

SHIVAM SHAH

THE WORLD'S YOUNGEST BRIDGE PLAYER?

Hardly 6 years old, Shival Shah of Great Britain takes part in bridge tournaments and has already accumulated 100 Master Points. A genius? A phenomenal talent? Only time will show. However, his claim on the title of the world's youngest bridge player cannot be easily challenged.

Shivam Shah was born on 27 August 1992. His father, **Nalin Shah**, started teaching him bridge when he was about 4½ years, but at that time he had already mastered some less complex card games with bridge-like concepts (e.g. trick winning, trumps and notrumps, etc.).

The *Oshwal Bridge Club* in Herts, England, holds two duplicates a week. Experienced players prefer the Wednesday tournaments, but a number of them also play on Fridays which are devoted to the less experienced. There are more than a dozen young players, aged under 18, who have learned the game recently and compete on Fridays. Shivam is by far the youngest although there is also a 9-year old and a few 11- and 12-year olds.

Shivam Shah started taking part in the weekly duplicates in December 1997 when he was a mere 5 years and 3 months old. At the beginning he required some help, but since January he has been playing holding the cards properly without using a card-holder.

Shivam usually partners his father, **Nalin Shah**. Playing together, **Shivam** earned his first Master Points in January 1998, and since then he managed to accumulate nearly 100 MPs. **Nalin Shah** reports:

'On 8 April, Shivam and I took part in the Wednesday session of the BBL Simultaneous, playing against the top players of our club. One of them was our oldest member, Mr Z. Khimasia who is over 85 years old. Thus the age span between the competitors that evening was no less than 80 years - a record, I would imagine.

Shivam and I scored nearly 50%, a superb result. One week later we got 55% and finished fourth in a 25-pairs field.'

Shivam Shah showed fascination with cards right from the age of 2. At 2½ he could line up the cards in a sequence starting from ♣2 to ♣A, followed by ♦2, etc., up to the ♠A.

Shivam was able to read when he was 3. At that time, he was introduced to chess and within a few months he could play a whole game, though at a very basic level.

At 4 he learned whist and his interest in chess started to wane. However, the transition from whist to bridge was more difficult than one would expect, mainly because of the extra dimension of the auction. Six months later, **Shivam** had learned the rules of bidding and could add up high card points.

In December 1997, **Shivam** already knew sufficient basic *Acol* to play in the club's Friday duplicates for non-experienced players. He was initiated in the normal Wednesday game in April, and now he is preparing to play in the Middlesex under-19 Pairs.