

MONTE-CARLO SQUASH CLASSIC LE MAG'

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FOCUS ON
*THE MONACO
SQUASH ACADEMY*

TOP STORY
THE 2025 WINNER OPENS

**MÉLISSA ALVES' VIEWS ON THE CURRENT SEASON
AND MORE**

Michel Ballerio has been president of the Fédération Monégasque de Squash Rackets since his “unintended appointment” (his own words) in June, and he delivered a speech full of soundness and sincerity after the final of the 28th Classic. ‘My mission will be to increase the level of the tournament. I have plenty of ideas, I am not afraid of working hard and I have some good people around me,’ said the man who represented Monaco at the international level in the 80s.



While the unfailing dedication of the volunteers, the quality of the organisation and the magnificent setting are all reasons for optimism, finding new sponsors will be essential. But let's dream a little: why not ramp things up from 2026 onwards? This would be an opportunity for the “Copper Queen” Mélissa Alves to start becoming the “Bronze Queen” ...

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CLASSIC
2025

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Last weekend, Mélissa Alves became the fifth player winning more than once in Monaco, after a dominant display in the final against Zeina Mickawy. The French number one spoke to us about her goals for the current season and the longer term.

MÉLISSA ALVES OPENS

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A PERFECT WEEK

"Winning a Copper tournament without losing a game and spending less than two hours on court gives me the confidence I need to beat this kind of opponents with some margin. It was tense at the end of the final, I was a little shaky because I had to finish it off and Zeina played the right shots when needed, but the way I manage these moments has improved. It's special to win a PSA tournament in front of my mum for the first time, I wanted to show her the best of myself."

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THE CLASSIC, A UNIQUE EVENT

"It's engraved in the players' memories. and I've known about it since I started playing in PSA (author's note: she was 16 in her first appearance). I chose to come here rather than playing the Gold event in China, it shows how much the Classic matters to me. You can feel that people enjoy watching us play here, and it was great to see the stands full during the final."



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GAME CHANGER

"This title is also a reward after all the work we've done with Yann Menegaux over the last few months. Working hard doesn't mean piling on training sessions, but rather looking at yourself in the mirror and finding what you need to do to improve. I'm no longer injured, and that changes everything because for two years I couldn't train properly. When I hurt my back against Nada Abbas at the World Championships, a match I felt I was in control of, it was a blow mentally and I ended the season taking anti-inflammatories. I was about to have surgery but

ended up being advised against it. I found myself swimming, using an exercise bike, doing Pilates and even Nordic walking, all things I love (she laughs). But it worked, and I have a vivid memory of July the 24th, when I woke up with no pain I instantly called Yann to tell him, I think it's gonna be ok."

RECIPE FOR SUCCESS

"I don't think I've ever felt better on court: I'm playing the game that suits me, imposing my physical presence, and at the moment we're working on improving my fluidity, both on my movement and my strokes. I don't have enough competition on a daily basis with the girls in France, and it did help that I trained with guys at the National Centre before beating Georgina Kennedy in Qatar – I also go to Marseille to hit with Paul Gonzalez and Victor Brygo. In France, we tend to separate men, women, youngsters, etc. When I play against male juniors in Egypt or in the US, even if they beat me they still want to play against me on the following day."

ROAD TO LA

"To be eligible for funding from the National Sports Agency for the 2028 Olympics, you have to meet the criteria set out in the Federation's performance plan. At my age, it says you have to be in the world top 10, and Lauren Baltayan is the only Frenchwoman who fits that bill. I don't mind them focusing on a youngster with great potential – we get on very well, she often asks me for advice and I want nothing else for her that reaching the highest possible level – but I feel that as the French number one, I could be given more support. We are in a situation where the women's performance programme relies on a single coach, Yann Menegaux, whereas the men have a larger staff which allows them to work with more accuracy, which is not the case for me."

THE TOP 10 IN MIND

"Managing to stay around 20 in the world rankings is good because the tour is very strong, but I'm aiming higher. I am confident in my abilities, I've already beaten several girls in the top 10 and Satomi Watanabe's win over Hania El Hammamy in China shows that anything is possible. The key to climbing the rankings is to perform more consistently in the big tournaments."

ONE PLAYER, SEVERAL COACHES

"It's common nowadays to have several people working with an athlete. My day-to-day coach is Yann Menegaux: he's very good at communicating, he knows that sometimes he has to let me get carried away so that I can refocus (she laughs). What I like is that he doesn't have a misplaced ego, he doesn't mind that I go and

look for things elsewhere and then we look into them. I also work with Amr Khaled Khalifa. When I started with him in Egypt, I made it into the top 20, but then he left for the US and I joined Yann in Aix. I was a big fan of Khalifa as a player, and he's also a great coach. I went to see him in New York after losing to Anahat Singh in Canada, and he lifted me. Last but not least, there's Raneem El Welily..."

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RANEEM AND MÉLISSA, HOW THEY MET...

"It happened at an exhibition tournament in Mauritius in 2019. We were staying at the same hotel and Camille Serme was teasing me, saying she was going to introduce me to her and tell her I was a fan. At first, Raneem must have thought, "Who is this crazy person" (she laughs). But we quickly hit it off, even though we have different personalities, and we message each other every day. She has welcomed me into her home several times, as if I were a member of her family, and I look after her children. I love life in Egypt, especially because it reminds me of French Guiana. There is big emphasis on family and traditions, and people know how to live together. As for Raneem, she's someone who has an aura and inspires nothing but respect. She's been through it all during her career and helps me with lots of things: choosing the right tournaments, managing key moments in a match, etc."

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WAKE-UP CALL

“I am not someone who likes to be the centre of attention, and for a long time I was unaware of my role as French number one for several reasons: I got this position because of Camille Serme's injury, then I moved to Egypt and besides I missed a few French Nationals due to injuries. Last summer, during the European Championships in Chartres, I had a very easy first round, I saw all these people on the balcony and thought to myself, “Have they really come to watch me play?” It was a real shock, and a huge thrill to share the bronze medal with



the crowd a few days later. Especially with the kids, and it was great to see the youngsters from the academy behind the court in Monaco. Apart from inspiring children, the other thing that is really important to me is to make French Guiana shine. It's been a common thread throughout my career.”

COACH'S THOUGHTS

After the final, we caught up with Yann Menegaux, coach of the French national women's team.

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"I was a little harsh in my analysis of some of Melissa's matches in Monte Carlo, for example her quarterfinal against Lauren. She didn't like it, but it's my job to want her do better. In the final, she showed much more control, she played her own brand of squash and she found the answers to everything Zeina Mickawy threw at her. Overall, it was a very positive week, with another Copper title and without losing a single game as well. When you're coaching from home, the help you

can give to an athlete is limited. So it was also very insightful for me to be with her all week, and I will be travelling with her to the two events in Hong Kong. Reaching the world top 10 is well within her capabilities, and she is not worn out because she started later than some other girls on the tour. To achieve that, she needs to play the attacking squash she likes, while being able to be patient. At the moment, we are working on channelling her energy, learning to hit less hard and focusing on trajectories. Méliissa is a driving force for French women's squash as a whole, and there are positive signs at the moment with young players making some progress. Of course, it's more motivating for a coach when things are going well, but I am committing all my time and energy primarily for the players' benefit."



FACTS & FIGURES

We recap the 28th Monte Carlo Classic.

On Saturday, Mélissa Alves became the **fifth player** to win the Classic more than once after Sarah-Fitz-Gerald (1996, 1997), Cassie Champion

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(1999, 2001, 2004), Natalie Grinham (2006, 2007, 2011, 2012) and Laura Massaro (2008, 2009, 2018). It's also the first time the French Guiana born wins the same event twice.

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The total prize money was \$32,500. The winner went home with a \$5,225 cheque, the runner-up got \$3,300 while those who lost first round received \$481.25. To give you an idea, the 2024/25 world champions earned \$91,200 – which is the biggest prize money in squash history.

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It's a rare feat in PSA: in her round of 16 match against Madison Lyon, Zeina Mickawy saved **seven consecutive match balls** in the fourth game and ended up winning. The Egyptian did it again in the semifinals, saving one match point against Torrie Malik before qualifying for the final.

Asia Harris' first round victory over Yasshmita Jadishkumar lasted **74 minutes**, which was a new career record in PSA for both players. It was also the longest match at the Monte Carlo Classic since the 2018 semi-final between Tesni Murphy and Millie Tomlinson (87 minutes).

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Did you notice the many youngsters from the club around the courts during the Classic? While most were dressed in red, six of them wore black jerseys with the words Monaco Squash Academy at the back.

MONACO SQUASH ACADEMY



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"In Monte Carlo, there is a programme called Classe Sportive, which allows children from Year 7 onwards to have flexible timetables," explains club director Yves Tastet. "We had been thinking about it for a long time, and it came to fruition after conversations I had with the judo coach (here, all the coaches from sport clubs know each other), who sold it to me and explained to me it could be a

huge boost. There is an application process, and conditions to be met such as a minimum number of training hours, obligation for the kids to take part in tournaments etc. The first year we had two kids in the program and now we have six. They are in classes with other young athletes, they finish school around 3:30pm and

MONACO SQUASH ACADEMY

at 4pm they join me at the club – they train every day except Wednesday, to make room for the others kids. Any coach will tell you it's complicated to make a kid improve if you only have him/her one session a week, so this changes everything. We can have them do solo practise, fitness work and so on, and the improvements have been blatant. In what areas in particular? Strategy, they've been learning how to build a rally and score a point, and their confidence grows as they spend more time on the court. Being part of the academy is a source of recognition for them, and motivation for the others."



LET'S GO TO ENGLAND!

During the week of the Classic, the club's two young flagships, 12 y.o. Nicolas Lanza (picture below) and 10 y.o. Henry Musso – who is not officially part of the academy yet because he is in primary school – found out that at the beginning of January, they will be crossing the channel to play in the British Junior Open, the most prestigious junior tournament in the world. “They really wanted it, and we decided to reward their hard work and commitment,” says Yves Tastet. “They watch a lot of squash, and they are fully aware of what the British Junior Open means. One thing for sure, it’s going to be an amazing experience for them.”

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MONTE CARLO CLASSIC 2025 (COPPER, \$32,500)

Round of 32 November, 10	Round of 16 November, 11	Quarterfinals November, 12	Semifinals November, 13	Final November, 14
Breanne FLYNN  11-9, 11-9, 12-10 [9/16] Nadia PFISTER  [9/16] Au Yeong WAI YHANN  11-9, 11-9, 13-11 [WC] Kara LINCOU 	[1] Mélissa ALVES  11-5, 11-4, 11-3 Breanne FLYNN  [WC] Kara LINCOU  11-7, 11-5, 11-6 [8] Lauren BALTAYAN  [7] Millie TOMLINSON  11-5, 9-11, 11-7, 11-6 Asia HARRIS  [9/16] Enora VILLARD  11-7, 11-5, 7-11, 11-4 [4] Alicia MEAD  [3] Torrie MALIK  11-9, 11-8, 11-9 Katerina TYCOVA  [9/16] Kaitlyn WATTS  8-11, 11-4, 11-1, 7-11, 11-9 [5] Emilia SOINI  [6] Jessica VAN DER WALT  14-12, 11-1, 11-6 [9/16] Saskia BEINHARD  [9/16] Madison LYON  9-11, 5-11, 11-7, 12-10, 11-4 [2] Zeina MICKAWY 	[1] Mélissa ALVES  11-7, 11-7, 11-6 [8] Lauren BALTAYAN  [7] Millie TOMLINSON  9-11, 11-7, 11-5, 2-11, 11-4 [4] Alicia MEAD  [3] Torrie MALIK  11-3, 11-6, 11-8 [9/16] Kaitlyn WATTS  [9/16] Saskia BEINHARD  11-6, 7-11, 11-6, 11-2 [2] Zeina MICKAWY 	[1] Mélissa ALVES  11-2, 11-4, 11-7 [7] Millie TOMLINSON   [3] Torrie MALIK  [2] Zeina MICKAWY 	[1] Mélissa ALVES  11-5, 11-3, 11-9 [1] Mélissa ALVES  11-5, 11-3, 11-9 [2] Zeina MICKAWY 

SEE YOU IN 2026...



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