

WORLD CHAMP'S ANALYSIS

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Nigel Richards of New Zealand won the 9th World Scrabble Championship in Mumbai, India, becoming the ninth different World Champion since the event began in 1991. The fact that no-one has won twice seems to suggest an element of chance is involved. As Nigel modestly put it when interviewed in Mumbai, 'This is a game independent of other games. You win some, you lose some - it depends on the luck of the draw.'

Greater Mumbai apparently has 22 million people in a 600 square mile area. It is a city of contrasts, from the extreme poverty of the streets and slums to the opulence of our Scrabble venue, the Taj President Hotel. We experienced the heat and humidity, the squalor and stench, the insane traffic, claustrophobic markets, hawkers, beggars and hungry children, the endless stream of humanity. But we also saw the impressive Gateway of India monument, the Hanging Gardens (with its penguin rubbish bins - bizarre!), a Jain temple, Diwali celebrations, Gandhi's house, Chowpatty Beach and some nice shops. Through it all, whatever their situation, the Indian people were more often than not friendly and helpful.

We encountered some classic local 'Indian English' spellings, like LIBARARY and LIABRARY, SU-VENEERS, and the lovely STRAINEOUS, a mixture of 'strain', 'strenuous' and 'extraneous' ('No straineous activities in this park'). The newspapers use modern slang such as PREZ (president) and BIZMAN (businessman), and we saw signs like CHOWK (road junction) and DHOBI GHAT (washing place). Of course the menus were chock-full of terms like BIRYANI, TIKKA, KOFTA and KULFI.

Anagrams

One of my earliest attempts at anagramming, back in primary school, yielded the following:

INDISTINGUISHABLENESS THE SUN IS BLESSING INDIA

The sun certainly shone while we were there, and as someone remarked, after a while the people became indistinguishable from one another, they all started to look familiar, like extras in a Bollywood movie.

MUMBAI transposes into I'M A BUM and AIM BUM, rather close to the mark for those of us who came down with a dose of 'Bombay bum' (related to 'Delhi belly'), which is defined in the online Urban Dictionary as 'a mild to medium case of 'the shits' following a medium curry the night before' (definitely not the cause for me!)

There are no single-word anagrams of MUMBAI allowed in Scrabble, but there are a few on the Net:

AMBIUM gas surrounding the atmosphere of the earth, the sun and other bodies.

(A 'C' front hook converts it to **CAMBIUM** which is OK in Scrabble.)

MIMBAU a town in Indonesia.

UMBIMA a Kenyan surname, e.g. Anna Umbima, a broadcaster/journalist.

NIGEL RICHARDS shares the letters in his name with a few other people in the world. **CHARLES RIDING** and **INGRID CHARLES** live in the U.S., and **CHRIS DEARLING** is a Canadian mathematics education consultant.

In the final, Nigel was dressed appropriately for his name (which means 'the black') in a black New Zealand tee-shirt. The signs were promising for him before Game 1, with **NIG** spelt out in the random jumble of tiles around the edge of the board. **GAN** was there at first too, but unlike **NIG**, it disappeared when the tiles were moved around shortly afterwards - not a good omen for **GANESH** (the Hindu elephant-deity).

Nigel's full name has other interesting anagrams too:

SINGLE, RICH, RAD

IN GLIDER CRASH

DARLING RICHES

RED CHINA GIRLS

RICH RED SIGNAL

HERALDIC RINGS

For those looking for an anagrammatic 'royal' connection, it was there in **CHARLES + DI + RING**. A sign, perhaps, that Nigel was to become the new 'King of Scrabble'? After blitzing Ganesh 3-0 in the final and collecting the winner's cheque, one anagram in particular stood out:

RICH LAD REIGNS

Squares

NIGEL GANESH

(I'm sure Glenda can tidy up these squares!)

ICILY ANEMIA

GIVES NEPERS

ELEMI EMEERS

LYSIS SIRREE

HASSEL

INDIA MUMBAI

NAILS UNIONS

DICEY MIDGUT

ILEAL BOGORA

ASYLA ANURAN

ISTANA

(The only non-Scrabble word is Bogora, a town in Sudan.)

Palindromes

India is the home of NAAN bread, cricketer Madan LAL, the town of MAHAM, blind river dolphins called SUSUS, and the MALAYALAM language. Here are a couple of Indian-flavoured palindromes for the World Champs, our premier 'word meet'.

Aid Nike*,
Esteem drowsy awe,
Rare ways,
Word Meet, Seek India!
(* Goddess of victory)

Top, aimed a cadet:
I'm ill in Asia,
B--- Mumbai's an
illimited academia pot!

After Nigel won the first game of the best-of-five final:
NIGEL - A LEG IN
Then he won the second game and had his sights firmly fixed on the top prize:
SEE, PURSE DIVIDES RUPEES
Someone said Nigel reminded them of a gourmet cook, crafting elegant creations with the tiles:
ALLEGING NIGELLA?
On completion of the clean sweep, time to celebrate?
NIGEL, AN ALE? GIN?
To conclude, here is a longer, slightly more cryptic palindrome in honour of our World
Champion Scrabblor:

'Name' tiles aid
Nigel Richards,
Drowned logic of
Top-spot foci;
Golden Words Dr.
(ah, CIRL, e.g.?)
India's elite man!