

BBC

NEWS SPORT WEATHER **WORLD SERVICE**

A-Z INDEX

SEARCH

Go

You are in: [Science/Nature](#)

Tuesday, 20 August, 2002, 17:27 GMT 18:27 UK

[News Front Page](#)

[Africa](#)
[Americas](#)
[Asia-Pacific](#)
[Europe](#)
[Middle East](#)
[South Asia](#)
[UK](#)
[Business](#)
[Entertainment](#)
[Science/Nature](#)
[Technology](#)
[Health](#)

[Talking Point](#)[Country Profiles
In Depth](#)[Programmes](#)[BBC SPORT](#)[BBC WEATHER](#)**SERVICES**

[Daily E-mail](#)
[News Ticker](#)
[Mobile/PDAs](#)

[Text Only](#)
[Feedback](#)
[Help](#)

EDITIONS[Change to UK](#)

Prize for 'big picture' mathematicians



By [Richard Black](#)
 BBC Science Correspondent

Mathematicians from France and the United States have been awarded the world's top maths prize, the Fields Medal.

The medal is given every four years, and is regarded as the maths equivalent of the Nobel Prizes.

Laurent Lafforgue and Vladimir Voevodsky won the medal for their work on some of the big current ideas in mathematics.

The prizes were handed out by Chinese President Jiang Zemin during the International Congress of Mathematicians in Beijing, the biggest annual gathering of mathematicians in the world.



Vladimir Voevodsky

In the audience was John Nash, the genius whose life formed the basis of the Russell Crowe movie "A Beautiful Mind".

Gold and glory

The Fields Medal is named after John Fields, a Canadian mathematician who established the award in the 1930s.

See also:

09 Aug 02 | [South Asia](#)
[Indians claim maths discovery](#)
 23 Jul 02 | [Science/Nature](#)
[How random is pi?](#)
 14 Mar 02 | [Science/Nature](#)
[British physicist wins religious prize](#)
 19 Nov 99 | [Science/Nature](#)
[Mathematicians crack big puzzle](#)

Internet links:

[International Congress of Mathematicians](#)
[Institute des Hautes Etudes Scientifiques](#)
[Institute for Advanced Study](#)

The BBC is not responsible for the content of external internet sites

Top Science/Nature stories now:

[Date for first Australians](#)
[Fifth closest star discovered](#)
[Mona Lisa smile secrets revealed](#)
[The gene that maketh man?](#)
[Gravity wave detector all set](#)
[Robots get cheeky](#)
[The big and the bizarre](#)
[Botox 'may cause new wrinkles'](#)

Links to more Science/Nature stories are at the foot of the page.

Made of gold, the medals bear the inscription "Congregati ex toto orbe mathematici ob scripta insignia tribuere" - "the mathematicians assembled here from all over the world pay tribute for outstanding work".

The Fields Medal is different from the Nobel Prizes in one important aspect - it can only be given to researchers under the age of forty.

"This saves us a lot of trouble," explained Professor John Coates of Cambridge University, UK, a former member of the international committee which makes the award. "With the Nobels many of the old men on the committee are possible winners themselves, but that's not the case with the Fields."

Big sums

This year's winners both work on wide-ranging, ambitious areas of mathematics.

Though unlikely to result in discoveries which greatly change the world most of us live in, their work is regarded as important as it aims to bring apparently unconnected fields of study together.



Laurent Lafforgue

This approach has yielded dividends in the past, most notably in the mid-1990s when researcher Andrew Wiles used a seemingly unrelated field of maths to solve Fermat's Last Theorem, a feat which had eluded mathematicians for over 300 years.

Lafforgue, aged thirty-five, works on the "Langlands program", a concept which seeks an underlying unity among various mathematical disciplines.

He is a Professor at the Institut des Hautes Etudes Scientifiques, or Institute for Advanced Scientific Studies, near Paris.

Voevodsky, a year older, specialises in abstract algebraic geometry, linking the science of numbers to the science of shapes.

He was born in Russia and studied at Moscow

State University before moving to the USA.
He is currently a Professor at the Institute for
Advanced Study in Princeton, New Jersey.

"They are both working with vast
mathematical machinery," commented John
Coates. "They are both very good choices."

 [E-mail this story to a friend](#)

Links to more Science/Nature stories

In This Section



©  [^^ Back to top](#)

[News Front Page](#) | [Africa](#) | [Americas](#) | [Asia-Pacific](#) | [Europe](#) | [Middle East](#) |
[South Asia](#) | [UK](#) | [Business](#) | [Entertainment](#) | [Science/Nature](#) |
[Technology](#) | [Health](#) | [Talking Point](#) | [Country Profiles](#) | [In Depth](#) |
[Programmes](#)

[To BBC Sport>>](#) | [To BBC Weather>>](#) | [To BBC World Service>>](#)

© MMIII | [News Sources](#) | [Privacy](#)