

New Yorker Wins US Spelling Bee With 'Knaidel'

Arvind Mahankali, a 13-year-old boy from Bayside Hills, N.Y., won the Scripps National Spelling Bee on Thursday by correctly spelling "knaidel," a kind of dumpling.

Mahankali, a student at Nathaniel Hawthorne Middle School, had finished third in the contest twice before, each time stumbling on German words. This year, the packed auditorium erupted in a standing ovation when he nailed "knaidel," which comes from German-derived Yiddish.

"I thought, 'The German curse had turned into a German blessing,'" he said of his victory. "It means I can retire on a good note."

Mahankali, who wants to become a quantum physicist, defeated 10 other finalists. Asked what he planned to do during his summer vacation, he said he planned to study physics.

He said he would use the \$30,000 cash prize for college.

The second-place finisher was Pranav Sivakumar, 13, of Tower Lakes, New York, who attends Barrington Middle School. Sriram Hatwar, 13, from Painted Post, New York, and a student at the Alternative School for Math & Science, finished third.

Finalists were eliminated on such words as "pathognomonic," a disease's characteristics, "doryline," a kind of ant, "melocoton," a grafted peach, and "kaburi," a land crab.

Contestants bit lips and clutched hands as they spelled before a crowded ballroom. All asked for definitions, origins, and a sentence using the word. Most wrote the word on their hands or forearms with a finger before spelling them into a microphone.

Asked by pronouncer Jacques Bailly to spell "temenos," Vismaya

Kharkar, 14, from Bountiful, Utah, covered her face with her hands and rocked her head forward and backward.

Then she wrote it into her hand and, after spelling it correctly, flashed a big smile and high-fived other contestants. But Kharkar went out on “paryphodrome,” exclaiming “Oh, no!” when the bell sounded indicating a misspelling.

Amber Born, a 14-year-old from Marblehead, Massachusetts, who is home schooled, reacted with raised eyebrows when given “lansquenet,” a kind of card game. “That is cause for panic,” she said, then slowly spelled it correctly.

Mahankali won a contest that involved 11 million young spellers at some point. A total of 281 aged 8 to 14 from all 50 U.S. states, the District of Columbia and foreign countries took part in the Bee held outside Washington.

For the first time since it started in 1927, the contest included tests on vocabulary. Organizers said the new quizzes were part of the Bee’s commitment to deepening knowledge of the English language.

Since 1999, 11 of the 15 winners have been of South Asian origin, including the last six.