

16/07/2003

Nicol gets RM1.3m Head-start

K.M. Boopathy

NICOL David's aspirations of becoming the first senior world squash champion received a headstart when she secured a two-year sponsorship deal worth RM1.3 million by Mulpha International to pursue her goals.

The deal is also the biggest individual sponsorship secured by a Malaysian as the quantum was higher than the three-year sponsorship of RM1 million received by Ong Beng Hee from Dunlop last year.

However, Nicol will have to earn the sponsorship deal which is performance based and incentives offered if she wins tournaments and improves on her world ranking.

The deal is also inclusive of Head equipment and travelling and accomodation cost during tournaments.

Nicol, ranked World No 37, is delighted with the challenging arrangement and with sufficient funds already secured, she is looking forward to a successful return to the professional scene after a four-month break from squash last year.

"Although it is hard to give a time frame as to when I can give a shot at the world title, but it is my ultimate goal," said Nicol in Subang yesterday.

"It depends on how fast I can establish myself in the professional circuit and reduce the gap between me and the top 10 players.

"I have been progressing well in tournaments over the last three months and it has been a good experience playing against the top 10 players.

"It is looking good for me and if I can improve the way I did in the last three months, you will never know what I can be capable of next year.

"My initial target is to break into the top 20 and as for the world title, it could happen earlier or may take time. It's hard to tell."

In order to help Nicol return to the top flight again, the SRA of Malaysia (SRAM) sent her for a training stint at the Liz Irving Elite Squash Academy in Amsterdam in March and the move was effective.

SRAM president Datuk Mokhzani Mahathir said that Nicol has all the credentials to become a world champion and the association will do everything possible to make it a reality.

"If there is anyone with the ability of becoming the world champion, it is Nicol and we will assist her until she achieves her goal," said Mokhzani.

"If you look at the records, former world junior champions who have won the senior title took more than six years and Nicol might get her chance probably in another five years.

"As for her stint in Amsterdam it seems to have helped her and she will be attached with Liz for future stints."

Five-time world champion Sarah Fitz-Gerald of Australia won the world junior title in 1987 but had to wait until 1997 to win her first senior crown.

This means Nicol will have to cope with the hectic professional circuit in the next five years before making a serious attempt to win the world title.

However, the next few months will not be easy for Nicol as she will have to compete in the qualifying rounds due to her world ranking, but things are expected to get better if she can reach at least the quarter-finals in the Malaysian Open on Aug 18-21.

Currently Sharon Wee, the World No 20, is the only Malaysian to gain an

automatic berth into the main draw of the major tournaments. But once Nicol breaks into the top 20, she is likely to establish herself in the professional ranks fast.