

DUNLOP BRITISH OPEN
LIVERPOOL 2008



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WELCOME

TO THE DUNLOP BRITISH OPEN - LIVERPOOL 2008



On behalf of England Squash, welcome to the Dunlop British Open - Liverpool, the oldest squash championships in the world. Following on from the exciting 2007 event at the National Squash Centre in Manchester, we are extremely pleased to bring the event to Liverpool in their year as the European Capital of Culture.

This is the fourth year of England Squash's partnership with internationalSPORTgroup™, and we are grateful to them for their terrific staging and to Dunlop for their generous title sponsorship. The British Open goes from strength to strength, and we are certain that the ECHO Arena Liverpool will provide a great backdrop. So sit back, relax, and enjoy!

Nick Rider

Chief Executive, England Squash



internationalSPORTgroup™ are proud to be the promoters of the Dunlop British Open - Liverpool 2008 and are pleased to welcome you to the world's most prestigious squash championships, which is being staged in Liverpool as part of the city's year long celebrations as the European Capital of Culture.

internationalSPORTgroup™ are committed to working in partnership with England Squash in continuing to build a solid framework for the future of the British Open and our special thanks go to Dunlop, Liverpool Culture Company, Northwest Regional Development Agency and our hosting venues Crosby Northern Club, Liverpool Cricket Club and the ECHO Arena Liverpool without whose support the championships this year would not be possible.

This year's championships promises to be one of the most exciting and eagerly contested in the event's illustrious history and hopefully will play its part in helping the sport reach new audiences and show squash to be one of the most exciting participation and spectator sports in the world.

Paul Walters

Chief Executive Officer, internationalSPORTgroup™ Limited



Welcome to Liverpool - European Capital of Culture 2008. As a sporting capital Liverpool is honoured to be staging the Dunlop British Open - Liverpool 2008, one of the premier fixtures in the squash calendar.

This event underlines one of the city's main ambitions in 2008, which is to showcase the very best in all cultural forms. Indeed these championships kick-start an action-packed summer of world-class international sporting events for Liverpool from yachting and tennis to golf and gymnastics.

It is also immensely satisfying to welcome you to the city's newest venue to see the world's best in action. The ECHO Arena Liverpool is a fantastic venue and one which will play a major role in our 08 celebrations and in the city's sporting calendar for many years to come.

I trust you get the time to enjoy the rest of what Liverpool has to offer. And finally I'm sure you will join me in wishing all the players the very best of luck. Enjoy!

Bryan Gray

Chairman, Liverpool Culture Company



The Northwest Regional Development Agency is proud to be sponsoring this event as part of a package of major squash championships in the region. This began with the successful Dunlop British Open - Manchester 2007 and will end in spectacular style with the Hi-Tec World Squash Championships which are taking place in Manchester this October.

It is particularly fitting that this year the Dunlop British Open is held in Liverpool as the city celebrates its tenure as European Capital of Culture 2008 with hundreds of exciting events and projects taking place across the city. Additionally, the Northwest is home to breathtaking natural beauty, exciting city life and outstanding attractions, guaranteeing an unforgettable experience for visitors to the region in 2008.

The Northwest is renowned for its sporting heritage and has an international reputation as a home for major world-class sports events. I am sure that Liverpool and the Northwest will once again rise up to the challenge and deliver another successful first-class event.

Peter Mearns

Executive Director of Marketing,
Northwest Regional Development Agency



We look forward to welcoming you to this year's Dunlop British Open - Liverpool 2008, an event we are very proud to have supported in recent years.

This year's event is like no other and hosted in Europe's European Capital of Culture, Liverpool, a city with great sporting and cultural heritage.

Dunlop continues to be the number one squash brand in the world with more players on the professional tour playing Dunlop than any other. Dunlop's ball continues to be the ball of choice for the world's leading championships. Through our market leading sporting equipment we provide cutting edge Aerogel racket technology for improved player performance, while our product range caters for players of all abilities from new beginners at grass-roots to World No.1's such as Amr Shabana.

We hope you enjoy this great sporting experience and look forward to seeing you at the Dunlop stand to see for yourselves how the unique range we offer can help you improve your game!

Sunny Singh

Sponsorship Manager, Dunlop Slazenger International

DUNLOP BRITISH OPEN

In a dramatic conclusion to the Dunlop British Open - Manchester 2007 squash championships, Gregory Gaultier beat compatriot Thierry Lincou to become the first Frenchman to win the men's title, and Australia's Rachael Grinham saved a match-ball to defeat the defending champion and overwhelming favourite Nicol David in the longest women's final on record.

After upsetting higher-ranked opponents in the semi-finals, Gaultier and Lincou met in the first ever all-French final in the 77-year history of the world's most prestigious and longest established championships.

Despite spending most of his career as his country's number two behind Lincou, Gaultier truly came of age with a dramatic and emotionally charged 63-minute 11-4 10-11(0-2) 11-6 11-3 victory to claim his maiden British Open title.

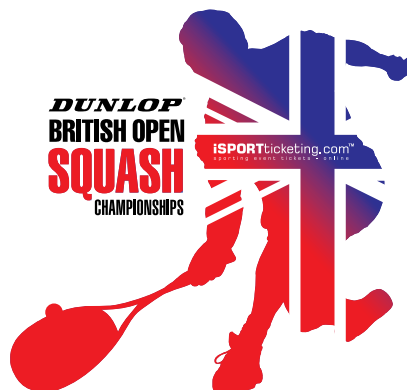
"Winning the British Open title was a dream of mine and it's my biggest win ever," said an emotional Gaultier, following his victory which was surprisingly his first World Tour win of the year.

The women's final proved to be one of the most dramatic of all-time, in which Malaysia's World No.1 Nicol David opened up a two-game lead en route to an anticipated third successive title.

But Grinham, the 2003 and 2004 champion who had upset her higher-ranked younger sister Natalie Grinham in the semi-finals, refused to bow to the dominant Malaysian, despite having lost all of their previous fourteen meetings since April 2005.

The 30-year-old Australian and former World No.1 reduced the deficit by winning the third, then saw the fourth go to 8-8, before David served for the championships at 9-8.

But the Australian recovered to force the match into a fifth game decider, and immediately raced to 8-0 and her own first match-ball. David took a further point, but was unable to deny Grinham her shock and well deserved 87-minute 7-9 4-9 9-3 10-8 9-1 victory.





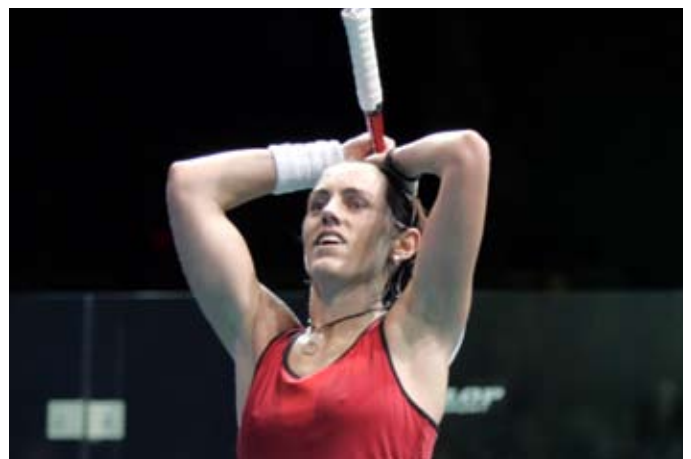
Dunlop British Open - Manchester 2007
National Squash Centre, Manchester,
England.
20 – 24 September 2007

Men's Final:

[3] Gregory Gaultier (FRA) bt [4] Thierry Lincou (FRA)
11-4, 10-11(0-2), 11-6, 11-3

Women's Final:

[3] Rachael Grinham (AUS) bt [1] Nicol David (MAS)
7-9, 4-9, 9-3, 10-8, 9-1



MEN'S PREVIEW 2008



by Richard Eaton

In some ways it seemed typically Greg Gaultier that three weeks before defending his British Open title he hadn't thought much about the psychology of it at all.

And yet Gaultier knows better than anyone that mind games influence the destiny of major titles - so blanking it may have been skilful too.

He had thought intently about winning the World Open and twice got as far as the final hurdle. His approach was more relaxed leading up to last year's British Open and he became the first French winner in its illustrious 77-year history.

"Winning the British was a dream of mine - it's my biggest win ever," Gaultier said. It was also a dream he had previously experienced, as a junior, which helped take some of the tension away.

Still, the feeling of trying to win a big title is not at all like the feeling of defending it, so whilst acknowledging that the difference between the two needed addressing, he wasn't going to get too focused on it.

"I didn't think about how I will take it," he said. "I don't know. There are not many tournaments that I win and have to defend titles!

"Probably my coach and I will talk about it. But I won't be thinking about defending something. I'm going to try to win something, you know. I'll try to think it's a new thing to win."

That's not just a mental device, it's an accurate description in quite specific ways. This time he will be competing in May, not September, and in a quite different ambience at the hugely impressive ECHO Arena Liverpool - and the opposition will likely be different too.

Last time Gaultier overcame Jonathan Kemp, Adrian Grant, Amr Shabana, and Thierry Lincoy. It was a great effort to get the better of his senior compatriot in the final and the World No.1 in the semis.

This time though there will be another Egyptian, Ramy Ashour, the reigning ATCO Super Series Finals Champion and the brightest new star in a decade, contending for the title.

Nor should he rule out some of the other usual suspects - two former British Open Champions, David Palmer and Nick Matthew, one nearly champion in James Willstrop, and one still-could-be champion in Karim Darwish.

Can Gaultier fight them off? Much will depend on his recovery from a wrist injury which spoiled the first three months of his year. He took two weeks off but the pain returned and he then took another three weeks off which he believes may have solved the problem.

There have been injury problems too for Ashour, who nevertheless won the Tournament of Champions in New York, PACE Canadian Classic and Hurgada International, while Shabana, who finished 2007 with five successive titles and exhaustion, has played very little this year and his form is very much an unknown quantity.

If Gaultier doesn't win again, his eight-month tenure will have made him the briefest British Open Champion, but don't count on that being the Frenchman's latest record - it is already a tournament where he has repeated his dreams.



“ Winning the British was a dream of mine - it's my biggest win ever ” Gregory Gaultier



NO.1 SEED
AMR SHABANA
EGYPT

Country: Egypt
Date of birth: 20 July 1979
Place of birth: Cairo, Egypt
Place of residence: Cairo, Egypt
Marital status: Married
Highest world ranking: No.1 (April 2006)
World Tour titles: 21
World Tour finals: 30

AMR SHABANA is Egypt's most successful squash player of all time and his reign as World No.1, which currently stands at twenty-six consecutive months, is the longest

unbroken run as the sport's leading player since the legendary Pakistani Jansher Khan.

The charismatic left-hander first topped the rankings in April 2006 and has since won eleven World Tour titles. 2007 finished with a period of near domination during which the mercurial Egyptian won five successive titles in just two months, including his third World Open crown, and by continuing to weld discipline to his shot-making brilliance, Shabana has the potential to extend his run at the head of the men's game.

The 28-year-old's form has been unconvincing in the handful of events that he has played this year, although a straight games victory over his closest rival Ramy Ashour in the final of the Kuwait Open suggests that the World No.1 may at last be ready to claim his maiden British Open crown, the only major trophy to have eluded him so far in his illustrious career.



NO.3 SEED
GREGORY GAULTIER
FRANCE

Country: France
Date of birth: 23 December 1982
Place of birth: Epinal, France
Place of residence: Aix En Provence, France
Marital status: Single
Highest world ranking: No.2 (March 2007)
World Tour titles: 11
World Tour finals: 26

GREGORY GAULTIER is one of the most exciting and unpredictable talents on the international squash circuit, and in January 2007 he finally emerged from the shadows of his

illustrious compatriot Thierry Lincou by rising above him in the Men's World Rankings to be the highest-ranked Frenchman for the first time - and a month later, he climbed higher still to a career-high World No.2.

Having enjoyed a remarkable 2006, in which he reached six World Tour finals, including the World Open final staged by the Great Pyramids of Giza in Egypt, and claimed both the Hungarian and US Open titles, the Frenchman made an indifferent start to his 2007 campaign before regrouping to become the first French winner of the British Open in the championship's 77-year history.

Despite the disappointment of losing to Amr Shabana in his second World Open final in December, the 25-year-old's fiery temperament, distinctive Gallic confidence and brilliant shot making will ensure that he makes a worthy title defence. However his progress will depend on his recovery from a wrist injury which spoiled the first three months of his year.



NO.2 SEED
RAMY ASHOUR
EGYPT

Country: Egypt
Date of birth: 30 September 1987
Place of birth: Cairo, Egypt
Place of residence: Cairo, Egypt
Marital status: Single
Highest world ranking: No.2 (June 2007)
World Tour titles: 9
World Tour finals: 15

RAMY ASHOUR is truly the sport's 'new kid on the block'!

Having first risen to prominence in August 2004 when he became the youngest ever World Junior Champion at the age of sixteen, Ashour just three months later claimed the Athens Open to become one of only a handful of players to have claimed a title on their World Tour debut.

In July 2006, Ashour became the first man in history to successfully defend his world junior crown and remarkably this supremely gifted Egyptian has been close to ruling the squash world for almost a year. He was almost there after winning the ATCO Super Series Finals in Manchester in August before injury prevented him from winning either of last year's British Open or World Open titles.

Having made a welcome and successful return to the World Tour by winning the Tournament of Champions, PACE Canadian Classic and Hurghada International, no one who has seen the talent and charisma of this remarkable 20-year-old will be surprised if he claims the British Open title on his debut.



NO.4 SEED
JAMES WILLSTROP
ENGLAND

Country: England
Date of birth: 15 August 1983
Place of birth: North Walsham, England
Place of residence: Yorkshire, England
Marital status: Single
Highest world ranking: No.2 (December 2005)
World Tour titles: 11
World Tour finals: 16

JAMES WILLSTROP climbed to a career-best No.2 in December 2005 following a spectacular twelve months in which he reached the final of the British Open, achieved a semi-final place at the World Open and won the Qatar Classic.

However, following the Commonwealth Games in Melbourne in March 2006, when he partnered Vicky Botwright to a Silver Medal in the Mixed Doubles, Willstrop endured an extended period of relative poor health and form, believed to have emanated from when he was hospitalised with food poisoning in Cairo on the eve of the World Open in September of the same year.

A return to good health in 2007 saw the young Englishman arrest his decline and collect three World Tour titles, which have been followed by three further trophies in the opening months of 2008.

The 24-year-old's return to form has coincided with the absence through injury of his compatriot and rival Nick Matthew, which will see Willstrop lead England's challenge for the sport's most coveted trophy as the home nations' highest ranked player.

MEN'S CHAMPIONSHIP

1st Round
Thursday 8 May

2nd Round
Friday 9 May

Quarter-Finals
Saturday 10 May

Semi-Finals
Sunday 11 May

Final
Monday 12 May

1 **AMR SHABANA** (EGY)
DAVIDE BIANCHETTI (ITA)

13 **JOHN WHITE** (SCO)
Qualifier

5 **DAVID PALMER** (AUS)
Qualifier

12 **ADRIAN GRANT** (ENG)
Qualifier

3 **GREGORY GAULTIER** (FRA)
MANSOOR ZAMAN (PAK)

14 **OLLI TUOMINEN** (FIN)
JOEY BARRINGTON (ENG)

7 **KARIM DARWISH** (EGY)
JONATHAN KEMP (ENG)

15 **LAURENS JAN ANJEMA** (NED)
Qualifier

DARYL SELBY (ENG)
9 **LEE BEACHILL** (ENG)

TOM PASHLEY (ENG)
8 **PETER BARKER** (ENG)

Qualifier
10 **ONG BENG HEE** (MAS)

AAMIR ATLAS KHAN (PAK)
4 **JAMES WILLSTROP** (ENG)

Qualifier
16 **ALEX GOUGH** (WAL)

Qualifier
6 **THIERRY LINCOU** (FRA)

Qualifier
11 **MOHD AZLAN ISKANDAR** (MAS)

ALISTER WALKER (ENG)
2 **RAMY ASHOUR** (EGY)



WOMEN'S CHAMPIONSHIP

1st Round
Friday 9 May

Quarter-Finals
Saturday 10 May

Semi-Finals
Sunday 11 May

Final
Monday 12 May

1 **NICOL DAVID** (MAS)
Qualifier

6 **SHELLEY KITCHEN** (NZL)
VANESSA ATKINSON (NED)

4 **NATALIE GRAINGER** (USA)
Qualifier

7 **VICKY BOTWRIGHT** (ENG)
LAURA LENGTHORN-MASSARO (ENG)

5 **ALISON WATERS** (ENG)
JENNY DUNCALF (ENG)

Qualifier

3 **RACHAEL GRINHAM** (AUS)

Qualifier

8 **OMNEYA ABDEL KAWY** (EGY)

REBECCA CHIU (HKG)

2 **NATALIE GRINHAM** (NED)



WOMEN'S PREVIEW 2008



by Richard Eaton

You might think Nicol David would be bursting with atonement and revenge after what she endured last year during the most prolonged brinkmanship a British Open final has seen.



Revenge, because David lost her title to a resurgent Rachael Grinham, who then succeeded her as World Champion too.

Atonement, because in a 7-9 4-9 9-3 10-8 9-1 defeat David had several agonising moments when the title seemed almost hers, only for it to slip gradually and treacherously away. There was more agonising in a post-mortem in which she sought to comprehend how such unwanted drama could have occurred.

But great champions can't think like that. The mind turns disappointment into excuses, and being negative becomes corrosive. Better to analyse what might be learnt, to create remedies, and move on.

David talks like she has done this. She knows she faded slightly in the second half of a match in which the gutsy Grinham was a player transformed.

David has, she says, added things to her training to strengthen one or two areas. She knows that focusing on any one rival distracts from multiple tasks in hand.

"You just realise that you have to put up with whatever happens, and be ready for anything," she said. "I'm just going to the British Open thinking it is now going to be earlier. My training is done and I just have to make sure everything is in place.

"You prepare yourself for anything, knowing all these things occur and learning what you can do and don't do in a tournament."

It would be unfair not to regard Rachael Grinham as special too. A uniquely attractive player, she tenaciously created a big surprise when some said she could no longer do it. But she may need improvement. She has had three early defeats this year - two to Omneya Abdel Kawy and one to Alison Waters.

Rachael is also in the same half as her younger sister Natalie Grinham, who has reached two finals in 2008 and remained World No.2 for sixteen out of seventeen months.

But David has won two titles this year and been World No.1 for nearly two years. A heroine not just in Malaysia but throughout Asia, she recently became a bearer of the Olympic torch down a commando-lined route to the Petronas Towers. A walk down Penny Lane would seem a contrast from fantasy.

It would also help place in perspective what happened eight months ago in Manchester; not returning to that venue may offer David further assistance in doing that.

However the favourite should have a second round match with Shelley Kitchen, who sensationally beat her in last year's World Open and has risen to a career-high seven. If she does, the powerful emotion of revenge may rear more quickly than she expected. And it may take some quelling.



NO.1 SEED
NICOL DAVID
MALAYSIA

Country: Malaysia
Date of birth: 26 August 1983
Place of birth: Penang, Malaysia
Place of residence: Penang, Malaysia
Marital status: Single
Highest world ranking: No.1 (Jan 2006)
World Tour titles: 26
World Tour finals: 40

NICOL DAVID is the most successful Malaysian female squash player of all time and despite relinquishing both her British Open and World Open titles in 2007 has held onto her World No.1

ranking for twenty-two successive months.

In a glittering junior career, Nicol won the Women's World Junior title in June 1999 and then became the first player to retain the title with victory in her home town of Penang two years later.

Instrumental in her development from an athletic retriever into a rounded tactician was a move to Amsterdam in 2003 to be based with Australian Liz Irving. Her relocation accelerated her breakthrough into the top flight and in the closing months of 2005 she claimed her maiden British Open and World Open titles to ensure her position as No.1 in the first World Rankings published in 2006.

Despite the weight of awards and expectations, and the disappointment last year at relinquishing her British Open and World Open crowns, titles she had successfully defended the previous year, Nicol appears destined for a prolonged period as the world's dominant player.



NO.3 SEED
RACHAEL GRINHAM
AUSTRALIA

Country: Australia
Date of birth: 22 January 1977
Place of birth: Toowoomba, Australia
Place of residence: Shorouk City, Egypt
Marital status: Single
Highest world ranking: No.1 (Aug 2004)
World Tour titles: 27
World Tour finals: 45

RACHAEL GRINHAM is the reigning British Open and World Open Champion and regarded by many as the most talented and entertaining player on the women's professional circuit.

After being crowned World Junior Champion, Rachael joined the Women's World Tour in 1994 where her array of strokes and strong temperament initially took her steadily towards the World's top 10. However, it was the 2003 British Open, held in Nottingham, which was to prove the turning point for the Australian when she won the world's most prestigious title for the first time - it was a title she was to retain in 2004 and to win for a third time last year.

Nicol David and Rachael's younger sister Natalie have pushed the former World No.1 down to number three in the World Rankings, but her ability to raise her game for the majors was never more evident than at last year's championships when she defeated both of her higher ranked rivals in the most spectacular style imaginable.

Rachael's brilliant shot making and fierce determination will ensure that she remains a serious title challenger.



NO.2 SEED
NATALIE GRINHAM
NETHERLANDS

Country: Netherlands
Date of birth: 16 March 1978
Place of birth: Toowoomba, Australia
Place of residence: Netherlands
Marital status: Married
Highest world ranking: No.2 (Feb 2007)
World Tour titles: 12
World Tour finals: 29

NATALIE GRINHAM, the younger sister of Rachael, has recently switched nationality to play under the Netherlands flag, the country in which she has been resident since

1999, and recent results suggest that she and Nicol David will pose the biggest challenge to her older sister's title defence.

Natalie enjoyed her breakthrough year in 2006, confirming her arrival amongst the game's elite by taking the Commonwealth Games by storm and claiming an unprecedented three Gold Medals for Australia. Earlier sporadic brilliance had seen her reach World Open and British Open finals but only recently has she shown the necessary level of consistency to repeatedly challenge for the sport's major honours.

Despite injury restricting her participation in several events in 2007, Natalie reached her second World Open final, the first ever world final to be contested between two sisters, and will be determined to put in a strong performance to claim her maiden British Open title.



NO.4 SEED
NATALIE GRAINGER
USA

Country: USA
Date of birth: 8 July 1977
Place of birth: Manchester, England
Place of residence: Washington DC, USA
Marital status: Single
Highest world ranking: No.1 (June 2003)
World Tour titles: 17
World Tour finals: 35

NATALIE GRAINGER has never discovered a focus and level of commitment which has allowed her to scale the heights that her undeniable talent richly deserves, but if there is to be a surprise challenge it could come from the personable Manchester-

born former South African who recently celebrated becoming a US citizen by returning to the World's top four.

Despite her label as a perennial underachiever, the 31-year-old has won seventeen World Tour titles, from thirty-five finals, and topped the world rankings for one month in June 2003.

At the 1998 Commonwealth Games in Kuala Lumpur, Grainger won bronze for South Africa in both the Women's and Mixed Doubles, partnered by Claire Nitch and Rodney Durbach respectively, and after a brief flirtation with English citizenship, she transferred her allegiance to the US for whom she secured an individual crown at the Pan American Games in July 2007.

Time may now be short for Grainger, but that should focus her mind and make her short game even more of an area to beware.



WHO ARE ENGLANDSQUASH

England Squash are the National Governing Body for Squash & Racketball and are responsible for developing the sport at all levels, from the elite players you will see this week such as James Willstrop and Alison Waters, down to structured grass-roots programmes in schools.

The activities we do on a daily basis are wide ranging - from speaking to the national and local press, ensuring that elite players such as Peter Barker and Jenny Duncalf are well looked after by the best coaches and physiotherapists in the world, to organising a comprehensive range of fantastic events, including the Harris Inter County Championships and the Towergate tlc Premier Squash League.

At our Head Office at the National Squash Centre in Manchester, we have fourteen full time employees including Chris, Paul and Alison, who work on all of our events, Louise, who coordinates our nationwide coaching courses, and Irene, who manages the England Squash High Performance programme.

This year we also brought in three new faces - Paul, Ben and Nick, who have formed our new Sales & Marketing Department. They will be working to ensure that squash & racketball get the recognition they deserve, and that all of our affiliated clubs thrive and continue to develop.

Across the country we have another sixteen employees, spread across our eight area offices. Wherever you are based in the country, we hope that you will have seen our England Squash Area teams out and about. They are there to promote and develop squash & racketball on a regional basis, listening to and helping clubs, players, coaches, referees and volunteers, as well as promoting both sports to people who have never picked up a racket.

The next twelve months promise to be hugely exciting for squash & racketball, starting with the Dunlop British Open - Liverpool 2008, and of course the Hi-Tec World Squash Championships - Manchester 2008 in October.



There are also many more events and helpful programmes that you may not be aware of, such as the National Racketball Championships, the new ES Club and Coach programme, and the thriving England Squash Masters events.

For more information on all of the above and lots more, go to www.englishsquash.com or call us on 0161 231 4499.

RAMY ASHOUR

HOW WE NEARLY LOST HIM

Most people have no idea how fortunate we are to have Ramy Ashour playing at all this year, let alone contending again for titles, and, probably, making a quality defence of the Super Series Finals title.



by Richard Eaton



It's not just that the 20 year-old Egyptian is the brightest new player this millennium; rather that the torn foot tendon he sustained in October would have knocked most players out of their stride.

Ashour was sidelined for two months; medical opinion suggested it might be much longer. But after being within a fraction of a point of being World No.1 when the injury happened, he wasn't going to allow a misfortune to develop into a mind-corroding feeling of jinx.

"I was told I could be out from six months to a year, but that I could take cortisone injections or play with some pain," Ashour said.

"I didn't want it to turn chronic, so I didn't want injections. So I took a decision to play with pain."

He was also provided with an insole for his shoe to help reduce discomfort, but at his comeback at the Tournament of Champions in New York in January he needed five pain-killing tablets in the morning and five in the evening, as well as plenty of extra stretching and lots of hot and cold water on the foot.

Amazingly Ashour went on to win the tournament. It was not only his squash which was special: it was the man himself.

Special qualities are also evident in how he handles his relationship with Amr Shabana, who took advantage of Ashour's absence to win an amazing five successive World Tour events and sprint to a long lead as World No.1.

Indeed it was longer than expected, Ashour admits, and his hastened comeback was

influenced by not wishing his fellow Egyptian's lead to become even more extended. In these circumstances jealousy and hostility could easily have developed. Instead Ashour claims Shabana is like a second elder brother after Hisham.

"I wanted to prove that two Egyptian players could be close to each other but competitive," he said.

These two could give the Super Series Finals a wonderful showdown. But there are other great players who might deny them, in a field as varied in styles and personalities as it has ever been.

There is David Palmer, the supremely gutsy Australian, and Thierry Lincou, the gracious Frenchman, both of whom have been World Champions, and there is also Gregory Gaultier, a second Gallic miracle, one capable of changing his colourful game from defence to attack and back like a chameleon.

And there are two Englishmen as well, also winners of big titles. Nick Matthew preceded Gaultier as British Open Champion and both he and James Willstrop could derail the favourites.

The eight players are completed by a debutant, Wael El Hindi, a sturdy fighter who relinquishes the centre of the court only with the greatest of reluctance. Another Egyptian of course.

There's no doubt which is becoming today's greatest squash nation. But time and fate often bring some surprising twists.

Just ask Ashour.

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 reigning ATCO Super Series Finals Champion

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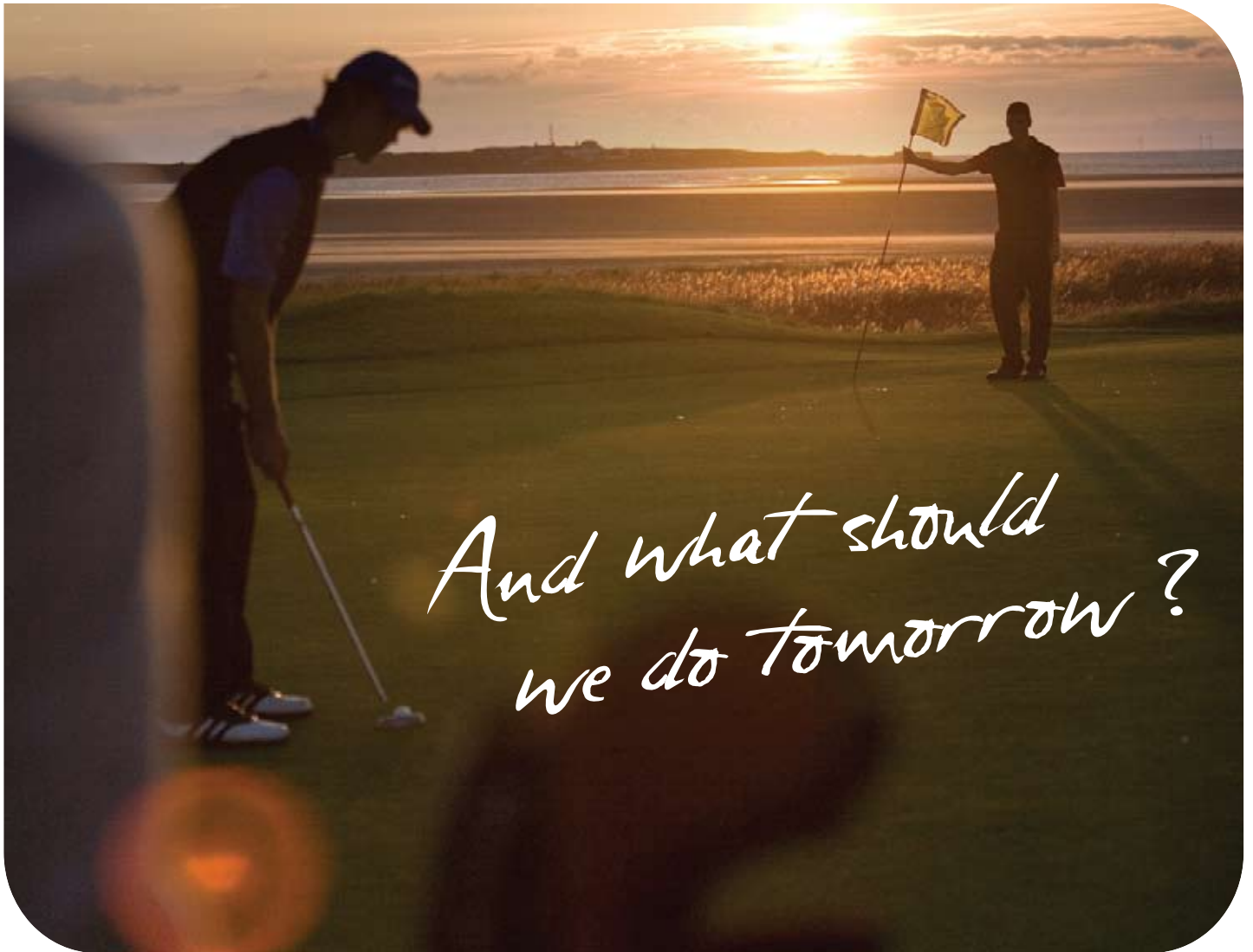


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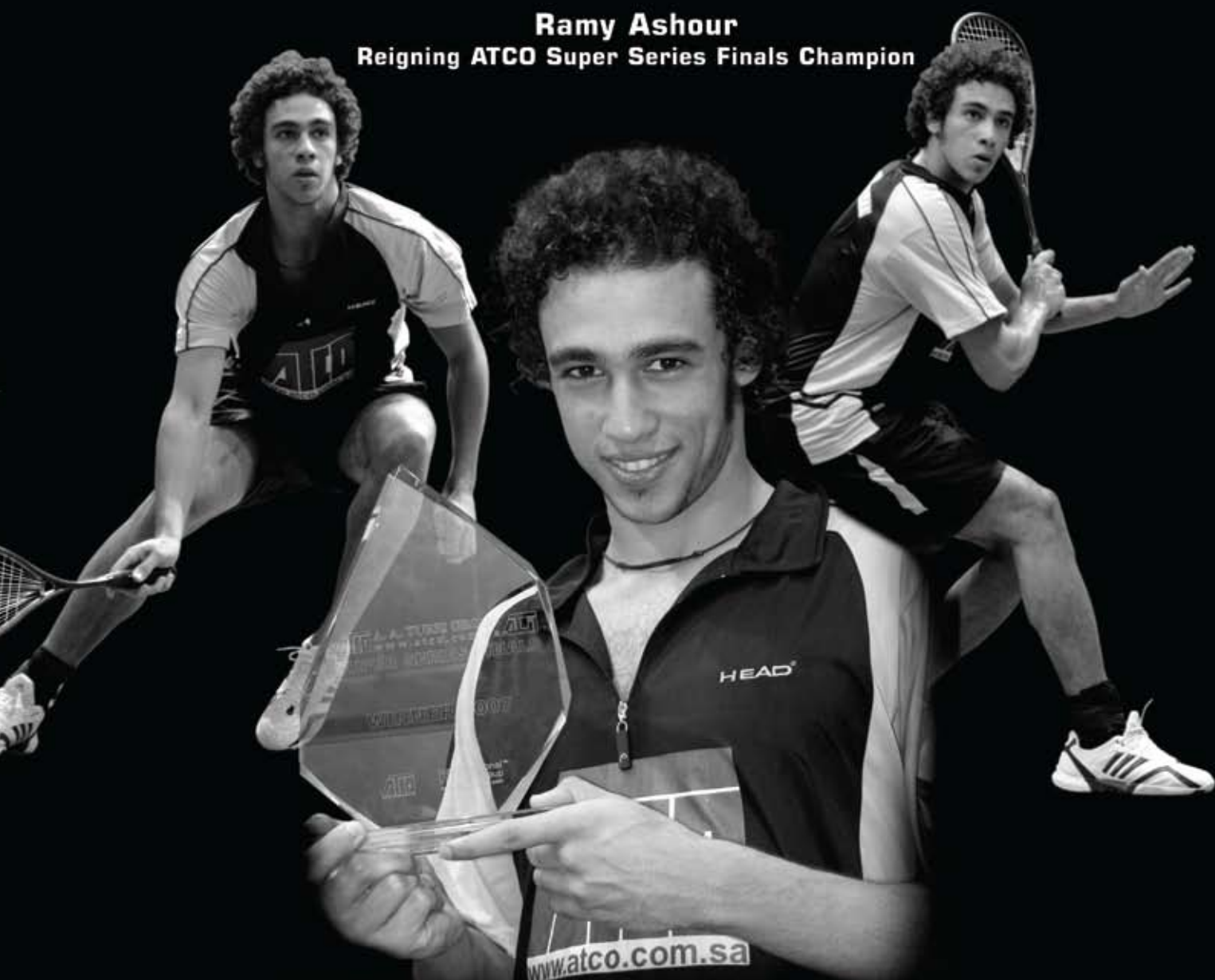
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