

NADAL SERVES UP CHALLENGE FOR NEWCOMER AWARD

LONDON, January 17, 2006 The remarkable victory of Spanish teenage tennis sensation Rafael Nadal in the French Open Grand Slam tournament last summer has made him a hot favourite to be nominated for the 2006 Laureus World Newcomer of the Year Award.

Almost 60 per cent of the Spanish TV viewing audience watched Nadals victory over Mariano Puerta in the mens singles in Paris the fifth most watched sports event in Spanish history. And with the 2006 Laureus World Sports Awards being held in Barcelona in May, Nadal would be a popular nominee. En route to the final, Nadal beat World No.1 Roger Federer in the semi-finals on his 19th birthday.

It was the highlight of a wonderful year in which the Spaniard also won ten other events in Costa Do Sauipe Brazil, Acapulco, Monte Carlo, Barcelona, Rome, Bastad, Stuttgart, Montreal, Beijing and Montreal.

The 2006 Laureus World Sports Awards, which recognise sporting achievement during the period February 1, 2005 to February 28, 2006, are recognised as the premier honours on the international sporting calendar. The final qualifying date this year is one month later than usual to include the 2006 Winter Olympics in Turin. The winners, as voted by the Laureus World Sports Academy, will be unveiled during a televised Awards Ceremony staged in Barcelona, Spain, on May 22, 2006.

Nadal will be facing strong competition after a vintage year for sport, with four Americans staging a strong challenge for nomination.

While 16-year-old golf prodigy Michelle Wie captured most of the headlines by turning professional in 2005, it was 19-year-old Paula Creamer who made the biggest impact on the golf course. In May she won the Sybase Classic at 18 years 9 months and 17 days, making her the second-youngest first time winner of an LPGA tournament. In July she won the prestigious Evian Masters in France and became the youngest and quickest player to reach US\$1 million in LPGA career earnings. She also won the NEC Open and the Masters GC Ladies Championship on the Japan LPGA tour, became the youngest player to win a place in the Solheim Cup team and finished second on the LPGA Tour money list, behind Annika Sorenstam, with earnings of US\$1,531,780.

On the racetrack 23-year-old Danica Patrick became an overnight sensation when, in her first year in the Indy Racing League, she became the first female driver to lead the Indianapolis 500. In all she led for 19 laps, eventually finishing fourth, the highest ever finish by a woman driver. She eventually finished 12th in the Indy Racing League and was named Rookie of The Year, appearing on the front cover of Sports Illustrated.

American teenager Tianna Madison won the womens long jump gold medal in the World Athletics Championships in Helsinki in her very first major international competition. The 19-year-old University of Tennessee athlete defied wet and windy

conditions to leap to a new personal best of 6.89 metres and beat Russias Tatyana Kotova who finished second for the third World Championships in a row.

At first glance an unlikely candidate for the Laureus World Newcomer of the Year Award is US golfer Jason Gore at the age of 31. As a qualifier, he shared the second round lead at the US Open and was in the final grouping on the last day, then returned to the second-level Nationwide Tour where he won three times consequently and earned instant promotion to the main US PGA Tour. In just his fourth start as a PGA Tour member, he won the 84 Lumber Classic to become the first man to be promoted from the Nationwide Tour during the season and win on the PGA Tour. He finished the season as No.88 in the world, having started at No.668.

Athletics provides a second contender in Britains Harry Aikines-Aryeetey, who, at 16, became the first ever athlete to win the 100 metres and 200 metres double in the six-year history of the World Youth Championships in Marrakech, the youth equivalent of Justin Gatlins sprint double in the senior World Championships in Helsinki. The schoolboy from South London ran 10.35 secs in the 100 metres and 20.91 secs in the 200 metres.

Britains Andrew Murray, aged 18, made a dramatic impact at Wimbledon beating Switzerlands George Bastl and 14th seeded Czech Radek Stepanek in straight sets, then leading David Nalbandian by two sets before falling to defeat in five. The 2004 US Open junior champion is acknowledged to be one of the best new talents to emerge in the mens game. Later in the year he finished runner-up to Roger Federer in the Thailand Open, climbing 449 places in the world rankings during the year.

Football provided a dramatic new face in Argentinas Leo Messi, aged 18, who has been described by some as the new Maradona. Messi moved from his native Rosario to join the Barcelona nursery at the age of 13 and now has dual nationality. Last year he captained Argentina to success in the Under-20 World Cup, finishing as top scorer and earning the Player of the Tournament Award.

Englands South African-born cricketer Kevin Pietersen, aged 25, was voted the Emerging Cricketer of the Year after his brilliance in the England v Australia Ashes Series in which he scored the most runs by a batsman with 473 over the five matches for an average of 52.55. It was his superb performance in the final match which ensured that England won the Series. He came under enormous pressure, but scored a towering 158 for his first Test century.

Meanwhile Chinas Yan Zi, aged 20, won the Guangzhou International tennis tournament in October when she was ranked just 163rd in the world and Britains Shaun Murphy, an unseeded outsider, won the World Snooker Championship.

There is a two-part voting process to find the winner: Firstly, a Selection Panel of the worlds leading sports editors, writers and broadcasters from over 80 countries votes to create a shortlist of six nominations. The members of the Laureus World Sports Academy then vote by secret ballot to select the Award winners. The Laureus World Sports Academy is the ultimate sports jury, made up of 42 of the greatest sportsmen and sportswomen of all time, who have made an outstanding contribution to world sport.

The names of the winner of the Laureus World Newcomer of the Year Award, and the winners of six other categories, plus several special Awards, will be revealed during a televised Awards Ceremony to be staged in Barcelona on the evening of May 22, 2006.

Last year's Awards Ceremony, in the presence of His Majesty King Juan Carlos of Spain, was attended by the legends of the Laureus World Sports Academy and Hollywood stars Jackie Chan, Morgan Freeman, Teri Hatcher and Marcia Gay Harden. Among the award winners present were Roger Federer, Kelly Holmes and Greece football coach Otto Rehhagel.

Barcelona, the capital of Catalonia, is a city with an enormous sporting tradition which has staged the most important sports events. The immensely successful 1992 Olympic Games gave a new impulse to sport in the city.

Sport is a part of everyday life in Barcelona and during the past few years the number of high-level international championships staged in the city has multiplied. Therefore it is no surprise that Barcelona was chosen to host the Laureus World Sports Awards in 2006.

Barcelona is a Mediterranean and metropolitan city with the most modern facilities. Its unique architecture, artistic ambience and many tourist attractions have made Barcelona one of the most visited cities in the world. A business and leisure city, it is the ideal place to organise such an important moment of the sporting year - the Laureus Awards Ceremony.