

David in Seventh Heaven



Nicol David celebrates her seventh world title

Richard Eaton looks back on a memorable 2012 women's World Open in the Cayman Islands

Nicol David's seventh world title revealed more about her than any of the others. There was a new emotional resourcefulness in coping with a build-up in which a group of younger players were said to be closing the gap on the Malaysian.

David also dealt summarily with two mini-crises – the loss of the third game to Ireland's Madeline Perry in the quarter-finals and a 5-7 second-game deficit in an 11-6, 11-8, 11-6 victory over England's Laura Massaro in the final.

On both occasions she responded quickly, appropriately and well. She ramped up the early ball pressure and mixed the short and the long games against Perry, but kept it tight and tenacious to break down the businesslike Massaro.

David has more options than she did. She volleys better, attempts to pierce defences with strikes of different speeds and knows better when to take the ball in short or when to wait and rely on the speed which makes her a counter-attacking maestro.

Most notably, though, she was quite relaxed. That partly may be because, as she moves into her 30th year, David is more aware of who she is.

This has made her better at placing her shortcomings, as well as considerable strengths, into perspective. Some of that emotional development is down to her work with Dutch psychologist Frank Cabooter, as well as Australian coach Liz Irving.

This became increasingly evident during her successes against Egypt's Omneya Abdel Kawy, Hong Kong's Annie Au and England's Jenny Duncalf, as well as against Perry and Massaro.

It was also hinted a few days later when, for the first time, she chose to spend Christmas away from home, at her domicile in Amsterdam.

"Of course Penang is my home," David said. "But I have been living in Amsterdam for nine and a half years, and it's partly about having time with my friends. I am growing older, but I am also growing as a person."

And that has been reflected on the squash court.

How the challengers fell

Laura Massaro did enough to suggest, by upsetting the seedings to reach her first World Open final, that she had become the most improved player of 2012.

Her final against Nicol David might have been significantly closer than 11-6, 11-8, 11-6 had she exerted a little more control when leading 7-5 in the second game. Massaro did, however, achieve that the day before during a lengthy win against **Raneem El Weleily**.

The young Egyptian's strokes were

fascinatingly relaxed, but occasionally a little too languorous, especially at important moments. Massaro, by contrast, was disciplined and focused.

Then suddenly, at match-point down at 10-11 in the final game, Massaro was thrillingly bold, risking a low volley and guiding it to a winning length. When she pushed through to win 5-11, 11-9, 12-14, 11-4, 13-11, it denied the second-seeded Weleily a chance of repeating her CIMB Malaysian Open final victory over David.

It also confirmed Massaro as the leading Englishwoman, for **Alison Waters** also missed a chance of repeating a recent win over David. Instead, she lost to another compatriot, **Jenny Duncalf**, who ignored recent fitness problems to make one of her finest comebacks.

Two games down after failing with three game-balls, Duncalf somehow took strength from the setback and won 7-11, 17-19, 11-5, 11-4, 11-9. "I felt physically okay and, in a weird way, positive," she said.

David's other rivals disappointed.

Egypt's **Nour El Sherbini**, touted as her long-term successor, surrendered in straight games to Ireland's **Madeline Perry**, while fifth-seeded New Zealander **Joelle King** lost in five to **Natalie Grinham**, the four-time World Open finalist from Australia.

Natalie admitted she had not quite given up dreams of winning the title, but elder sister Rachael seemed hazy about the experience of having done that.

Two games and 10-6 up against **Nicolette Fernandes**, the 2007 world champion lost 3-11, 6-11, 12-10, 11-5, 11-9 to the qualifier from Guyana. She is also the Caribbean champion, so, not surprisingly, her triumph was greeted by the loudest ovation of the tournament.

Rachael Grinham's biography says her ambition is to work out what to do after squash. It was impossible not to feel sympathy that, even for such a pleasing player, the answer has become more pressing.



Guyanese qualifier Nicolette Fernandes, a shock first-round winner over Rachael Grinham, dives to reach the ball