

**1. What initially drew you, still as a high-school student, to such a technically demanding topic as extracellular vesicles, and what surprised you most when you began working in a real research lab?**

To be honest, I didn't think much about the technical side of the topic at first. I was genuinely fascinated by the potential of extracellular vesicles (EVs), which is why I chose "*The role of extracellular vesicles in communication between cells in lung cancer*" as my research topic. Our results showed that EVs isolated from conditioned media of human cancer cell lines and tissue EVs isolated from NSCLC patient samples play an important role as mediators of intercellular communication, as the expression of the proteins studied coincided with that of the EVs from which they originated. Also, my mom is a scientist, and I often visited her at work when I was little. While I was waiting for my mom to finish her work in a flowbox, my favourite thing to do was to play with the vortex, so I already had some idea of what lab work looks like.

**2. Competitions showcase results, but research is mostly about the process. What was the toughest moment in your project, and how did you manage to overcome it?**

I faced many difficult moments during my research, but the toughest was definitely the final week. I had to finish writing the discussion and conclusions while also preparing for several tests at school. Balancing everything at once was really challenging.

**3. If you could change one thing about how young people engage with scientific research in the Czech Republic, what would it be and why?**

There are definitely many students in the Czech Republic who would love to try working as scientists, but they often don't know where to start. I personally began my research on EVs through the SOČ competition, which I learned about at school. Throughout my SOČ journey, I have found out, how many opportunities there are for young scientists. Unfortunately, there is not enough knowledge about these projects among students. Now I know there are many more opportunities and competitions for students, but they're simply not well known enough.

**4. How did the SOČ competition go overall? What were you most afraid of? What did you learn from it, and what surprised you the most?**

My work reached all the way to the national round, where I placed fourth. The competition got harder with every round. The more advanced round was, the shorter presentation and longer discussion were requested. At the beginning, I was worried I wouldn't be able to write such a complex and extensive thesis. Before each round, I was also afraid of meeting the other competitors, thinking they might be too competitive or unfriendly, but I couldn't be further from the truth. They were truly kind, and several even became my friends. Everyone there was genuinely interested in science and in learning about each other's projects.

**5. How did you prepare for each round of the competition? Was the school round significantly different from the national round, for example?**

I went through three rounds of the competition: school, regional, and finally the national round. I prepared for the school and regional rounds in a very similar way, mostly at home with support from my family. Before the national round, however, I took a rhetoric course offered by JCMM specifically for SOČ participants, where I met competitors from other scientific fields as well.

**6. Would you do it again?**

The whole process was challenging, and I learned and tried many new things. I would definitely recommend SOČ to anyone who wants to experience what scientific work is really like.