



Bermuda Squash Racquets Association

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To: International Release

From: Roger J. Sherratt, Press Officer, Bermuda Squash Racquets Association

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Subject:

Final Results

Virtual Spectator Bermuda Masters 2006 **Presented by Logic, hosted by Endurance**

The final match of the Virtual Spectator Bermuda Masters 2006 had it all. The new World Open Champion and world #1 Abr Shabana, pitted against the "old" (well, 33 year old) legend of squash, Peter Nicol, who recently won double gold at the Commonwealth Games and has already announced his intention to retire later this year; a packed stadium of enthusiastic squash fans; and idyllic weather. The only question was whether the much anticipated clash would live up to all expectations - and it did so beyond all measure.

This was sublime squash at its finest from start to finish, and will long be remembered by all those fortunate enough to be there on the night.

First blood went to Nicol who seemed prepared to play long, patient rallies and wait for Shabana to make mistakes. Both played superlative shots, and recovered the impossible, with Nicol moving well around the court. He built up a lead at 7-2 and was chasing down every ball. Shabana fought back, but it was too late as Nicol won it 11-9.

The second game saw the positions reverse. Shabana raced into the lead, and Nicol had to work much harder to avoid giving Shabana any opportunity to play his devastating drops. As he increased in confidence the Egyptian played a series of great winners to be up 7-2, and it was then Nicol's turn to come back. He rattled off 4 successive points with incredible winners, only to end the game hitting two into the tin. To be fair to Nicol, the pace had been frantic and both tins could so easily have been winners.

A similar pattern started in the 3rd with Shabana looking more confident with every rally. Nicol led 6-3 at one point, but Shabana came back strongly to win it 11-7.

At this point it appeared to be the beginning of the end for Nicol but he shocked the capacity crowd as he completely dominated the 4th game while Shabana seemed to lose heart with a series of uncharacteristic unforced errors. Nicol was serving for game ball before Shabana could even get on the score sheet with two unreturnable drops. Not to be denied, Nicol put the game away with a superb drive, wrong footing Shabana.

It was game on at 2-2 and the BHS Sports Centre buzzed with excitement as spectators realized that an upset was now within the realm of possibility for Nicol. But Shabana came out for the 5th with all guns blazing and raced into a 7-1 lead. Both of these incredible athletes were playing



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superbly and retrieving as though this was the first instead of the fifth game. Then it was time for Nicol to surge back as he tried valiantly to catch up. At 5-9 the two played an incredible rally, won by Nicol, resulting in thunderous applause from an expectant crowd, and this was followed by yet another marathon rally during which both players pulled off miraculous retrievals which many in the audience simply could not believe because they burst into applause thinking a winning shot had been played, only to realize the rally was still going on. When Shabana finally tinned the ball, the crowd simply erupted as Nicol appeared to be on the verge of catching up with the World Champion. However, Shabana reached match point when Nicol hit a return volley out of court. Shabana failed in his first attempt, hitting into the tin, but in one final brilliant rally he hit an unbeatable forehand drive down the wall, and it was all over.

The crowd rose as one to acknowledge two incredible athletes, both of whom gave their all, and then some, in their bid to become the Virtual Spectator Bermuda Masters 2006 Champion. Amr Shabana fully deserved his victory, but in truth there were two winners on court when this match ended.

"I'm gob smacked" said Nicol. "It was a great game of squash. There were only 3 or 4 decisions in the whole match, which is the way it should be played. We played at a very fast pace, both going for our shots. It was very exciting. In the last game I made a few mistakes and gave him a good start and he was able to stay ahead. He played slightly better than me at the end so he deserves it. I think he's going to be world champion for years to come."

Of his third visit to Bermuda, Nicol said, "I've thoroughly enjoyed coming to Bermuda. This tournament just gets better and better. We had a fabulous crowd, and I love it here."

After being crowned champion, Amr Shabana commented, "First, I'd like to thank Peter for his kind words. He is a legend of the game. All respect to Peter. It was a tough match, he's an amazing player. He started off so fast and quick he caught me by surprise a little. I started to see the ball better in the second and was able to get more control of the centre of the court.

"We were both attacking, I knew he wasn't going to wait for me to attack, he was going to attack first which made for a lot of fast exciting rallies. It wasn't an easy match at all. I didn't think I was going to win for a lot of it.

"I expected him to die a little in the fourth, but it was me who got tired. I got off to a great start in the fifth and managed to hold on, but it was very close.

"I've got absolute respect for Peter, he raised the bar for all of us, and he's an inspiration.

"It's been a great tournament, the crowd, the organization, the sponsors have all been perfect, I just hope the sponsors can double or triple the prize money next year!"