

# Terry Tao for Australian of the Year

Daniel Mathews

August 24, 2006

Dear friends,

By now I trust you have all heard the good news. Terry Tao, Australian mathematician extraordinaire, has won a Fields Medal – the equivalent of the Nobel prize in mathematics. Those of you who have heard from me in recent times may have heard me mention this possibility, which has now become a reality. It is great to see it happen.

This is really an amazing achievement. Its the first time an Australian has won a Fields medal, and he is a very young recipient at 31. Terry is originally from Adelaide, went to the IMO three times, aged 10, 11, 12, winning bronze, silver and gold respectively. By age 24 he was a full professor at UCLA. He has done a huge amount of research in a whole series of different fields. It is quite exceptional. And although Ive never met him personally, from all accounts he is a very nice guy.

As Terry says, the mathematics itself is far more important than any one person. But it is great to see mathematicians and mathematics – indeed, science and scientists more generally – receiving some attention in Australia.

I think it would be good to nominate Terry for Australian of the Year for 2007. The magnitude of his achievement, one might think, would make him an obvious choice. But given Australias culturally stereotypical preferences, it is perhaps not a foregone conclusion. The more of us that nominate him the better.

You can nominate him online at <http://www.australianoftheyear.gov.au/pages/index.asp>. Its pretty straightforward, you just fill in the form. But if you want to do so, its *quite urgent*, because the closing date for nominations is just a few days away, August 28. (Its also possible to nominate on paper and post by snail-mail, but given the time constraints this seems infeasible.) Completing the form shouldnt take too long: I estimate half an hour maximum. To make it easy for you, Ive provided below two appendices: (1) hints for filling out the form, and (2) useful links.

If you think this is a good idea, it would be excellent if you could find the time to nominate this very worthy candidate. And, if you know of anyone else who might be interested, or who I've missed, or whose email address I got wrong, feel free to forward this on to them too.

Regards,

Dan

### (1) HINTS FOR FILLING OUT THE FORM

Terrys public contact details are as follows.

Prof Terence Tao UCLA Department of Mathematics, Los Angeles, CA  
90095-1596 Department phone (310) 825-4701 tao@math.ucla.edu

His age is 31. This means hes not eligible for young Australian of the year, which only goes up to age 25.

You have to write a few words about the nominee: in the online version there is nothing about word limits, but in the paper version they require *at least* 100 words. Hopefully this shouldnt be too difficult: I have already given some information above, there has been plenty in the media, and I provide a whole bunch of useful information and links below.

You also have to fill in details about yourself. If you like you can also give details of a referee, but thats optional. If you know a maths professor you could put their details in; perhaps you should ask their permission. You can also include supporting documentation, such as news stories, pictures, or even samples of work(!): you might have seen something you want to include, or you could browse the links Ive provided below. This supporting documentation would be sent via email to awardsinfo@australiaday.gov.au, quoting the receipt number of your online nomination; or alternatively by snail-mail to the following address:

National Australia Day Council Old Parliament House King George Terrace  
Parkes ACT 2600.

Given the proximity of the closing date however, snail-mail might not be such a good option.

### (2) USEFUL LINKS

Clearly you dont have to read all these to understand what Terry has done, why he got a Fields Medal and why he should be Australian of the year. The news articles are all very similar; and you dont really need to know the history of the Fields Medal, nor the proof of any theorems! Nevertheless, if you browse through some of these you should be able to get a good idea of the importance of what he did and the prize he was awarded.

UCLA press release

<http://www.newsroom.ucla.edu/page.asp?RelNum=7252>

The official Fields Prize citation for Tao

<http://www.mathunion.org/medals/2006/TaoENG.pdf>

Australian news articles on Tao

<http://www.theage.com.au/news/national/its-prime-time-as-numbers-man-tao-tops-his-field/>

<http://www9.sbs.com.au/theworldnews/region.php?id=130878&region=3>

<http://www.smh.com.au/news/national/sum-boy-genius/2006/08/22/1156012541805.html>

<http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,20876,20219438-28737,00.html>

<http://au.news.yahoo.com/060822/2/108qm.html>

<http://www.news.com.au/heraldsun/story/0,21985,20221346-24331,00.html>

News of Fields Medal announcements

<http://www.newscientist.com/article/dn9813.html>

Terrys home page

<http://www.math.ucla.edu/~tao/>

Terrys breakthrough paper with Ben Green on arithmetic progressions of primes

<http://www.arxiv.org/abs/math.NT/0404188>

(from here you can get to the paper in various formats by clicking ps, pdf, etc)

My homage from last January

[http://math.stanford.edu/~mathews/articles/terry\\_tao.pdf](http://math.stanford.edu/~mathews/articles/terry_tao.pdf)

General information about the Fields Medal

<http://www.mathunion.org/Prizes/Fields/index.html>

[http://www.fields.utoronto.ca/aboutus/jcfields/fields\\_medal.html](http://www.fields.utoronto.ca/aboutus/jcfields/fields_medal.html)