



Pretoria's wheelchair tennis star now aiming for 2020

Although she is currently experiencing a lot of frustration due to few opportunities, Pretoria's young wheelchair tennis star believes she will be ready to participate in the Paralympic Games in two years.

All geared up and nearly nowhere to play has been Mariska Venter's biggest frustrations so far this year.

It led to the local High Performance Centre (HPC) based wheelchair tennis player's internationally rankings dropping quite dramatically. Last year, she was ranked as one of the top 30 players in the world, and now she is listed somewhere in the sixties.

"The HPC is, without doubt, the best setup in the world any player could wish to be based at. I got a fantastic team supporting me, but what does it help if I can't get to play tournaments," lamented the 22-year old player.

A lack of funding is why Venter has been spending more time training than she had been playing. This brought a change in her approach.

"When I get the opportunity to play internationally, I got to make the most of it as I got to improve my ranking. Ever since I started playing wheelchair tennis, I just had one goal, and that is to represent South Africa at the Paralympic Games. In 2016, I qualified according to the international standards to go to Rio, but I was not selected. I am not going to allow it to happen again. I want to be in the top 20 by 2020," Venter explained.

Venter recently returned from Europe where she played three ITF Tournaments. She got some excellent results. The HPC player was the runner-up in the singles of the Jens Memorial Open and teamed up with Donna Jansen (Netherlands) to win the doubles. In the Flanders Open, she ended up being the runners-up in the doubles playing with Emmanuelle Morch (France).

If she can find a sponsor Venter hopes to play in Malaysia in November.

Venter currently considers herself to be a



Mariska Venter in action on the tennis court. Photo: Reg Caldecott

better doubles player. For this reason, she hopes that she and KG Montjane might get to team-up to try and qualify for the women's double for the 2020 Paralympic Games.

"In a way, it makes sense for us to play the doubles as we are both supported by the HPC and are both coached by Gerald

Stoffberg. I think Montjane and I will complement each other's style when we play the doubles," she said.

Venter's life changed dramatically in 2004 when she and her family were on their way back home after a trip down to the Western Cape.

"It was nine at night just outside

Bloemfontein when a car passed a truck. The driver did not see us coming. It led to a head-on-head collision. My father passed away as well as my oldest brother. I broke my back amongst other things and was left paralysed from the waist down," said Venter who was only eight years old when the accident happened.