too).

Dr. Eugenia Cheng's talk, *Unequal: The Math of When Things Do and Don't Add Up*, connected random math facts to real-world scenarios (anywhere from eating chips to societal equality). At the end of her talk, she sang a poem, and played its music on the piano. That poem was *Loveliest of Trees* by A.E Housman, and also contained a mathematical and poetic description of the narrator's age. Moreover, she connected a lot of the facts to social justice. In her words, "We should think about what metrics we apply to people and take into account the obstructions different people have fought against."

Another captivating talk was given by Dr. Phil Blau, who presented the SIGMAA-HOM guest lecture, *Road to Insolvability*. He took us on a historical journey of math, discussing the work of Paolo Ruffini and Niels Abel, and how it led to the eventual discovery that 5th degree and higher polynomials can't be solved using a general formula. I realized that behind each theorem or discovery, there were innumerable attempts, mistakes, and failures. Mathematical discoveries don't happen all at once; they happen as a result of curiosity, passion, and patience. As someone who's fascinated by the history of math, this was one of my favorite talks.

In addition to attending talks, I also got the opportunity to share my own mathematical work, *No Perfect Squares are Perfect Numbers*, at the Undergraduate Student Poster Session. I really enjoyed sharing and communicating my research with the judges and fellow participants. The judges gave me great feedback which was both inspiring and thought provoking. I left the poster session rejuvenated with new ideas to expand my research further.

MathFest further showed me that math isn't just something we learn in a classroom or read from a textbook, it's a vibrant community of people who are curious to explore deeper, who are unafraid to make mistakes, who are persistent in their quest to learn and add to the wide ocean of mathematical knowledge. As a student attending MathFest for the first time, I'm immensely grateful to be part of this community. I can't wait to go to MathFest 2027 in New Orleans.



