

# Indian Junior testing himself in U.S. tournaments



Prahalad Rajkumar has set big goals for himself. He wants to earn a university degree, become a software developer, play lots of bridge and win a national championship in an ACBL tournament.

At age 21, he's already made so much progress that he's a favorite to accomplish all that and more.

A native of Chennai, India, Prahalad learned bridge at age 14 from his dad, who is an Indian national champion. Prahalad played in many high-level tournaments during his high-school years. He placed third in a major IMP Pair event in his home country and was named to the Indian Junior Team in 2001.

"A few times, I skipped my mid-year exams to go to the Indian Nationals," Prahalad said. "There were no make-up exams, but I was doing so well in my courses that my instructors just let it go by."

Prahalad came to the U.S. three years ago to study computer science at the University of Maryland. He played in Washington DC and New York City NABCs, where he entered as many championship events as possible. He particularly likes the major team events.

"I really enjoy being able to practice and improve and learn from other players," Prahalad said. "I want to play against the best, and I hope to one day make a strong showing in the Spingold or Vanderbilt."

Prahalad says the tournament events are very different in his home country. There are no flighted or stratified events, and the national organization doesn't have the resources to promote youth bridge. Teens and other newcomers must play in the open sections at Indian tournaments.

Prahalad hasn't played in any Junior events for the past three years, but he has strong praise for ACBL's program and its participants.

"There are so many more opportunities here in the U.S. for young players," Prahalad said. "I have a strong appreciation for all of ACBL's efforts to

teach in the schools and encourage junior bridge."

Here in Pittsburgh, Prahalad entered the Vanderbilt and lost to the powerful Meltzer team. Since then, his team has won a compact KO event and placed second in the top bracket of the four-session Toyes-Giftes Knockout Teams. His teammates were G. Venkatesh, Los Altos CA; G. Prabhu, Ames IA; and R. Rajkumar (his father), Kanningat Krishnakumar and P. Ridhar, all of Chennai, India. On Friday, Prahalad and Venkatesh finished 13th in the Lebhar IMP Pairs.

Perhaps his most impressive showing in a championship event was in New York City, where Prahalad and his 15-year-old brother placed 32nd in the finals of the Life Master Pairs last summer.

In New York, Paul Soloway visited the Daily Bulletin office to report on a diabolical ruse an opponent had pulled on him in the Life Master Pairs. Soloway didn't know the young man's name at the time, but he does now. It was Prahalad, who held:

♠ 10 8 6 ♥ A J ♦ K 7 5 ♣ K J 8 7 5

Prahalad chose to respond 1♠ to his partner's opening 1♥ bid and heard Soloway, on his left, bid a natural 2♠. When this was passed back to him, Prahalad bid a smooth 3NT.

Soloway held

♠ A K 7 4 3 2 ♥ 3 ♦ J 8 4 2 ♣ A 2 and was totally deceived. He was intent on not giving declarer a spade trick, so he led diamonds on opening lead and again when he was in with the ♣A. This was not a successful defense, as the full deal was:

♠ J 5  
♥ K Q 10 7 6 4  
♦ A 6  
♣ Q 10 9

*Soloway*

♠ A K 7 4 3 2  
♥ 3  
♦ J 8 4 2  
♣ A 2

♠ Q 9  
♥ 9 8 5 2  
♦ Q 10 9 3  
♣ 6 4 3

*Prahalad*

♠ 10 8 6  
♥ A J  
♦ K 7 5  
♣ K J 8 7 5

As soon as Soloway made his second diamond lead, Prahalad showed his hand and claimed 12 tricks. All Soloway could do was look on in admiration.

"It was like re-raising in poker with nothing," said Soloway. "He made a terrific bid of 1♠ – and his 3NT bid was out of this world. He earned his top."