

# Episode 151: The great crunch at the Lettuce Club's annual showdown

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The University of Minnesota's Lettuce Club is a student tradition centered around an annual competition to see who can eat a head of iceberg lettuce the fastest and whoever wins becomes Head Lettuce.

**KAYLIE SIROVY:** Hey guys, my name is Kaylie Sirovy, your host from the Minnesota Daily. Right now you're listening to In The Know, a podcast dedicated to the University of Minnesota.

Today, we're talking about what I think is one of the most unique UMN clubs out there—the Lettuce Club. It's a tradition that involves a ton of iceberg lettuce. To help us understand the origins and inner workings of this leafy club, we got Russell Brown, a senior in history and a past Head Lettuce, here to spill the beans—or in this case, the lettuce.

**RUSSELL BROWN:** To my understanding, it was started as just kind of like a goofy little get together and then it just kind of spiraled out of control into what it at one point was. I don't think there was like any true reasoning behind it other than being a fun little quirky club.

**SIROVY:** This tradition sprouted up during the fall semester of 2019 and has since earned quite a reputation on campus. But what exactly does it take to join the Lettuce Club?

**BROWN:** Yeah, so we are pretty loose on the rules. Only iceberg lettuce is allowed. Has to be at least one pound. You have to try and eat it as quickly as you can. You can only really win though if you're a U of M student who has at least one year left because whoever wins and becomes the new Head Lettuce is also then responsible for planning next year's club meeting.

**SIROVY:** For those who may be wondering, no, you do not have to eat the stem, but you can bring any condiment or dressing you wish. Ranch seemed to be the favorite this year as I saw quite a few bottles of it amongst the competitors when they met this past week to crown a new Head Lettuce. But as the past Head Lettuce, what were your responsibilities?

**BROWN:** You know, it's really not been that much work. I probably, over the last year, just for planning and like getting us registered as a student organization, it's probably been about 10 hours total, so not too much. The part that has been the most draining definitely has been

like the social media engagement because since there was such a long period without the lettuce club being held, I'm just trying to like make sure we're present online and people know what's going on has been more difficult.

**SIROVY:** Why did the club stop meeting?

**BROWN:** I have my understanding of why it was. I don't know exactly like how factual it is. This is just how it's been kind of relayed to me. The Lettuce Club, last time it met in fall of 2021 or 2022, we just kind of used a room without booking it, or the previous Head Lettuce did, and the university really didn't like that because they brought in like Barstool Gophs and, or actually like National Barstool was there, and a lot of media and they really didn't like that just because of like liability.

So, the university was like kind of threatening like to just fully shut down Lettuce Club. And so, it was just a lot of hurdles to try and get through of like, you need to be a registered student organization and you need to get event insurance, which we are not opting to do because we're not in a university building. We're in a public place. So, yeah, they wanted \$400 for us to throw our event. So we're kind of trying to figure out a way to make this happen without, you know, that huge financial burden.

**SIROVY:** That's a lot to navigate for a club about lettuce, but on the lighter side, have you seen any funny moments during your time as the Head Lettuce? I can imagine there would be quite a few.

**BROWN:** I would say like the funniest moment involved with Lettuce Club for me was when National Barstools posted like a recap of the meeting and they posted this really up close picture of me like devouring what I thought was lettuce because I didn't win, I just asked for the club so that I could make it like happen for everyone. They have a picture of me devouring a head of cabbage because I brought the wrong thing and I just look so pissed. I'm like, there's evil in my eyes, like so angry I have cabbage, but I thought that was really funny.

**SIROVY:** That seems to be a running theme as I saw more than a few heads of cabbages instead of iceberg lettuce. Why do you think the club sticks to iceberg lettuce though?

**BROWN:** You know, it's just like, it's just kind of what it was. Like, I don't have any explanation for it. Although, I am quite happy it's iceberg and not any other type. I think that's, it's like just light and easy to eat. Good for competition.

**SIROVY:** Was there a reason that you wanted to continue the Lettuce Club?

**BROWN:** I just think, now more than ever, we just need goofy things that can bring us together and I think that a Lettuce Club where you just meet once per year to do something dumb I think it's important, like equally important to other clubs. So I just didn't want to see that fun die out.

**SIROVY:** This club sounds like a perfect way to remain connected with other students and leave an impression. So, are there any tried-and-true strategies you've seen for devouring a head of lettuce in record time?

**BROWN:** Well, we're not inside of a building this year, so I don't know how plausible this one will be, but people were like smashing their heads of lettuce on the table to try and break it up last time. There was also a lot of accusations being thrown about cheating. So, I'm being very mindful of it this year. I brought a scale, we're weighing all the lettuces before we start.

**SIROVY:** So, what's the most challenging part of the competition for you? Is it the chewing? The sheer amount of lettuce? Or maybe the pressure to maintain your composure?

**BROWN:** You know, I think it's more so just like, at least for me, it's the texture because I just start chewing lettuce and I'm like, eventually everything feels gross. So I just kind of get psyched out by that. It's not necessarily like the stomach part of like, "I'm full." It's just the, it's the mental part for me.

**SIROVY:** As for the competition, I spoke with Abby Teal, a third-year student majoring in Genetics, Cell Biology, and Development. Teal was new to the Lettuce Club and told me she was just there to have a good time. Not only that, but it was her birthday, and she celebrated by blowing out a candle stuck into a head of lettuce. Her friends and the rest of the club joined in to sing "Happy Birthday," and honestly, I think that's a great way to spend a birthday.

**ABBY TEAL:** You know, I've always heard about the Lettuce Club. I wanted to try it out, see what it was about, and then also, yeah, it's my birthday, so nothing else I'd rather be doing.

**SIROVY:** Do you think you can be Head Lettuce?

**TEAL:** No. We're just here for a fun time.

**SIROVY:** Another competitor, Katherine Magnuson, a senior majoring in Data Science, approached the competition with a different goal in mind.

**KATHERINE MAGNUSON:** I am here today to prove I am built different and to celebrate a fantastic graduation. I think I was born Head Lettuce, I was just going to get the title on top of it today.

**SIROVY:** The last competitor I spoke with before the lettuce eating began was Nathan Tomas, a sophomore studying building science.

**NATHAN TOMAS:** When I, you know, a freshman, before freshman year, back in like 12th grade of high school, people told me about the Lettuce Eating Club on campus. And I was like, "That sounds prolific. I gotta get involved with that." There wasn't really an opportunity to

do so. Then a friend of mine reached out to me and was like, there's a Lettuce Eating Club on campus, you wanna get involved? I'm like, I've been waiting my whole life for this. Let me at him. So here I am. Yeah, eating lettuce.

**SIROVY:** The energy coming from the competitors as the time drew nearer was electric. But first they had to recite the Lettuce Club oath where they put their right hand on their lettuce and the left one in the air.

The oath is as follows: "Lettuce compete today with honor, glory, and most importantly a mild appetite for leafy vegetables. If we find ourselves growing weak, let the strength of the mighty iceberg carry us forward. We must remain calm if we do not win, and believe in the new Head Lettuce to guide us. Even if we do not win, we will be grateful for this little gem of a club and for those of us that will go on to compete in the future, we better be prepared to toss salad once again."

The moment Brown shouted, "go," a green frenzy erupted, filling the air with the crisp scent of freshly chopped lettuce. From my vantage point, it was easy to spot who was in it just for laughs and who was gunning for the win. The students who mistakenly brought cabbage were struggling, but they didn't let that slow them down. As the minutes ticked by, a few contestants surged ahead, eyeing the coveted Head Lettuce title.

But alas, as the first person finished their lettuce and Brown was ready to crown them Head Lettuce, they had to be passed over to the next person who finished as they were a senior, so they couldn't be Head Lettuce. This happened for the next two people until finally, there was a winner.

And it was none other than Tomas with a time of 5:21! Brown dramatically removed his crown as people continued to munch on their lettuce, preparing to start the coronation ceremony. To those in attendance he declared, "I am proud to crown the next Head Lettuce of our Lettuce Club. May the lettuce gods help Nathan reign successfully and plan a great meeting next semester." The crowd burst into applause, then chanted in unison, "God save the Head Lettuce." It truly was magical and I am glad to have witnessed it.

Tomas will now be the club's social head, managing the Instagram (@originallettuceclub) and planning the next leafy gathering which he hopes to advertise to more students. So, you ended up Head Lettuce, how does it feel?

**TOMAS:** I am in awe of this accomplishment. I walked in here today just being like, thinking it would just be a fun thing to be a part of, and to walk away with it being Head Lettuce was something I never expected, honestly.

**SIROVY:** Even though not everyone could become Head Lettuce, the students were still crisp with excitement. The soon-to-be graduates had a blast celebrating one of our campus's most iconic traditions, while those coming back next semester are already looking ahead to

another head-to-head competition for the coveted title.

This episode was written and produced by Kaylie Sirovy. As always, we appreciate you listening in and feel free to leave us an email at [podcasting@mndaily.com](mailto:podcasting@mndaily.com) with comments, questions or concerns. I'm Kaylie, and this is In The Know.