



Azlan Iskandar

AZLAN TO THE RESCUE

Former world no.10 Azlan Iskandar tells Simon Redfern how he helped save the 2015 PSA Women's World Championship

Azlan Iskandar, the man behind the rescheduled 2015 PSA World Women's Championship in Malaysia in April, has always been ahead of his time.

When the 33-year-old from Sarawak was aged 12, he set a target to be in the world's top 10 before he was 30 and duly achieved that aim at 28.

By the age of 19, he had set up his own company, Sportspin Event and Athlete Management, with his sister and it is Sportspin that has rescued the women's flagship individual event, after Hallmark, another Malaysian company, withdrew at the last minute in December.

"I set a goal when I was 12 to be top 10 before the age of 30 and I did, so after I achieved that goal, I struggled to find motivation," recalled the two-time Malaysian national champion, who retired from the PSA Tour in 2012 after winning 14 titles.

"I was lucky enough to have a next career move set up 2-3 years in advance. Sportspin Event and Athlete Management was a company I set up with my sister when I was 19. It was the company that basically

managed all my sponsorship contracts and my PR.

"My sister was my manager for the first few years of my career. Now I'm the CEO of the company and my business partner is Nafzahizam Adnan, an ex top-100 player and the older brother of the current Malaysian no.1 [Nafiizwan Adnan].

"For the last three years Sportspin has been running the Malaysian Squash Tour. We basically run about 12 men's and 12 women's \$5k professional events around the country to promote squash.

"At the same time we are exposing the kids in my squash academy [AISA – Azlan Iskandar Squash Academy] to international squash at a young age. I've done this under the radar, but it is a thankless job!

"I put myself in the shoes of when I was growing up. I did not have this opportunity when I was younger, touring the country, earning ranking points and earning money.

"I'm glad it has helped ease some of our juniors into the transition of becoming a senior player, as travelling abroad is too expensive at the early stages of one's career."

So how did he and Sportspin become involved in rearranging the PSA Women's World

Championship in Kuala Lumpur from April 25 to 30 for a record \$170,000 in prize money?

"I was genuinely excited when I heard the event was going to be staged in Malaysia," he replied. "Unfortunately, it didn't materialise (initially).

"Malaysians like the thought of having an international event, but when it comes to finding sponsors, it is extremely difficult. I had a stab at it with a few close friends and reached out to a couple of big companies in December. I continued to flirt with the idea of running this event. Fortunately, the Sports Minister of Malaysia too made a few calls to private companies to step into this event. Then here I am!"

Iskandar also acknowledged the assistance he has had in organising the championship from PSA CEO Alex Gough, whom he has known since he was 18.

"He has been great," he said of the Welshman. "He has been pushing hard with me to make sure this event happens, so the girls get another event and another shot at the title, points, money and glory."

Iskandar has also called on the help of Canary Wharf Classic promoter Tim Garner, on whose floor he used to sleep during the early days of his career.

"Tim will help out with all the technical and scheduling for the event," he said.

"I have been purely the

event promoter, finding the funds and liaising with sponsors, the PSA, Squash Racquets Association of Malaysia and Ministry of Youth and Sport.

"I have a team that will be executing everything from planning and marketing the event, creating the theme, the logo, the digital presence etc."

Iskandar will use the



\$15,000 Malaysian Squash Tour II event held at Bukit Jalil National Squash Centre from April 19 to 23 just before the WWC to test out everything, but will also be running squash clinics throughout the tournament.

Is he planning anything else? "The think tank is still thinking," he replied with a smile.

PSA WOMEN'S WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP

Prize money: \$170,000

Dates: April 25 to 30

Venue: Bukit Jalil, Kuala Lumpur

Courts: 10 and 1 moveable glass

Draw: 32

Sponsors: Naza Group (title), Malaysian Ministry of Youth and Sports, Le Meridien Kuala Lumpur (hotel)



Bukit Jalil, venue for the rescheduled 2015 PSA Women's World Championship