

## Tennis Ireland Women in Sport Week

### Nicola's 'Treble' in National Titles and Tennis Career



*Nicola receiving her prize from George Stevenson at the Irish Masters Indoors on 19<sup>th</sup> February 2023*

**Nicola McCormick** achieved the (perhaps unique) feat of winning all three national masters singles titles (Irish Open, Irish Closed and Irish Indoor) in her age category (over 50s) in the last 12 months and was selected to play for Ireland in the World Team Championships and Quadrangular Internationals last year.

Although intensely competitive on court, Nicola is a fine ambassador for Irish Tennis and for Woman's sport in general, demonstrating qualities of leadership, resilience and fair-mindedness.

Many of the young and older players can benefit not only from her example but also from her advice and readily given practical help.

I had the opportunity of catching up with Nicola at her club Windsor L.T.C. after her win at the Irish Indoors. She has had many tournament successes at Junior, Senior and now Masters level.

Please read on to hear her amazing tennis story as a top junior winning the Irish under 12s to working her way back over 40 years later to winning 3 Irish titles at Masters level as a 'working Mum'.

## Early Years (Juniors Under 18)



*Nicola receiving her trophies for winning the Irish Open Under 12s at Fitzwilliam LTC in 1982*

Nicola started playing tennis at the age of 9 and became interested watching her Dad play at her local club, Newry Tennis Club. Nicola recalls: "dad bought me my first tennis racket when I could hit 100 balls in a row against a garage wall using his wooden Dunlop Maxply Fort. I was coached by my dad (Frank) who was a 'middle weight' Irish boxing champion and later by the late, inspirational Viv Gotto at Windsor Tennis Club. Viv had played at Wimbledon and was a former Ireland Davis Cup player and Captain so I learnt a lot from him."

Turning to Nicola's tournament successes in her very first tournament in 1981, at the age of 10 playing at the Belfast Boat Club under 12 Ulster Championships she got to the semi finals. The following year she won the Fitzwilliam Irish National under 12 title, age 11. In 1984 she won all three under 14 Irish titles (Singles, Doubles and Mixed) at Fitzwilliam.

Success continued 2 years later winning the Irish under 16 girls title and Nicola was a beaten finalist in 1988 for the under 18 title.

Nicola has represented Ulster at all age groups and remarkably as an Ulster Senior team player just aged 14. She represented Ireland at under 14 and under 18 levels at the 4 Nations, World Youth Cup and other junior European ITF events.

### **Senior Level (18-30 years)**

Having left school with successful exam results, Nicola went on to study Dentistry at Queens University Belfast and kept up her love of the sport representing Queens and Ireland at the World Student Games in 1991 and playing for Ulster in the senior inter pros.

After university Nicola moved to Hampshire in 1994.

“When I went over to England I joined Hampshire Tennis Club and was a member for 20 years. I quickly got selected for Hampshire County teams and played in the top divisions at County week for several years.

Then in 2006 I had my first child, Patrick followed by Zoe in 2009. I stopped playing tennis completely, lost interest, was too busy as a full time dentist and Mum!”

### **Masters Level (Over 30 years)**

Fortunately for Irish tennis, Nicola moved back to N. Ireland in 2016, rejoined Windsor L.T. C. for sentimental reasons (Viv Gotto) and a good junior coaching programme with dome covered courts.

“I played with my young children and started playing a little mixed league tennis again. Then after getting into regular practice games and coaching sessions at Windsor, I decided to ‘dip my toe in the water’ and played in the 2022 Irish Masters Indoor tournament, my first Master tournament aged 51. I managed to win the Woman’s singles Over 50s title. Later in the year I travelled to Dublin for the Irish Open and to Cork for the Irish Close and won the respective National over 50s singles titles.”

“This year I have decided to branch out a bit further and have a go at a few ITF events. I went to San Remo, Italy and played in an ITF 400 graded Masters event on clay courts which was hard going and got to the final but unfortunately I had to retire due to an injury I sustained in the semis.”

Nicola is not stopping there as I asked her about what targets and plans she has set herself for the rest of this year.

“My main aim is to keep trying to improve and stay fit. I realise the importance as I get older of good physical conditioning and nutrition, and doing all the right things to stay injury free. I am keen to play more European events as well as National competitions.”

Finally I asked Nicola what she gets out of the sport to which she replies:

“I appreciate more and more the friendships in tennis, the opportunities to travel, play the game we love and meet new tennis people.”

David Williams

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