

A LONG RIVALRY



Peter Nicol explains why he and Jonathon Power were such fierce rivals during their pro careers

Although I had several rivalries over the course of my career, the one that was the longest and most challenging was with Jonathon Power. Most people remember this rivalry well because of the fact we were so different – personality, style, physicality, racket skills, etc. However, under all the differences there were similarities – especially the desire to win!

There's no getting away from the fact that Jonathon's racket work was superior to mine and there were occasions he ran me around the court until I could no longer keep going – unusual for me. His understanding of where to put the ball was impressive and once he had you under pressure in a rally, you were very unlikely to get back into it. It wasn't all about his deception; his basic game and ball placement were very impressive.

Saying that, Jonathon's ability to hold his swing and hit late and low meant that he was constantly stopping me on the T before releasing the shot. When the majority of players adopt this style, the resulting shot is normally not quite as good and therefore there is a balance between hitting in a rhythm and holding with deception. With Jonathon, there was no difference, meaning he got the benefit of the hold whilst still hitting a great shot, almost every time when on form.

One area that was never really mentioned with Jonathon was his immaculate length. This set up the opportunities for him then to use his racket skills to put on more pressure. As with other skilled racket players, their length is still vital to their being able to play the expansive, expressive game we know them for.

One area I felt I had an advantage over Jonathon was

mentally. If I could compete with him for the T and not let him control the game, there was always the chance of mistakes and self-doubt creeping into his game. Although I saw this as a minor weakness, Jonathon's desire and will to win made it incredibly difficult to get him to this point regularly and one good rally or even a quality shot would give him the boost to regain his composure.

Leading on from the mental side of the game, I have to talk a little about Jonathon's expressive nature on

court. When I was younger and we were in full battle, I found his tantrums and outbursts infuriating. They'd disrupt play, confuse the referee and sometimes make me lose concentration. It was exasperating. With a few years to reflect and no longer having that rivalry, I appreciate the way Jonathon was fully invested emotionally on court and whatever he felt, came out. Not easy to play against, but I believe it was always an honest reflection of how he felt.

We now play regularly on the Legends of Squash Tour and although the matches adhere to the same pattern of play and the desire to win is as strong as ever, the aggression has dissipated. The result is we both enjoy being on court, battling without the pressures of being professional players. If you get a chance to watch Jonathon play before he stops for good, make sure you take opportunity!

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