

Wheelchair Tennis juniors make SA proud

The 2013 Cruyff Foundation Junior Masters took place in Tarbes, France, 24 – 27 January 2013. Only the world's top 12 juniors players – eight boys and four girls – were invited to play in this premier event with SA contributing three of the world top 12 players; Mariska Venter, Gift Lekganyane, Thato Tsomole and coach Rene Plant.

The event was played in a round robin format with the eight boys being divided into two groups. South Africa's exciting and very talented Thato Tsomole from Hartebeespoort faced the world no.1 and defending champion Alfie Hewett of Great Britain in his opening match. It was the first time sixteen

year old Thato, currently ranked world no. 5, was exposed to this level of competition, with Hewett taking the match 6-0,6-1. Thato also faced Carlos Anker of the Netherland on the opening

day losing the match 6-0, 6-0. The 3rd encounter was against the 13 year old Martin de la Puente of Spain, where the young Spaniard also won the match 6-0, 6-1.

In Group 2, world No. 2 ranked junior Gift Lenkganyane of South Africa was paired up against Hussein Hamid Hel of Iraq and Chris Herman of USA on Day 1. Although Gift played well, he lost comfortably to the young American, and played the only 3 set match on the opening day against Hamid Hel. Lekganyane won the first set 7-5 after which Hamid Hel seemed to settle down and only dropped one game in the next two sets to claim a 5-7, 6-0, 6-1 victory. Lekganyane then faced world no.3 Nico Langmann from Austria, where a 6-4,6-1 win over Lekganyane secured Langmann a place in the semifinals.

The Girls Singles draw was made up of a field

of the top four junior girls in the world including South Africa's Mariska Venter. Mariska was first up against Diede de Groot (16) of the Netherlands where Mariska was defeated 6-2, 6-4. Mariska recovered well, and posted the first win for the

South African delegation beating Polina Shakirova of Russia 2-6, 6-4, 6-2. Armed with one win and one loss Mariska Venter now faced two time champion Angelica Bernal from Colombia. It was not only pride at stake, but both were coming to the match with a win and a lost – it was the ultimate decider. Both players brought their A game to the court, but experience allowed the defending champion Bernal to secure a 6-3, 6-3 victory over SA's exciting talent Mariska Venter.

Alfie Hewett (GBR) and Diede de Groot (NED) wheeled away with the prestigious titles

after defeating Carlos Anker (NED) 6-0, 6-1 and Angelica Bernal (COL) 6-0, 6-2 in the finals. "Although we did not play for any of the titles, or walk away with either trophy, it was a proud achievement for WTSA to have one quarter of the world's top junior in our camp. We believe we have the talent, have the players, and have the programmes. I am sure we will dominate this and other junior events in time. Congratulations to our juniors, you did us proud.. " Karen Losch manager Wheelchair Tennis SA Airports Company South Africa (ACSA) is the official sponsor of Wheelchair Tennis South Africa. It is through their generous sponsorship that we can develop our players and allow them to travel to events of this caliber.