

Little masters of spelling

HOW OFTEN has it happened that you try and spell a word, only to get stumped right in the middle of it? This does not seem to be a problem with the talented children who compete at Spellmasters Australia. What makes these children stand out from the rest?

Saurav Das (13 years), a Year 8 student from Melbourne's Haileybury College has just won the Senior Division Round 4 of the Spellmasters spelling competition. He won the monthly \$50 prize money, the Macquarie Dictionary first place prize and a place in the final at the end of the year. Some of the words he was asked to spell were "pharmacy", "retrieve" and "wrath". Saurav is also the winner of the 2007 Spellmasters finals.



NAINA PADUKONE discovers young talent making an impact at an unusual academic skill

consecutive years in a row would be a tremendous personal achievement.

Saurav joined Haileybury College in Year 7 after securing a scholarship in 2006. He enjoys playing basketball and is an ardent reader. Saurav also takes part in quiz competitions run by his community and at other social functions.

His brother Somesh Das (10 years), a Year 5 student from Holy Trinity Primary School won the 2nd Place in the Junior Division. Some of the words that he had to spell were "reservoir", "squall" and "digital". Somesh won an electronic pocket dictionary and a place in the finals at the end of the year. Somesh too plays basketball, chess, table tennis and the piano.

Proud father Hillol Das is a Consultant Psychiatrist at Pine Lodge Clinic, Southern Health and mother Purabi assists her husband with the administrative work. When asked about their sons' outstanding achievement and what preparations have gone into them, the parents confirmed that both Saurav and Somesh are avid readers and always refer to the dictionary if they have a spelling to verify. They are exceptional students and have been good at academics from the onset. The family migrated to Australia from Tripura in 1996, and have pretty much settled here.

Another outstanding achiever is highly motivated Anand Bharadwaj (8 years), a Year 2 student from Clifton Hill Primary School, who won Spellmasters Round 4 Junior Division competition. Anand won the monthly \$50 prize money, the Macquarie Dictionary first place prize and a place in the final at the end of the year. Some of the words he was asked to spell were "scheme", "panicking" and "souvenir".

Says Lili Hampel from Spellmasters, "When Spellmasters commenced in 2006, it was open to students from Year 2 up to Year 9. Anand was so keen to be a part of the competition that the entry level was changed, and it is now open to all school students from Prep to Year 9." Anand has been competing at Spellmasters since he was in prep and competes at both the

junior and senior level. In 2006, he stood third in two separate qualifying rounds in both the junior and senior competitions. In the senior competition he was a prep student competing with Year 9 students. He continues to be an enthusiastic competitor at Spellmasters. In Year 1 he won a qualifying junior round, and now in Year 2 he has once again won a qualifying junior round, as well as coming second in a senior qualifying round.

"Spectators are always amazed and delighted by the spelling ability and confidence of this pint-sized spelling whiz. He captures the hearts of all who watch him," adds Lili.

Anand will go on to compete at both levels in the end of year finals where he will have the chance to win prizes and the Spellmasters trophy for his school.

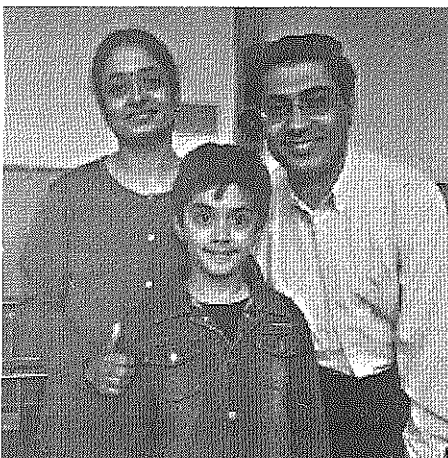
Lili Hampel who runs Spellmasters Australia in Melbourne, has completed two Masters degrees, one in Education (English) and Arts (English), from Monash University. She was the scriptwriter for

a newspaper columnist. With an array of achievements there is no doubt about her passion for English and spellings. She launched the organisation after being inspired by the movie *Spellbound* and the reaction of the audience.

Asked if the children who compete at Spellmasters need any special prerequisites she states that spelling really involves knowing the basic rules, letters and patterns, and at looking at how words are formed. She is also happy with the response from parents and schools in adding to the success of Spellmasters Australia. She states that the enthusiasm from the parents is overwhelming.

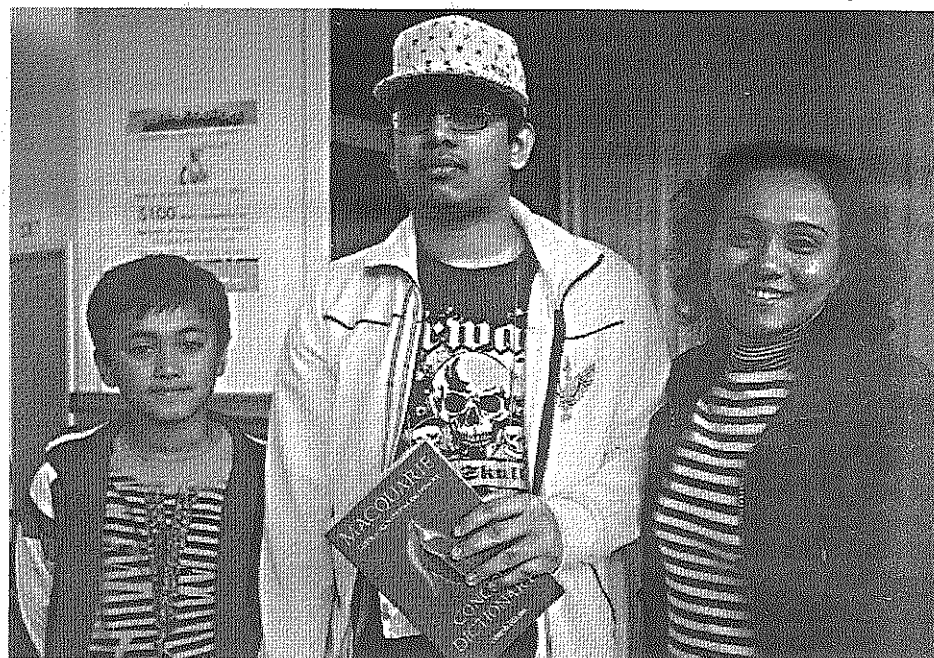
"Any child with the enthusiasm to participate and improve their confidence as well as their spellings, can enrol for the competition. They are not given gruelling words but everyday words that can be broken up. These competitions help students improve their understanding of the English language, their spelling techniques and in consequence their comprehension, and communication skills," she states.

Parents should take inspiration from these young achievers and encourage children to develop new skills in spelling. Kids from South Asian backgrounds



Anand with his family

Asked why he wanted to compete yet again after carrying away the trophy last year, he states that winning for two



Saurav and Somesh Das with mum Purabi

the Channel 10 children's show *Off the Dish* and an English coordinator at two secondary colleges. She has written stories for various publications here and overseas, and is a ghost writer for

have always been particularly skilled at spelling. Those who have seen the award-winning American documentary *Spellbound* will know this!