

Squash queen gives back

By Carmel Dominic

To Malaysians, and of course the world over, squash is synonymous with Nicol David. The proud Penang-born, who was recently crowned the *World's Games Greatest Athlete of All Time*, always has a smile on her face and is most unassuming. This writer credits Nicol's approachable nature to her strong Catholic and a down-to-earth upbringing.

Attributing her faith to her family, Nicol said that her mother taught her to surrender everything she does into the hands of the Lord.

"I do what I need to do. I attend my training sessions, eat well and always keep a healthy mind. The rest, I surrender to God. Yes, I go into a match hoping to win, but the actual outcome is in God's hands," she said.

Like the rest of us, she does feel sad and disappointed when she loses a match. However, she knows that there is always a bigger picture at play.

Learn from failure

"I learn more from my failures than my winnings. I become a better player and a better person through my failures. Everything happens for a reason. Even failure. There could be many reasons why I lose a match, and it is easy to play the blame game. But, the true reason of why I lose will always present itself when the Lord feels it's time to reveal it to me and then

In conjunction with International Women's Day, March 8, we highlight Nicol David, our Queen of Squash.

Nicol shares how her trust in God and the faith of her parents has driven her to success.

Not resting on her laurels after retirement, Nicol has started a foundation to empower children between the ages of eight to 12 through sports and education, using squash and English.

suddenly, everything makes sense. Growth comes with realisation."

She added that her mother, Ann Marie, a catechist, gave her some insightful perspective on how to handle her losses.

"It is important to mum that I always keep things in perspective, especially my losses. She always reminds me to put myself in my opponent's position as now, their parents have the opportunity to be proud of them as how my parents were proud of me whenever I won. She not only found a way to calm me down but simultaneously reminded me to think of others and that the world does not revolve around me," she said thoughtfully.

Her father, Desmond David who was a national football player, supported her on sports matters.

"Being a sportsman, dad saw my talent and fully encouraged me to pursue it. He believed that if you have the ability, it should be fully utilised. On my low days, he would always remind me of my past achievements and how I managed to achieve all that despite the obstacles I faced. Dad always tells

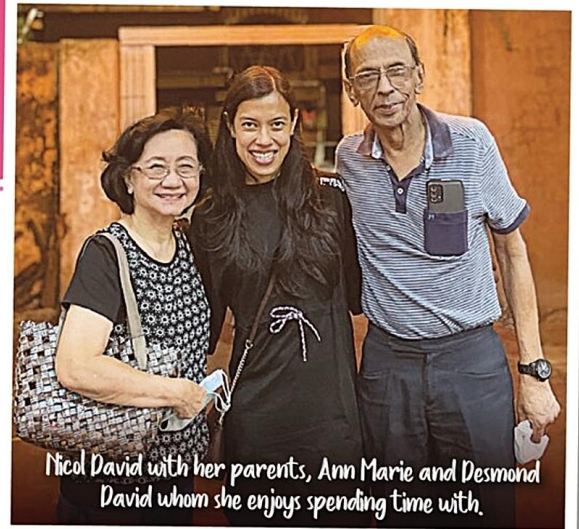
me not to give up, even if I lose. He instilled the habit of picking myself up, dusting the failure off and coming back harder the next round."

Depend on the Holy Spirit

Throughout her 18-year career, Nicol resided overseas to train as a professional squash player. At the tender age of 18, most parents would be reluctant to allow their child to go so far away from home and be under the supervision of strangers, but knowing how adamant Nicol was about becoming a professional player, her parents gave their blessings and unwavering support. It was at this time too that Nicol had her first personal encounter with God during a Life in the Spirit Seminar (LSS).

"My mother told me about this seminar and I thought it would be beneficial for me to participate. And I'm glad that I did. I experienced the presence of the Holy Spirit for the first time and received the Gift of Tongues."

Nicol left for Amsterdam soon after the seminar to begin her



Nicol David with her parents, Ann Marie and Desmond David whom she enjoys spending time with.

training. On hindsight, she says her experience at the seminar was the starting point of her spiritual growth. She fully acknowledges that her talent and everything that comes with it is God's providence. She would not have been able to do any of it on her own. Following her mother's advice, Nicol kept a regular daily prayer time and always kept her faith at the forefront in her decision-making process. She has also experienced the power of the Holy Spirit during her matches.

"There have been many times when I'm in the court, in the middle of the match, and I can feel a calming presence come over me and take over my movements on the court. It's almost like I am a third party watching myself play, though I am the one playing. This is the moment when I'm in the zone. My responses are swift and efficient. I am at my best in those moments and usually win

the match. This calming presence is the Holy Spirit, because I always surrender myself and the match to the Lord and so, He takes over," she shared.

Trust in the Lord

Speaking on spiritual maturity, Nicol said that over the span of 15 years, the consistent lesson that she is faced with is, trusting God's timing and decisions. Admittedly one of the hardest things to do as a disciple of Christ, Nicol has had her fair share of doubtful and fearful days.

"It is easy to get carried away in a situation and rely on my own understanding to solve or make sense of it. But, it quickly unravels and then I realise that I can't deal with it on my own. Then, I go running back to Him and sit in prayer. Before I know it, things will somehow fall in place and there is such clarity. It's a work in progress," she admits.

Empowering children through sports and education



At the Seven Terraces filming the Penang Tourism Ambassador videos.

Now that squash queen Nicol David has retired from the sport, she has turned her attention to social responsibility. The eight-time World Champion has founded the Nicol David Organisation, a non-profit organisation that empowers children between the ages of eight to 12 through sports and education, using squash and English.

"We believe that squash is one factor that will instil good values in children and at the same time, being proficient in the English language will give them more opportunities in the future. We will be reaching out to B40 and M40 families to take up the programme. At the moment, the programme will be based in Bukit Jalil, so we are reaching out to a few schools in the area to recruit students. There are no prerequisites to join the programme, but of course an interest in sports will benefit them greatly."

In a nutshell, this substi-

tuted after-school programme is geared towards teaching children the importance and advantages of having good values like self-discipline, healthy work ethic and how to keep a positive mindset.

The education part of this programme will be supported by the Embassy of the United States of America. They have secured the services of an English professor who will virtually train local university graduates on how to interactively engage the children to learn the English language. University students from the squash club will be selected to be trained as coaches for the children. Nicol will take on the role as head coach and train the university students to be future coaches. The organisation also aims to cultivate leadership skills among local graduates. The program is set to be launched in June this year.

Nicol and her co-founder, Mariana de Reyes, who was also a professional squash player from Colombia back in the day, came together to set up this organisation.

"As I was nearing my retirement, I knew I needed a plan to keep myself occupied. Having grown up in an environment and family that was always helping others, I knew I wanted to do the same. I just wasn't sure how. As I was speaking to Mariana about my future plans, she gave me some very good advice. Listening to her, I realised that I would need help in making this idea a reality. So, I asked her to join me, which she did and the Nicol David Organisation was born."

Having conquered and dominated the world of squash, all the while making her family and country proud, Nicol is now excited for this next part of her life. And again, she reiterates that God is in control and is leading her on this path.

"God has allowed me to reach my full potential in squash. I have maximised my talent to the best of my ability. Now, with all the skills, experience and lessons that I have learnt from that part of my life, God is showing

me how I can put all of that to good use with the setting up of this organisation. There were some bumps here and there, but as soon as I opened myself to possibilities and allowed God to take over, I realised that He had positioned all the necessary people in my path, to make my ideas and plans into reality. I am very grateful for His many blessings."

Despite the sweet nectar of success, Nicol said that she never really stopped to enjoy and bask 'in the moment'. Nicknamed the 'Energiser Bunny' by her peers, Nicol really lived up to that name. Now that she has the time to reflect, she wishes that she had taken the time to enjoy her successes, instead of getting ready to achieve the next goal. Her one advice to the young ones is that they remember to enjoy their successes, because those moments are fleeting and precious.

The *HERALD* wishes Nicol David all the best in her future endeavours.