Inspirational!

By LUWITA HANA RANDHAWA
educate@thestar.com.my

SHE has a record 78 Women's Squash Association titles.

Last year alone, she won the Tournament of Champions, the British Open, the Commonwealth Games singles gold, the Asian Games singles and team golds and just three weeks ago, she became World Champion for a record eighth time at the Wadi Degla Women's World Squash Championship in Egypt.

With a list of achievements this impressive, it's no wonder Nicol David is seen as an inspiring figure to Malaysian students.

She was even voted, by tertiary students between 16 and 25, into the Top 10 Most Inspiring Leaders and Personalities Award list, along with the likes of Air Asia Bhd chief executive officer Aireen Omar, Groupon Asia Pacific head Joel Neoh and Chatime Malaysia chief executive officer Bryan Loo.

Earlier this week, the reigning queen of squash received her award from UCSI Group founder and chairman Datuk Peter Ng at the university's Kuala Lumpur campus. At the event, Nicol took time to candidly chat with students, all scholarship recipients from the UCSI Scholars' Club (U-SchoS).

Despite holding the world number one position for a record unbroken 105 months – that's 8.75 years! – the 31-year-old from Penang said her journey is not over.

“There's still so much more for me to learn and I'm still constantly improving my game. The way I look at it, the number one position is not mine to keep, but mine to get all the time.”

Her coach Liz Irving, with whom she trains in Amsterdam, always
finds new things for her to work on and new ways to motivate her, she said.

The athlete also spoke about the connection between sport and study.

"Playing squash made my studying better. Things I learnt from squash like discipline, time management and focus helped when it came to schoolwork and exams."

And the pressure to win a tournament is not unlike the pressure to excel in exams.

"Pressure is always going to be there and in fact, it gets bigger every year. It's how you handle and manage it that counts."

You have to work hard throughout the year and not cram everything in at the last minute, she said to the students.

"If you've put all the work in, trust and believe that what you've planned and prepared will come together when you're being tested."

It doesn't hurt to learn a few relaxation techniques too, she added, when asked how she manages to sleep well the night before a big game.

Nicol was also asked how she has handled obstacles on her road to success.

"I hate losing and losses are painful, but you have to accept that there will be challenges along the way. That's part of growing up. Nothing is smooth sailing."

What's important is how you handle your failures, she said.

"A failure can lead to something bigger if you learn from it. When you fail, identify what went wrong and move forward. Grow from it."

As parting advice, Nicol, who heads next to compete in the Tournament of Champions in New York, told the students to follow their hearts.

"Don't be afraid to explore and try new things until you find something you really like. When it feels right, go for it and work hard. Nothing can stop you if you really love to do what you do."

Fan Club: Nicol with her award, posing with U-Schos members.