

type of woman that can take a tweed skirt and totally make it work," he said. "She can take menswear-inspired textures and look great in them." Of Nancy Reagan's signature red, Zyla said, "She wore it confidently, in a very powerful way. It is definitely her romantic color, but she always wore it in crisp silhouettes, very architectural." (Her season and archetype: Early Spring, Playful Princess.)

Putting on his overcoat, Zyla recounted a conversation he'd overheard on the subway, around Christmas. Two young men discussed the previous evening's office party: "I had a great time," one said. "Did you see *Jennifer*?" And the other one said, "Yeah, she wore a *red dress*." Zyla said, "I was standing behind them, thinking to myself, I've never heard anyone say, 'Jennifer—she wore a *blue dress*.'"

—Emma Allen

THE SPORTING LIFE IN THE BOX



The world is huge, but Nick Matthew and James Willstrop have reduced it to a small glass box. The two British squash players, each recently ranked No. 1, grew up battling on court in Yorkshire, and have since been unable to escape each other, in Khobar, New Delhi, or even Canberra. Like many top-level squash matches, their encounters are equal parts lightning chess and heavy-weight brawl—sprinting melees of shifting tactics, desperate lunges, and shouted appeals to the referee. Yet their rivalry is singularly contentious. After one donnybrook, Matthew complained that Willstrop kept blocking him, and intimated that he, Matthew, had won on gumption alone; Willstrop, a bearded, taciturn twenty-nine-year-old giant known for the precision of his strokes, wrote afterward that Matthew, whose nickname is the Wolf, had treated him with "disdain and arrogance." On paper, the contest would seem to be a toss-up, but Matthew has won their last fourteen meetings.

Both men have been in Manhattan the past two weeks, for the surpassingly noisy Tournament of Champions, held

on a glass-walled court at Grand Central Terminal. On a Tuesday, Willstrop went to Harlem to share his experiences at StreetSquash, an organization housed in a gleaming facility on 115th Street, where local kids get help with their homework and learn the game, with the goal of attending college.

Two days later, Matthew also stood on StreetSquash's Court 4, surrounded by twenty teen-agers. "Did you speak with James the other day?" he asked. "Hopefully, you'll find me more interesting." Lean and brush-cut, rangy and fierce, he calls to mind an extremely bendy drill bit. He wore squash togs splotted with sponsors' logos and a wristband the size of a Roman vambrace. When he wins a tough final, he likes to hurl his wristband into the crowd. (After losing to Matthew in the final of the 2010 World Open, Willstrop beat the ground with his fists and hurled his own wristband into the Persian Gulf.)

Matthew told the students that he started playing squash at eight, and was soon hooked: "It's claustrophobic, it's gladiatorial, and there's no hiding place. It teaches you to grow up very quickly." But he was a late bloomer: "James won every national title in the juniors, and I didn't win *any*. So those of you who are improving—know that there's time." He added that his parents wanted him to go to college, but agreed to a three-year trial period on the pro tour. He grinned. "I'm thirty-two now, and it's worked out pretty well."

The students were shy, asking only how to avoid junk food (man up) and which languages he'd learned during his travels (none). George Polsky, the program's founder, inquired if Matthew had advice for turning a losing match around, adding that he'd asked Willstrop the same question.

"What did James say?" Matthew asked. "Because if I find out what *he's* thinking I can beat him next time."

"James did mention to avoid having negative thoughts," Polsky said.

"Yeah, yeah!" Matthew agreed. "Even if you lose, there's always one thing you can take away, one thing you learned." With a dark chuckle, he said, "Remind me of that if I don't win this week."

After windmilling his Gumby-like arms to stretch, he hit balls with the students, one at a time—everyone was happier to be in motion. The champ handed

out high fives for long rallies, but kept most of the rallies short with a stream of trick shots. There were corkscrews and skid boasts and no-look boasts where he'd turn and gape at his opponent, defenseless—except that his shot had sent his opponent racing in the wrong direction. He even threw in a double fake, taking a full cut at the ball, missing it on purpose, then feathering a drop shot with a quick sec-



Nick Matthew and James Willstrop

ond swing. Over the shouts of disbelief, he laughed and said, "Shabana just did that to James in London"—referring to the great Egyptian shotmaker Amr Shabana. "James was out in the car park!"

Afterward, in a town car headed for Grand Central, Matthew reflected on his rivalry with Willstrop. "It's well documented that there's no love lost," he said. "Unlike Shabana, who will go for his shots at any time, we both learned the English way, which is not 'playing safe,' exactly—you're trying to push the guy around—but which is about *accumulated pressure*. Everywhere, all over, unrelenting." He threw out a last corkscrew: "James is a lot more insular, but I'm sure we told the kids similar things—except that he would have had a big emphasis on the humility side of it." Both Matthew and Willstrop lost in brutal semifinal matches. After narrowly besting Willstrop, the tournament's eventual winner, Ramy Ashour, said that the top players have grown so familiar with each other's shots and psyches that winning "is getting tougher and tougher."

—Tad Friend