

SQUASH ANNUAL AWARDS

PLAYER



ROD GILMOUR
reveals our roll of honour for achievements in 2018

PLAYERS OF THE YEAR

Spare a thought here for Simon Rösner. In his 15th season on the circuit, 2018 proved to be a breakthrough year: a first PSA World Series title win in New York and three further finals for the 31-year-old German. But one of the hallmarks of a great champion is how to overcome the hard times and remain at the top of the game.

Mohamed ElShorbagy knows that more than most. He has been consistent throughout his career in suffering early-round defeats – everyone wants to beat him, after all – and then winning big titles.

Yet, he continues to adapt, learn and embrace being Egypt's world no.1 male. Through 2018, he did indeed dip, but he won a host of major titles and continues to revel in being trained and coached by David Palmer.

Meanwhile, compatriot **Nour El Sherbini** once again earns our award as top female player. She started the year by collecting the Arab Outstanding Athlete Award in Dubai and topped the rankings for 11 of the years 12 months only to be usurping by rival Raneem el Welily in the final month of the year. She now exudes confidence, typified by her brilliant Allam British Open win in May – and continues to be the fans' favourite.

YOUNG PLAYERS OF THE YEAR

If 2017 proved an award entrée in this category for **Diego Elias**, 2018 set in stone that the Peruvian has a big future in the game. Sure, his only titles came by virtue of three Pan and South American triumphs, but he continues to make inroads on the PSA Tour. That was highlighted in October at the Qatar Classic with a sparkling, five-game win over the world no.1 to become the first Peruvian to reach the last four of a major PSA event. It was no fluke; the match was a pure spectacle and suggests a first major title looms for the 22-year-old. On the women's side, the emergence of another young Egyptian should not be a great surprise and **Hania El Hammamy**, who turned 18 this year, is already showing great



Mohamed ElShorbagy



Nour El Sherbini



Diego Elias



Hania El Hammamy

potential. Sandwiched around her World Junior Championship runner-up prize, she made a plethora of PSA World Series main draws and the signs are that she will make further headway in 2019.

SURPRISE OF THE YEAR

South America and 'Historico!' are becoming common place in squash – none more so than when Colombian **Miguel Angel Rodriguez** made history to become the first South American player to win the British Open in May. His victims included Ramy Ashour, Omar Mosaad, Ali Farag and then Mohamed ElShorbagy in the final. He did so as a 32-year-old and unseeded.

His final victory was remarkable, a 102-minute thriller against the tiring Egyptian. The Colombian's renowned fitness had won the day. "It's huge; this is like winning the 'Wimbledon of Squash'. I'm a legend I think I can say," he mused.

The 2018 Cairns Squash International will also be remembered for an equally enthralling story. World no. 494 Darren Chan happened to be on holiday in the Australian city in October before entering the tournament, where the 22-year-old Malaysian proceeded to upset world no. 95 Evan Williams to claim the title. With his win, Chan rose over 200 places in the world rankings.

HIGHLIGHT OF THE YEAR

He has been so close to a major title throughout an otherwise illustrious career, but the stars finally aligned for **James Willstrop**'s golden success at the Commonwealth Games. There was to be no final game heartbreak here. The former world no.1 was simply unstoppable in the final on the Gold Coast after a brutal display of accuracy toppled New Zealander Paul Coll. "Shots went in. It just came together," said the Yorkshireman, whose emotional bear hug with manager Mick Todd was equally memorable. While there was no competitive action, the sight of squash being part of the Youth Olympic Games in Buenos Aires was seen as a "great milestone" for the sport. "I hope we will look back upon this as a great step on our Olympic journey," said Andrew Shelley, the World Squash Federation's chief executive. We await how the sport's administrators, along with its public relations team, tackle the complexities of convincing Paris 2024 officials that it finally merits a place at the top table.



Miguel Angel Rodriguez

COMEBACK OF THE YEAR

Returning in July after 20 months out with a serious knee injury, not even **Low Wee Wern** expected such a rapid return to success. The 28-year-old Malaysian went on a 20-match unbeaten streak to win four PSA Tour titles in Malaysia and Australia, before returning to World Series events in November. A ruptured Achilles at a tournament in Colombia in March 2017 also started a gruelling process of recovery for charismatic American Amanda Sobhy. One year later, after three tentative events in early 2018, she was back to winning ways to become US national champion. A return to the top 10 also beckons in 2019.

MOST IMPROVED PLAYER OF THE YEAR

Another year, another set of athletes who want to muscle their way into squash's ever-expanding game. Our correspondents have chosen an array of names and to pick a standout proved as tough as these committed stars. There is Wales' Tesni

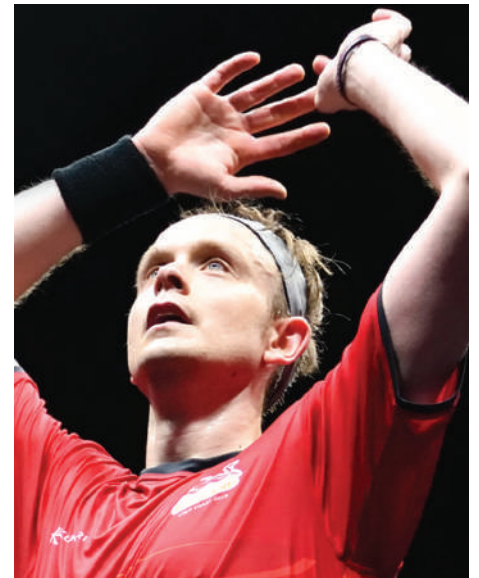


Low Wee Wern

Evans, entering the world's top 10 after a stellar year, which included the British national title. We have rapidly-rising Egyptian Mohamed Abouelghar, 25, who won the China Open for the biggest title of his career. Qatar's Abdulla Al-Tamimi has certainly added dimension to his game after a stable 2017. But plaudits must go to **Simon Rösner**. Granted, he has always been world-class, but he added a new level in 2018.

TEAM OF THE YEAR

On the European scene, Paderborn once again proved a formidable team as they lifted the European clubs' title. Plaudits must also go to the walking squash over-60s team in Hertfordshire, who have invented their own form of the game, alongside walking hockey and walking football. However, what about Nour El Sherbini, Raneem El Welily, Nour El Tayeb and Nouran Gohar for a team? The **Egypt women** quartet duly retained their world team title in China and look a top podium outfit for several years yet.



James Willstrop



Simon Rösner



Egypt's World Women's Team Championship-winning squad