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Maths genius declines top prize

Grigory Perelman, the Russian who seems to have solved one of the hardest problems in mathematics, has declined one of the top prizes in maths.

The Fields Medals are among the most important prizes for mathematics, and Perelman was to have picked up the award at a ceremony in Madrid.

Perelman is said to shun self-promotion

However, the organisers told the BBC that Perelman had declined the prize.

In 2002, Perelman claimed to have solved a century-old problem called the Poincare Conjecture.

So far, experts combing through his proof in order to verify it have found no significant errors.

"The official statement regarding Grigory Perelman is that he has declined to accept the medal," said a spokesperson for the International Congress of Mathematicians, which organised the meeting at which the prizes were announced.

There had been considerable speculation that Grigory "Grisha" Perelman would decline the award. The Russian has been described as an "unconventional" and "reclusive" genius who spurns self-promotion.

The Fields Medals are regarded as the equivalent of the Nobel Prize for mathematics. They are awarded to mathematicians under the age of 40 for an outstanding body of work and are decided by an anonymous committee.

The winners are Andrei Okounkov of the University of California, Berkeley, Terence Tao from the University of California, Los Angeles, and Wendelin Werner of the University of Paris-Sud in Orsay, France.

Mr Perelman was born in Leningrad (St Petersburg) 1966 in what was then the Soviet Union. Aged 16, he won the top prize at the International Mathematical Olympiad in Budapest in 1982.

Having received his doctorate from St Petersburg State University, he taught at various US universities during the

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1990s before returning home to take up a post at the Steklov Mathematics Institute.

He resigned from the institute suddenly on January 1, and has reportedly been unemployed since.

Perelman's gained international in 2002 and 2003 when he published two papers online that appeared to solve the Poincare Conjecture.

The riddle had perplexed mathematicians since it was first posited by Frenchman Henri Poincare in 1904.

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