

The no.1 candidates

Leading coaches Liz Irving and Omar El Borolossy give Rod Gilmour their views on possible future challengers for the world no.1 ranking

With half the top 10 in the WSA World Rankings in their 30th year or beyond and a World Championship looming fast, it is a good time to ask two of the game's leading coaches who might eventually end Nicol David's lengthy reign at the head of the women's game.

Also, as Australian great Liz Irving says, it's not just about replacing the Malaysian squash queen at the top of the rankings, but about keeping the WSA Tour alive off the court.

So, who are the candidates in the opinion of Irving, David's coach, and Egyptian Omar El Borolossy?

Irving, who is known for championing junior players, pauses for a moment. "There are a couple of players who can take over, but no one who can while Nicole is playing, unless she gets injured," she insists.

"Joelle King has good potential. She is at a good age (25) and still has a long way to go as world no.1 is different to five [in the women's game]. She is not a rounded player yet, but once she does, she has the game.

"Camille Serme has also shown great commitment and is thoroughly professional in her approach. She is definitely one hitting form and if she sticks with it over the next five-year period and builds on her game, she is a definite possibility."

It is at this juncture that Irving makes an important point. According to the Australian, the way Serme carries herself at tournaments and the way she commits to her training are attributes that other young players can learn from.

"What a lot of the girls need to improve on is their availability at tournaments and to become approachable," she explains. "They are there to back up the game and push the game forward. If they are not building relationships, then it is going to be hard to justify holding events. It is all part of it; we had to spend a lot of time in the hospitality tents 20 years ago.

"There

are a couple of players carrying the Tour a little bit and the rest have to follow a little bit better. It is crucial for the girls to go forward and I'm not sure they fully understand it. I may sound critical, but no one is saying anything. I want to see the Tour progress, but it is far from flourishing at the moment."

There is extra pressure on those players outside the major squash-playing nations, though. "These days it's all about funding," Irving says. "You won't make it otherwise."

One national coach who is well-equipped in this department is El Borolossy, the current Egypt coach. He oversees both men's and women's

national teams, as well as an army of up and coming players, from Cairo to Alexandria. The 38-year-old stresses that players "must travel" to academies if they are to progress.

He said: "We have seen the current problems with Australia. The last generation of Australian players, for example, mostly lived in Europe and trained full-time together."

For now, it is Egypt's 16 to 18-year-olds who are beginning to make headway on the women's circuit.

"We have already reached the golden age with the men's team in Egyptian squash," El Borolossy admits. "But we are beginning to struggle, with no junior boys coming through – there is a generation gap.

"The women are not far behind them and they will be led by the two Nours [El Sherbini and El Tayeb, aged 18 and 20 respectively]. We are looking at complete dominance within the next 10 years, as we also have hopes who are all 16 and 17 years old."

Sherbini could be one to watch at the World Championship. By her own admission she had distractions last year with school, while she has also shrugged off a career-threatening injury.

"She is now more settled. She has her game, fitness and her mentality back after injury and is on great form," El Borolossy says.

The main threats towards the end of the decade, he adds, will come from Asian countries, with Malaysia and India leading the way. "There is nothing coming from Europe, though England always has a consistent programme," he said.

Irving believes there will be no one player who will dominate like her Malaysian charge, one who can carry the game forward. Yet, isn't this what the game needs? After all, David has turned the no.1 spot into a lair which states in bold: enter at your own peril.

"Top spot will shuffle around, I'm sure of that," Irving says.

"These young players have to stay committed and strong, and gain as much experience as possible. Everyone has potential; it's how it's helped along and developed."

Camille Serme, whom Australian great Liz Irving feels could be a future world no. 1



Nour El Tayeb, of whom Egypt coach Omar El Borolossy has high hopes