

Kavya Shivashankar spells history for Indian American kids

It was a dream come true for Kavya Shivashankar as she made history by lifting the Scripps National Spelling Bee trophy to bring a third back-to-back victory of the prestigious championship to an Indian American kid.

Tears welled up in the eyes of Kavya, 13, of Olathe, Kansas, who has finished among the top 10 for the last three years and tied for the fourth place last year, as she finally won the glittering gold trophy and a cash prize of \$30,000, along with several other prizes worth \$11,000.

The word that brought Kavya the coveted title and huge hugs from her father, mother and little sister at Thursday night's final telecast at prime time by ABC was 'Laodicean', indifferent or lukewarm especially in matters of religion or politics.

However, unlike last year when the second spot too was taken by an Indian American kid with Sameer Mishra emerging as the top speller, 12-year-old Tim Ruitter of Centreville, Virginia, the only non-teenager in the finals finished runner-up. He misspelled 'maecenas', which means a cultural benefactor.

Aishwarya Eshwar Pastapur, 13, from Springfield, Illinois, who loved to pump her arm and exclaim 'Yes!' after getting a word correct, finished third after flubbing 'menhir', a type of monolith found widely distributed across Europe, Africa, and Asia.

Last year's runner up Siddarth Chand, 13, of Beverly Hills, Michigan the only boy among seven Indian American finalists, was the second to be eliminated as he slipped on 'apodyterium', the primary entry in the public baths in ancient Rome.

Before him Neetu Chandak of Seneca Falls, New York, was floored by 'derriengue', a disease of cattle in South America.

Then 'Herniorrhaphy', a surgical procedure for correcting hernia, felled Tussah Heera of Las Vegas, Nevada.

'Amorevole', Italian for loving, affectionate, fond, claimed Ramya Auropren of San Jose, California. Anamika Veeramni of Parma Heights, Ohio, had no clue about 'Fackeltanz', German for a 'Torch dance' at a wedding or similar celebration.

Earlier, seven Indian American kids coming from a community that is less than one percent of the total US population breezed into the finals making about two thirds of the 11 top spellers.

Way back in 1985, Balu Natarajan, today a physician specialising in sports medicine, was the first Indian American to win the title, and thereafter including last year's winner Mishra, eight Indian American have won the championship.

Among them, back-to-back title winners were Nupur Lala and George Abraham Thampy in 1999 and 2000 respectively and Pratyush Buddiga and Sai R. Gunturi in 2002 and 2003 respectively. Other winners were Ragashree Ramachandran in 1988 and Anurag Kashyap in 2005.

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