

# Tampa man's game up for award

**5 Second Rule** among seven finalists for game of the year

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TBO.com

Michael Sistrunk is finally seeing a dream come true: an idea rising up from his imagination and moving onto store shelves.

The 37-year-old senior dive master at Tampa's Florida Aquarium is always coming up with games, gadget improvements and inventions for use around the house. He dutifully writes down each one in a notebook at his bedside.

Now, one of those ideas is a new board game, 5 Second Rule.

"It is really exciting to see my invention on the shelves. It's rewarding. It gives me a sense that I have finally accomplished something," he says. "All my friends who played with me to test the product and my family in Mississippi are following along."

The game is selling for \$24.99 at Wal-Mart, Learning Express, Borders and Amazon.com, several Pizza Hut outlets and some stores in Canada. But that isn't all.

Sistrunk's game has been nominated by the manufacturer for the Game of the Year award

sponsored by the Toy Industry Association. People can vote for it to win at [www.Toyawards.org](http://www.Toyawards.org).

More than 500 games from 189 toy manufacturers were submitted; 5 Second Rule is among the top seven finalists in its category. The voting ends Jan. 12, and the winners will be announced Feb. 12. To be eligible, a game has to be available in stores and introduced in the U.S. market within the past two years.

Before he was a professional diver and game designer, Sistrunk worked in the banking industry for 13 years. He says his game requires more quick thinking than intellect.

"You don't have to be a brainiac to play this game, you just have to be quick-witted," he says.

Here's how it works: Players have a series of questions to answer. The first player is in the "hot seat." The player next to him chooses a card from a stack, asks the question, and sets the 5-second timer.

The questions are easy. Name three hurricanes; three bald celebrities, three ways to keep in touch with someone. Each correct answer gets you a point.

Easy, right?

Wrong.

Five seconds is not enough time to think of anything and the timer is a fascinating tension-builder. Tiny metal balls mark the time, which expires with a "zoop!" sound. Players

race the timer to blurt answers. If they don't get three, the next player gets the same question – but can't repeat the answers already given.

Sistrunk worked on the game for at least two years, testing it with family and friends. He got such a great response, he pitched it to game companies.

"I was nervous about going to someone with my idea and trusting them. I did a lot of online research on different companies and finally settled on Patch Products Inc., as they seemed family-friendly," he says.

The simplicity of the game appealed to the Wisconsin-based educational game marketing company. It helped Sistrunk improve, test, manufacture and market the board game.

Jessica Wineke, a Patch spokeswoman, said the company introduces about 10 to 15 new products each year. 5 Second Rule, released this year, has exceeded the sales forecast by 80 percent, she says.

Sistrunk said the company rejected two of the three ideas he had submitted, but he is happy with the success of 5 Second Rule.

And he just gave it a little boost: The family and friends who helped him test it all got their own for Christmas.

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Sistrunk



JIM REED/STAFF

"It is really exciting to see my invention on the shelves," says Michael Sistrunk, a senior dive master at Tampa's Florida Aquarium. His 5 Second Rule game has exceeded the sales forecast by 80 percent.