

# The Squash Player Magazine's Annual Awards

## Player of the Year (male)



### Mohamed Elshorbagy

Will 2014 be remembered for a wind of change at the top of the men's game? Elshorbagy started the year as the world no.4 and ended it as no.1. The Bristol-based Egyptian's whirlwind form started in August, when he began a run of four straight PSA titles, including the U.S. Open – where he became world no.1 – and Hong Kong Open. In all, he won five titles and finished runner-up three times in 2014, including at the World Championship final in Doha, where he was top seed and held a match-ball before losing to Ramy Ashour in a thrilling denouement.

Coached by Hadrian Stiff in Bristol and mentored by the great Jonah Barrington, Elshorbagy says: "I wouldn't say I'm in the form of my life, as I'm only 24, but I know I can play better than this one day." His firebrand style of squash looks set to blow over into 2015.

## Young Player of the Year (male)

### Diego Elias

As the squash world watches his rapid rise up the PSA rankings with interest, Elias continues to make waves at junior level. In May he was crowned world junior no.1 for the first time and he followed that honour by becoming the first Peruvian to win the World Junior Men's Championship three months later, racing to the title in Namibia without dropping a game, the first player to do since James Willstrop in 2002. Coached by Jonathon Power in Toronto, the 18-year-old started 2015 by winning the British Junior Open and is still eligible for another world junior title tilt this year.



## Player of the Year (female)



### Nicol David

Although she failed to win the 2013 World Championship staged in Malaysia in March 2014, when she was beaten by Nour El Sherbini in the semi-finals, and then lost in the Malaysian Open semi-finals to Raneem El Welily in August, 2014 largely belonged to David. In the face of constant pressure from a host of young Egyptians, the 31-year-old Malaysian fought back to finish the year on a high, her relationship with coach Liz Irving and her ability to adapt to change continuing to reap rewards, so much so that in November she celebrated 100 months as world no.1. Altogether David gleaned nine titles in 2014, including the British Open and her eighth world crown, when she saved four match-balls to beat El Welily on her home court in Cairo in December.

"You work so hard and when the final plays out like this, you don't know what to do with yourself," David said. "I dug very deep, because I wanted it badly."

## Young Player of the Year (female)

### Habiba Mohamed

Another outstanding talent from the stable of Alexandrian players, Mohamed had a stellar 2014. She started it off by lifting the British Junior Open under-17 title, before winning three WSA trophies and the World Junior Women's Championship, where she shocked compatriot and defending champion Nour El Sherbini. "I celebrated the win over Nour in the semi-finals - and winning the final is even a greater reward," she said. Still only 15 and already ranked 23rd in the world, she is the youngest player in the top 80. Time will tell how good she can become.



## Quote of the Year

“The way I see it for Nick, Greg and Amr is that the best matches they have ever played are in the past now. For me, the best matches are in the future.”

Mohamed Elshorbagy

## Most Improved Player of the Year (male)

### Fares Dessouki

Midway through last year's British Open, talk turned to whether Dessouki could become the first player to advance to the final as a qualifier. Nick Matthew scuppered that bid in the last eight, but stated that the 20-year-old Egyptian could become a major force in future years thanks to his fast-paced, hard-hitting style. Another quarter-final appearance, at October's U.S. Open, only confirmed his potential.

"I have to keep on working really hard," said Dessouki, who is midway through a business degree in Alexandria. "I know there are other players who want it as much as me."



## Most Improved Player of the Year (female)

### Nour El Tayeb

El Tayeb's astonishing rise in the world rankings – from 27th at the start of the year to eighth by the end – may well be unique. The 21-year-old from Cairo had a 29-9 win-loss ratio in 2014, including final appearances at the Hong Kong and Malaysian Opens. In those two events, the former world junior champion advanced to the final as the 16th seed, suggesting a fearless nature to her game.

"I have always lacked consistency in my performance and never put any effort into improving my weaknesses, but recently I actually sat down with my coaches and started to have a goal of improving my weaknesses," she explained.



## Highlight of the Year

### Ramy Ashour's title

Given his box-office qualities, his name barely registered in 2014. It took until November before this superb Egyptian athlete stormed back into the hearts of all squash fans by winning his third world title – and how. He hadn't played a tournament since May's British Open because of injury. Yet, six months later, he beat Mohamed Elshorbagy in five thrilling, topsy-turvy games in Doha.

"I worked so hard both mentally and physically to get myself ready for the tournament and I pushed myself so hard," Ashour said. "It doesn't get any better than that."



## Promoter of the Year

### Karim Darwish

After officially ending his 16-year career in October, a new life beckoned for the former world no.1 as sports director at the Wadi Degla club in Cairo. There was no time to reminisce on his fine career, though, as the race was on for Darwish to get the 30th Women's World Championship ready in time. He achieved that with some aplomb, with few teething problems and was granted a thrilling final for good measure.



## Team of the Year



### Surrey Health & Rackets

England's Premier Squash League is turning into a fruitful one for Surrey Health & Rackets, who collected their fifth title in succession in 2014. The turning point came when Peter Barker produced what seasoned observers described as one of the finest ever PSL performances in beating Nick Matthew 3/0. It set up a decider as Adrian Grant duly beat Duffield's Steve Copping.