



After losing in the finals of the U.S. Open in 2012 and 2017, Raneem El Welily proved that three times was a charm, as she crushed Nour El Sherbini in the 2018 finals.

**BY JAMES ZUG** 

The 2018 FS Investments U.S. Open Squash Championships saw two Egyptians winning crowns, confirming Egypt's dominance of the game. Mohamed ElShorbagy thrashed, bashed, blistered and beasted his way to his third title. This tied him for the second-best number of U.S. Open titles with a Mount Rushmore of greats (Nicol David, Gregory Gaultier, Natalie Grainger, Hashim Khan, Jahangir Khan, Jansher Khan and Roshan Khan) and now just one victory behind matching Cassie Jackman for the all-time record of four.

After twice losing in the final of the Open, Raneem El Welily answered the question posed by the motto of the 2018 event—"Who's Next?" The Alexandrian sharpshooter drilled dozens of nicks on her way to becoming the fifth different winner of the women's draw in the past



Mohamed ElShorbagy hugged his coach David Palmer (below) after coming back to beat Simon Rösner in a thrilling five-game final.

five years. For El Welily, the victory was a foundational brick in an imposing career edifice. She has now almost done it all: winning British Junior Open draws (all four on offer) and World Junior titles (twice); a world No. 1 ranking; World Team titles; and victories in major events like the Tournament of Champions, Carol Weymuller Open, Malaysian Open, Al Ahram in front of the Pyramids of Giza, and Windy City Open on top of her first World Championship last winter. With her U.S. Open title, all that is missing now from her wall is the Hong Kong Open and the British Open.

Both ElShorbagy and El Welily looked locked in at host venue Drexel University. ElShorbagy dropped just a single game en route to the final. But he struggled with the physicality of Simon Rösner in the final and barely escaped with a five-game win after going down 2-1. El Welily, on the other hand, also dropped a single game before the final, but she cruised at the end, diabolically dismissing Nour El Sherbini, the world No. 1, in three games.

**EGYPTIAN INSCRIPTION:**

**EL WELILY & ELSHORBAGY**



**ENGRAVED ON  
U.S. OPEN TROPHIES**







Reeham Sedky (r) and Hania El Hammamy put on a first-round show for U.S. Open fans—their second five-game, eighty-plus-minute match of 2018.



Tesni Evans reached her first-ever platinum semifinals, including a stirring comeback down 2-0 against Joelle King in the second round.



Amanda Sobhy knocked off two higher seeds, including defending champion Nour El Tayeb in a five-game triumph, to get to the quarters.



Reeling off three victories, Yathreb Adel made the quarters, just like she did at the 2014 Open as an eighteen-year-old qualifier.

Like in most U.S. Opens, upsets abounded early on. Wales served notice. Tesni Evans, seeded twelve, sprinted to the semis and captured the solitary game off El Welily, and Joel Makin reeled off two straight upsets before losing to defending champion Ali Farag. The precocious Yathreb Adel again proved right the pundits who predict great things from the Egyptian. She snagged three matches, including two straight 11-9 in the fifth victories—remarkably, all nine games Adel won at the Open were by two points. In his fifth visit to Drexel, Mohamed Abouelghar reached his first U.S. Open quarters and also looked very much like a future champion.

For those courtside at Drexel, it was exciting to watch first-hand the U.S. Open main-draw debuts of a number of future stars. Many were from Egypt: twenty-year-old Zeina Mickawy, who knocked out 2017 world junior champion Rowan Elaraby in the opening round; twenty-one year-old Nadine Shahin, who grabbed one match and then nearly toppled Salma Hany in another, losing 14-12 in the fifth; Nada Abbas, the eighteen year-old who upset Nele Gilis in the opening round. American and Penn senior Reeham Sedky took the first two games against Hania El Hammamy in a matter of minutes 11-2, 11-1, but El Hammamy rebounded to narrowly escape in five, 13-11, 12-10, 11-8 in one of the more dramatic comebacks of the Open. Who will be the first world champion born in the twenty-first century? Abbas or El Hammamy might be a good bet.

It wasn't all Egyptians. Jaundiced observers, seeing the second straight year with both Open champions hailing from Egypt, sometimes lament the lack of diversity on the PSA tour but the fact

is that only a dozen women and fourteen men in the world top fifty are from Egypt. Other countries are performing well and this was shown at the Open. Of the sixteen quarterfinalists, just seven were from Egypt.

Hong Kong China kept head coach Chris Robertson busy, putting eight players in the draw—one was twenty-five year-old Tsz Fung Yip who won his first Open match ever. England showed some fighting spirit. Julianne Courtice, at age twenty-six, made her maiden main-draw appearance count by taking one match and then pushing Joshna Chinappa to five in the next. Courtice's twenty-five year-old countryman, Declan James, also made his inaugural Open appearance count by winning two matches, including his second-round victory over Adrian Waller where he saved eight match balls in a brilliant, 101-minute blockbuster. George Parker, twenty-two, took advantage of his first visit to the States since 2015 to string together two straight five-game victories.

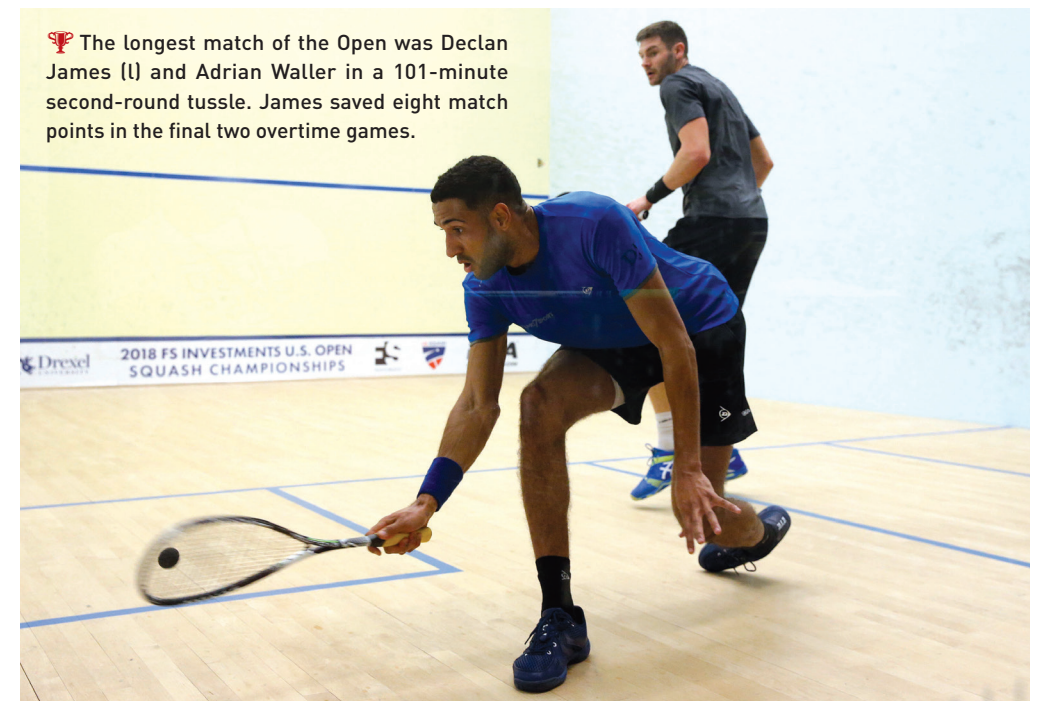
For Team USA home fans, Amanda Sobhy showed her continued progress as she returns from an Achilles injury suffered in 2017. She strung together three victories, including disposing of the defending champion and world No. 3 Nour El Tayeb in a thrilling five-gamer before she tumbled to exceptional play by Camille Serme in the quarters. U.S. No. 1 Todd Harrity took the most important scalp of his career when he came from behind to push out Cameron Pilley in five games in the opening round. Olivia Blatchford—who was also presented with the 2017 U.S. Olympic Committee Athlete of the Year award nomination during the Open—lived up to her seeding by reaching the round of 16 before falling in front of El Welily's steady march through the draw.



Simon Rösner (l) dismissed defending champion Ali Farag in a four-game semi, becoming the first German to reach the finals of the Open since Sabine Schoene in 1997.



In the opening round Todd Harrity stunned Cameron Pilley, coming back from a 2-0 deficit to record his biggest-ever win on the PSA tour.

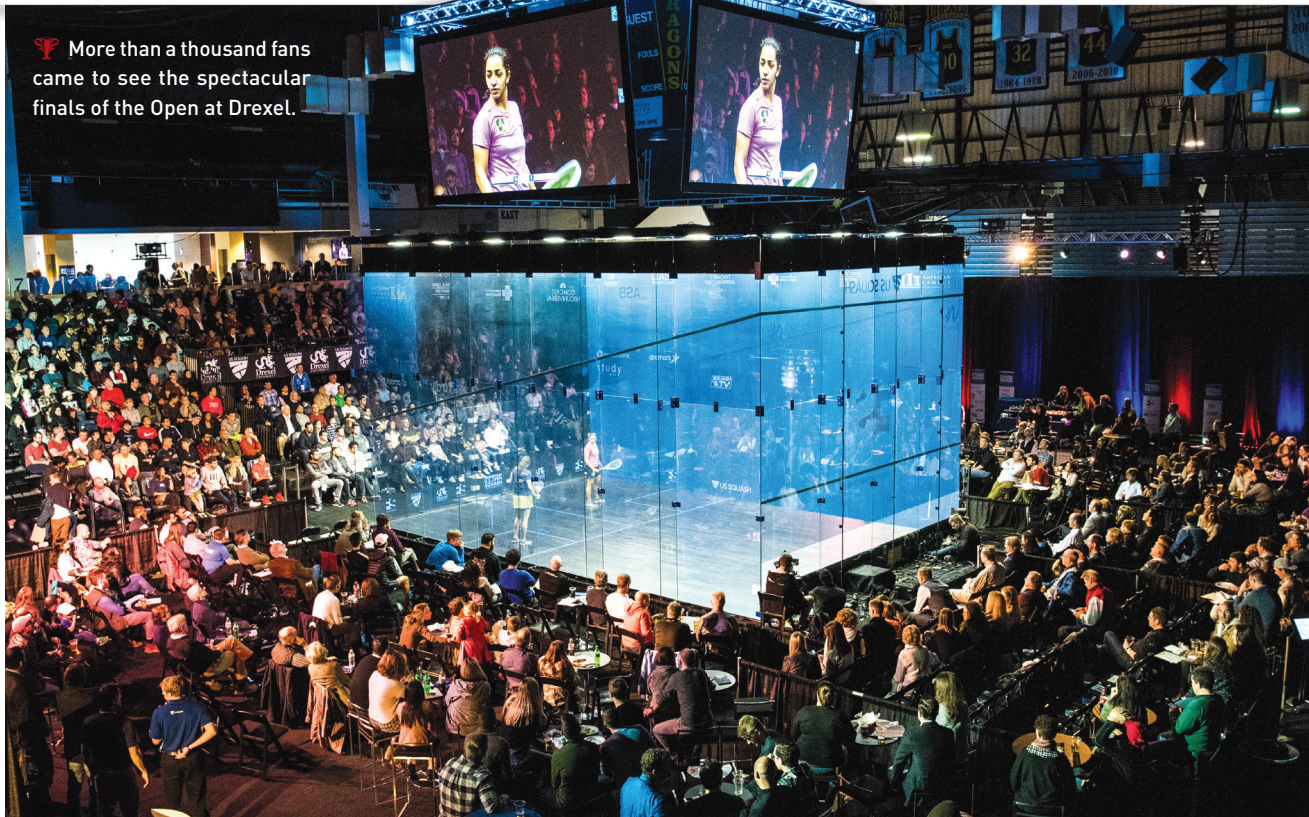


The longest match of the Open was Declan James (l) and Adrian Waller in a 101-minute second-round tussle. James saved eight match points in the final two overtime games.





Fans got to interact with the players in many ways at the Open, including spinning for serve in the finals.



More than a thousand fans came to see the spectacular finals of the Open at Drexel.



A highlight of Drexel Day at the Open was the speed-gun challenge featuring Team USA's Chris Gordon (l) and Drexel squash players Matias Knudsen and Anna Hughes.

It was the eighth straight time Drexel has hosted the U.S. Open, but a couple of innovations changed the complexion of the tournament. Sports Data Lab, in partnership with the PSA, collected sports-science measurement throughout the event and provided real-time data on players' heart rates to those watching the matches. The ever-changing number gave spectators a vivid understanding of how intense squash was at the world-class level.

Another change was the new PSA tournament format. The Open was the first major event—now titled World Tour Platinum rather than the previously-titled World Series—to showcase a new format that included no qualifying rounds. Instead, both the men and women had forty-eight player draws with the top sixteen-ranked players receiving first-round byes.

Removing qualifying placed every competitor directly into the main draw. They got paid (and received ranking points), as opposed to the old system where a player could travel to Philadelphia, lose in the first round of the qualifiers and receive nothing. But without a qualifying event, the Open was slightly less open. The old days of an unheralded player coming through the qualifying and doing damage in the main draw was over. Think of Chris Walker who at the 2001 British Open qualified in and reached the final.

The 46th annual U.S. Open trophy presentation: (l-r) Drexel Senior Associate Athletic Director Laura White, US Squash Board Chair Mark Pagon, Simon Rösner, Mohamed ElShorbagy, Raneem El Welily, Nour El Sherbini, FS Investments Chairman & CEO Michael Forman and Drexel President John Fry.



PHOTO: STEVE ROWE

ASB's Peter Schmidl had to jump on court and fix a loose board in the floor during the first day of play on the ASB GlassCourt.



The change added intensity right from the outset. Each of the first two days featured thirty-two matches at the Daskalakis Athletic Center: eight on the ASB GlassCourt and twenty-four downstairs on traditional courts on Drexel's Kline & Specter squash courts. This meant a tremendous amount of squash—with four matches occurring simultaneously, double the maximum last year. This pushed the US Squash and Drexel production team to new heights and gave the tournament a festival feeling. You could also watch four matches at once—using SquashTV for the glass court and the PSA's YouTube page where the other three matches were live streamed.

The new format meant that the dynamics were vastly different on the standard non-glass courts. The ball stayed up in the hotter environment and the points were longer. Because there was much less space between the court and spectators, coaches and referees, the atmosphere was far more gladiatorial. The pressure was tangible.

This year more than half of the traditional-court matches lasted beyond the minimum three games; all but three of them were played on traditional courts. (To compare, at the 2017 Open only nine first or second-round matches went the distance.)

The incredible setting upstairs, with the glowing glass cube surrounded by a thousand passionate fans, was brilliant, but the scene downstairs was equally exciting in its own way. Who—and what—is next? [SM](#)



PHOTO: STEVE ROWE

As always, the downstairs courts provided ample entertainment for squash fans.



# AWARDS AND RECOGNITIONS AT THE U.S. OPEN



A large group of U.S. Squash Hall of Famers came to Drexel to congratulate the Class of 2018 inductees Anil Nayar and Carol Thesieres. (l-r) Ned Edwards, Ralph Howe, Jay Nelson, Ben Heckscher, Joyce Davenport, Nayar, Thesieres, Sam Howe, Tom Poor, Maurice Heckscher and Kenton Jernigan.



During the fifth-annual Character in Sports Day, Abby Markoe was awarded the 2018 Feron's Wedgwood Sportsmanship Trophy.



(l-r) Jud Hand, Liz Hand, Lach McIntosh and Ian McIntosh were honored with the 2018 Philadelphia SRA Service Award.



AK Frazier was honored with the 2018 Women in Sports Day Special Recognition Award.



Kristen Callahan (l) helped present the 2018 Robert W. Callahan Sportsmanship Award to Chris Spahr.



Olivia Blatchford Clyne was honored with the 2017 U.S. Olympic Committee's Athlete of the Year Award.



The two leaders of Women in Sports Day, (l-r) Katharine Joyce and Ashley Bernhard, were honored on court.



Julianne Harris was awarded the 2018 Achievement Bowl.



Drexel Day featured dozens of Drexel alumni and current students, faculty and staff enjoying the matches in the Daskalakis Athletic Center.



U.S. Open first match players Rowan Elaraby (far left) and Zeina Mickawy (far right) flanked honorary starters (l-r) Tyreese Samuels, Ransom Gaymon, FS Investments' Steve DeAngelis, and Kayla Atkinson.



Beth Devine, Anne Marie Horner and Terry Horner were honored with the 2018 SquashSmarts Distinguished Service Award. (l-r standing) Chris Tejada, Ransom Gayman, Ann Marie Horner, Terry Horner, Beth Devine, Quinetta Bowden and Ross Bolling; (l-r sitting) Melliah Santos and Dasha Hammond.



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