

# LOTS TO LOOK FORWARD TO

*World no.6 James Willstrop gives a player's view of last season and the new campaign*

**As the summer months break up competitive activity, it's a good time for a short recollection of the highs and lows of our world game over the past months.**

## THE GOOD

Equal pay and profile is THE issue everywhere, and since the PSA initiated the coming together of the men's and women's games, in terms of many World Series events, the women stand equal in prize money and now increasingly in profile, having always done so in every other respect. There's a lot of work to do on the Tour as a whole, but the moves made are significant.

It's time to salute a superb streaming and TV product. The World Series Finals coverage raised the level again and so many at SquashTV and PSA work their heads off to make it so. We soon forget what things looked like five, 10 or 20 years ago. And now surely no one can ever say the words 'but you can't see the ball on the TV' again. Of course, they will, though.

While we are on the subject of TV, let me tip my hat to the SquashTV commentating team. They are all former squash players who are finding their voices with the mic,

offering a balance of astute analysis and comic lightness that is singular and sometimes deliciously un-PC. See YouTube for the Joey-PJ bloopers at the World Champs last year, which can't fail, no matter how many times.

I'm on the board of the PSA and I've learnt that criticism of an association will always come more frequently than praise. In no area is this more true than on the subject of refereeing. Lee Drew has found himself in a job concentrating on refereeing, where it is practically impossible to see any tangible reward. Lee and a select group of referees have worked so hard together over the last few years, and despite the fact that we are not yet near employing full-time referees, the levels are certainly moving towards being very professional in standard.

Dubai Opera proved a sumptuous venue for the World Series Finals and that camera angle on the TV was a real addition, if only for the fact it made us all wince at the pace of the game.

## THE BAD

The discrepancy between male and female spectators at squash events is concerning. It's hard to think why squash should attract a predominantly masculine fraternity to its events, but if we want to talk about equality, this has to be our next step. And that's not to say nobody is trying. Seek out Sarah Campion's efforts and the Squash Girls Can initiative at England Squash.

There have been debilitating injuries for pros at the top end of the game recently. Amanda Sobhy's Achilles injury has kept her out for months and Low Wee Wern has had a shocking double dose of serious injury. Greg Lobban and Chris Simpson had lengthy lay-offs too. Few players escape unscathed from injury and those of us who are healthy at present are

reminded by the battle-worn to enjoy every second.

The PSA awards evening in Dubai was a smart precursor to the action that week. The Match of the Year went to the Mohamed ElShorbagy-Greg Gaultier match in New York, which was met by a reaction of stifled chuckling. I may be the only person on planet squash who loathed it – or at least the second half of it anyway. I was due on court straight afterwards and it was nauseating not knowing whether Gaultier's mysterious cramping was going to subside. Maybe it was grating purely because we all know you can't beat someone as good as ElShorbagy if you're as knackered as Greg looked. Perhaps there were scores to settle and Greg felt entitled to pull a fast one. That's a whole other subject. No matter, the public devoured it.

## THE INDIFFERENT

We have been working away in Manchester over the last few months, mainly on doubles for the Commonwealths, which is a cruel game. It reminds me of golf – you never quite know where you are with it. One minute you're perfect, the next you're throwing that godforsaken eyewear at the nearest confused coach. Hopefully some of the hard work will pay off on the Gold Coast next April.

With the Commonwealths, a Manchester worlds, a full schedule of incredible events and presumably more 'will they, won't they?' regarding the IOC, there's lots to look forward to in 2017-18.

