

Showdown in the Desert

Rod Gilmour previews the men's World Championship in Doha from December 7 to 14

THE LOWDOWN

Qatar will be the 15th country to host the men's World Championship, which changes its name from the World Open for the first time this year. The venue – the Khalifa International Tennis and Squash Complex – is the one used at the long-running Qatar Classic and boasts a \$325,000 prize fund, the second biggest in the sport's history.

COURT WATCH

As seen at the Qatar Classic in previous years, conditions can prove benign on a cool glass court. "The floor is fairly hard, meaning the guys who can progress through the earlier rounds quicker will have an advantage later on, with less wear and tear on the legs," reports England's Daryl Selby.

CHAMPIONSHIP IN NUMBERS

- 686** – minutes it took Nick Matthew to win both his World Open titles
- 555** – matches Jahangir Khan won in succession until Ross Norman ended his record-breaking run in the 1986 final
- 130** – length (in minutes) of first final in 1976
- 100** – minutes it took Matthew to get past Mohamed El Shorbagy en route to winning the 2011 title
- 39** – months Peter Nicol held the 1999 title before having to defend it
- 21** – consecutive years (from 1976-1996) in which there was Pakistani interest in the final
- 16** – years since the title was last won by a Pakistani
- 6** – former world no.1s competing in Qatar

STAT ATTACK

Since making his World Open debut in 1998, Amr Shabana has played 50 matches, with just eight losses. With a record like that, it is hardly a surprise to



Khalifa International Tennis and Squash Complex

learn that it is 10 years since the Egyptian last failed to reach the last eight. Shabana simply loves the big stage and claiming the odd scalp or two. When he won his first world title in 2003, the ninth seed beat four higher-seeded players along the way.

WHAT WE WILL/WON'T SEE

Won't see: Nick Matthew tweeting. In 2011 the Englishman handed himself a one-week Twitter ban in Rotterdam as he focused on retaining his world crown. He admitted that he had taken heed from a throwaway comment made by US Open tennis champion Andy Murray a few years ago. "In the end I got my head down, shut myself off from it and it seemed to work," Matthew said after winning his second title.

Will see: Referees on the back foot. In such a big event the less-than-graceful antics of Davide Bianchetti in Rotterdam – when the Italian was disqualified for colourful language and indiscipline – was not a sight those present would like to see again. Squash officials, however, have since shown little sign of cracking down on over-the-top player dialogue towards referees.

WHAT I'LL MISS....

"It is always the best tournament. To be world champion, you hold that title for 12 months. The history with Jahangir, Geoff Hunt and Jansher on the trophy makes it special to have your name on there. It always holds a special atmosphere, something that I will miss with not playing," David Palmer, former world no. 1.

THE VIEW FROM...

India

"The performance of Indian squash players is moving up. Within the last year we have had our best performances at the World Men's Team and World Junior Championships. Saurav Ghosal is ready and all set to jump into the top 20. Many years of dedication and perseverance have gone into this. I'm confident of him reaching his potential," Cyrus Poncha, India coach.

Germany

"Having won bronze in the Men's European Teams at Nuremberg led by Simon Rosner, we surely hope that he will prove that he is ready to progress up the rankings. Germany has a strong men's team right now and all of them are also preparing for the 2013 World Games," Volker Bernardi, German Squash Federation.

FIVE TO WATCH



James Willstrop

Commonwealth, world and British titles have all eluded the 6ft 2in Yorkshireman thanks to the gritty exploits of chief rival Nick Matthew. However, the no.1 seed is buoyed by a highly-favourable draw, with all his main rivals in the shark-infested waters below.



Nick Matthew

A third title would be unprecedented for an Englishman. His perseverance, professionalism and physicality should also play a major factor in his hat-trick bid. Time will tell if Qatar remains his last chance for world success too.



Amr Shabana

The brilliant Egyptian was distraught at his exit last year to James Willstrop after hitting peak form in Rotterdam. Leaner and meaner this year – as consistently expressed by his peers – can Shabana do the unthinkable and win a fifth title at the grand old age of 33?



Greg Gaultier

Rivals have marvelled in 'G-Force's' form since the birth of his first son over the summer. Refreshed and seemingly reinvented, he blew Nick Matthew off court to win the NetSuite Open in San Francisco in October. Always there or thereabouts, but must overcome his mental barriers.



Ramy Ashour

The sensationally-gifted Egyptian has had a topsy-turvy career at world level. Having won in 2008, he left Kuwait in 2009 in tears after a 3/0 final drubbing by Amr Shabana before pulling up for the second Open in succession with hamstring problems last year. He has won all three events he has entered this season.

HOW TO WATCH

SquashTV will broadcast more than 65 hours of live content in Qatar. There will be at least 10 staff on site producing output, having transported almost one ton of equipment to Doha. More info: www.psasquashtv.com