

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Maykala Todman Buzzes Past The Competition To Win 2015 Territorial Spelling Bee

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At the end of 22 intense rounds culminating in a speedy championship round, 11-year-old Maykala Todman, a student at St. Croix's Lew Muckle Elementary School, emerged as the champion of the 2015 Territorial Spelling Bee held Friday at the John H. Woodson Junior High School on St. Croix.

The word that sealed the deal for the sixth grader was "Daltonism," which is defined as "colorblindness of the red-green type" and derives its name from John Dalton, the chemist and physicist who was afflicted with the phenomenon and was the first to write about it.

While Maykala's championship showing was nothing short of excellent, hers was not exactly an easy road to the top. She saw stiff competition from Khaien Donowa, 13, a seventh grader at the Arthur A. Richards Junior High School, who placed after her and Naheem Modeste, a sixth grader at St. John's Giffit Hill School, came in next.

Nonetheless, Maykala held her own from her very first word, "hickory" to her last, "Daltonism."

Following the competition, the beaming bee champ -- neatly dressed in her school uniform and holding several of the awards she'd garnered -- told *VI Consortium* she felt "proud and great about winning."

Maykala said her strategy for preparing for the bee centered on learning the origins of words in order to decipher their correct spelling. For instance, she said when she understood the word "kuchen" (pronounced "KOO-KEHN") given to her in Round 18 was of German origin, she soon figured out its correct spelling based on what she knows about the letter sounds of words with German origins. However, she admitted she had difficulty with the word.



Maykala Todman (L), 2015

Territorial Bee champ, looks on with other spelling bee participants

Jane Sumayah, Maykala's mother, said she was proud of her daughter's accomplishment, noting the youngster's work ethic.

"Maykala worked hard and put in a lot of long hours on the weekend," she said.

But it seems young Maykala had been preparing for her big bee moment for a long time. Sumayah said her daughter had been enrolled in school from age 2-1/2, and had always had a love of books and reading. When it came to preparing for the territorial bee, she said Maykala only had one month to the day to get ready, as the girl had snagged third place in the district spelling bee only last month.

Beaming from the effort put forth by her son, Eva Wilson, Khaien's mother, said she was "extremely proud" of the young man, and said he "takes his school work very seriously."

As for Khaien's strategy in performing well at the bee, Wilson said the teen, who has "always came out in the top three" in the last four spelling bees, is big on using technology.

"He studies his words on the internet, learning the origins of words, pronunciations and using them in sentences," she explained.

But Wilson said her son, who went head-to-head with Maykala up until Round 22 when the word "corrade" knocked him out of the competition, isn't left to himself to bear the task of studying alone. She called it "a family affair" when it comes to getting the teen prepared to compete. Khaien's uncle, Michael Wilson, shared his sister's sentiments, saying he helps coach the youngster at home and that he was also very proud of his nephew's accomplishment.

Khaien is champion of the 2015 district bee that was held on Feb. 13.

Naheem said he would "basically go over my words and have my parents and my coaches test me," when it came to practicing for the bee. The 11-year-old has been involved in spelling bee competitions since the third grade, but said he was caught off guard by the last few words in Friday's competition as he, Khaien and Maykala battled it out.

"The words they gave when there were three people left, those words were not from the list, so they really surprised me because I really didn't know them," he said. Naheem fell to the word "cloche" in the 21st round.

Nonetheless, his father, great aunt and coach, are proud of Naheem's efforts.

"It was a lot of pressure, a lot of hard work, a lot of late nights. It was tough, I really thought he was the champion, but it happens to be someone else, but we are very proud of him," said Peter Lawrensen, Naheem's father.

St. Croix Sen. Kenneth Gittens, whose office supplied the awards for the competition, attended the event. St. Thomas Sen. Tregenza Roach also attended.

"It's important to support the children," Roach said, "they are the reason why we do the work that we do." He also pointed out that as a lawmaker, it is important for him to "see



L to R: Naheem Modeste,

Khaien Donowa and Maykala Todman

Maykala will now head to Washington, D.C. to compete in the Scripps National Spelling Bee during the week of May 24-29. As part of her territorial bee prize package, she received an all-expense paid trip for her and her coach to attend the competition.

Looking ahead, Maykala said of her plans for preparing for the national stage, "I'll be expanding my vocabulary, learning new words in the process, and getting ready to win in Washington, D. C."

Now in its 42nd year, the 2015 Territorial Spelling Bee was sponsored by the *Virgin Islands Daily News* and the Virgin Islands Department of Education.

The bee's 12 participants each received certificates as well as gift bags. They, their respective schools, and coaches can be found below:

Annushka Chandirami ? VI Montessori & Intl. Academy ? Melissa Bump

Eurnett Christopher ? Joseph Gomez Elementary ? Ermin Stevens

Khaien Donowa ? Arthur A. Richards Jr. High ? Jamelia Thurland

Jacinda Dubois ? St. Patrick's Catholic ? K.M. Michael

Michai Hughes ? Moravian ? LeVar David

T'Shai Israel ? Addelita Cancryn Jr. High ? Tamah Henley

Taiyce Jacobs ? Church of God Holiness ? Stephen Marcel

Naheem Modeste ? Giffit Hill ? Becky Fleckner

Rachel Nelson ? Bertha C. Boschulte ? Merida Gumbs

Nayeli O'Shaughnessy ? John H. Woodson Jr. High ? Carla Bastian

Maykala Todman ? Lew Muckle Elementary ? Maria Edwards

Aundre Watley ? Evelyn M. Williams Elementary ? Sheryl Carr

Feature Image: 2015 Territorial Spelling Bee Champ Maykala Todman smiles with her awards.