

SQUASH ARRIVES IN DUBAI

*Rod Gilmour reports on
a momentous first PSA
World Series Finals in
the emirate*



After a week spent in downtown Dubai marvelling at the sheer scale of the Burj Khalifa, the world's tallest building, it was hard not to look up to squash's own grandiose achievements at hosting the season-ending PSA World Series Finals in the emirate.

Gregory Gaultier (above left), in the process of beating Cameron Pilley in the Dubai World Series Finals climax

Not for nothing is Dubai intent on becoming a mecca for top-level sport. But it has taken several years of toil by Ziad Al-Turki, the Professional Squash Association chairman, for his vision to come to life. By showcasing the men's and women's top eight players in Dubai, squash has now joined the likes of horse racing, badminton, golf and tennis in staging lucrative events there (\$320,000 prize money in squash's case).

The World Series Finals, first played in 1993, have endured a stop-start history, with 19 men's events and just two women's, won by Malaysian Nicol David in 2012 and 2013.

However, World Series events now create a combined \$2.3million in prize money and increasing gender equality on the tour circuit made sure that 2016 women's champion

Laura Massaro, of England, went home with the same-size pay-cheque as the men's standout winner, France's Gregory Gaultier.

There was symmetry in Massaro's win in May, as she kicked off the opening night session in the air-conditioned, purpose-built venue beneath the Burj Khalifa. As dusk fell, the Dubai Fountain would whirl into action just metres away, powerful jets swaying elaborately in time to contemporary music. Massaro was in tune with her own game and her choice of pink outfits matched the World Series décor and lighting preferred by Al-Turki.

Last seen at the Finals at Queen's Club in London, the 'Z Court' was back in action here too. The court stood out thanks to the pink markings. New LED lighting helped

in the capture of super slow-motion TV pictures. High-definition televisions were placed around the top of the court. Behind the sidewall seats, two rolling advertising boards relayed the scores and top-end sponsors.

Video screens immediately behind the court wall in effect turned the court front wall into a big TV that provided PSA TV highlights and images of Dubai. It wasn't totally clear, but this is a work in progress and – once corrected – will be a significant enhancement to the presentation of squash with important sponsor potential. This is the future!

In all, it was a world away from a decade ago, when the Finals were staged in Broadgate on London's Square Mile.