

# Vergeer is giving back

**ESTHER:** *Not fazed by long, hot streak*

**NICK GORDON**

ONE of sport's most successful athletes jetted into the country last week but it wasn't for a high-profile event or to claim more accolades to add to an already impressive list – it was to give back.

Wheelchair tennis star Esther Vergeer graced South African shores as part of an initiative between Wheelchair Tennis South Africa and the Johan Cruyff Foundation to host a series of clinics for children looking to pursue the sport.

It's a sport that has allowed Vergeer to become one of sport's most successful athletes with her winning record only bettered by one other – at least that's what the record and history books are able to tell you.

The longest recorded winning streak in any professional sport belongs to Pakistan's Jahangir Khan whose exploits on the squash court saw him rack up 555 wins between 1981 to 1986.

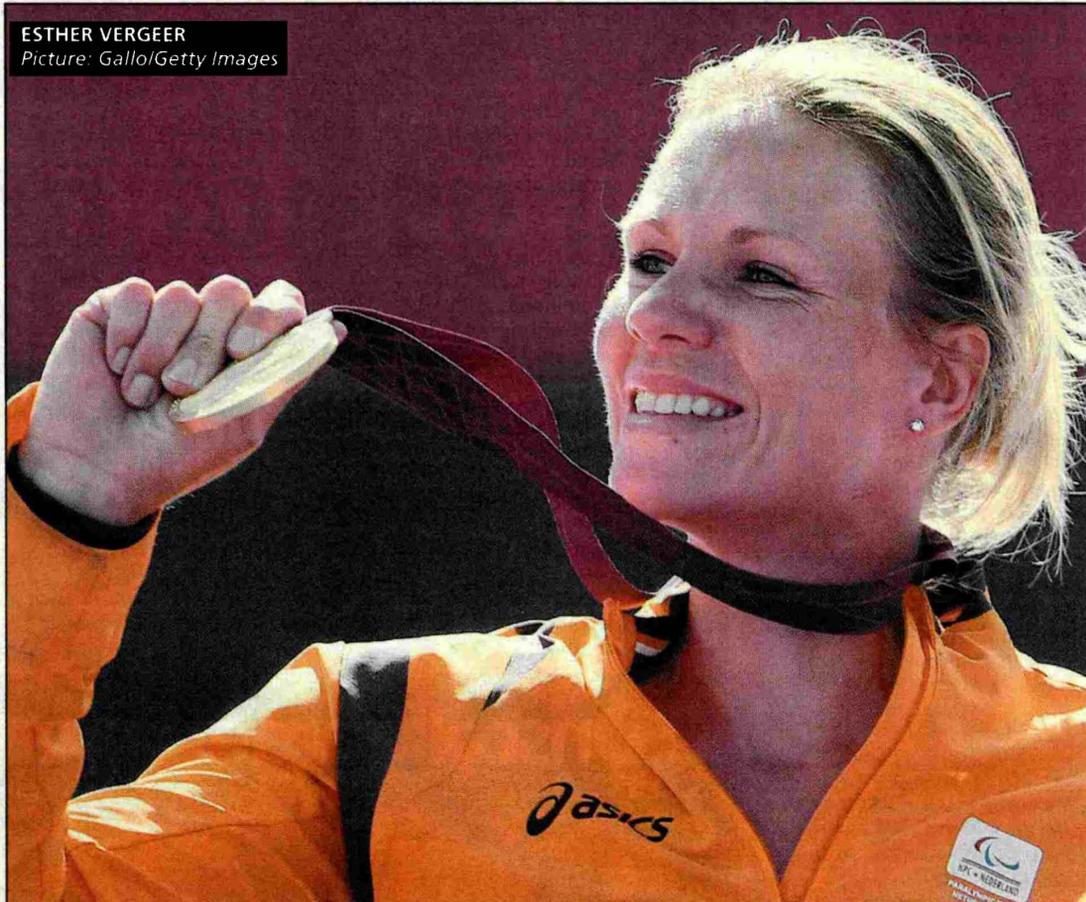
The Dutch sensation has been on a winning streak of 470 consecutive matches since being defeated by Australian Daniele di Toro in Sydney at the start of 2003 although the 31-year-old told *Super Saturday Citizen* it was not really something she keeps track of.

"Not me, but I do get confronted with all the numbers all the time," said Vergeer, who claimed a second gold medal at the Paralympics in London last year, said.

"After London, I know that it's at 470 but it's not that I have a piece of paper that I write it down on," she added.

Vergeer's record is an impressive one and includes four Paralympic gold medals, 169 titles and the world No 1 ranking, a spot she first held back in 1999, yet she admitted that it was quite surreal to be regarded as one of the most successful people in sport.

**ESTHER VERGEER**  
Picture: Gallo/Getty Images



"It's quite weird to realise that this has actually happened. When I started I never thought of having this winning streak or winning so many gold medals. It just happened.

"Of course I put a lot of hard work and determination into it, but it's quite amazing to realise it actually happened," she said before touching on the qualities that have helped her get to where she is today.

"It's a combination of a lot of things. But the determination, that I wanted to be the best in the world and then eventually get better every single day and to have that motivation every single day is probably one of the keys that I became who I am

now," she said.

Of the 470 wins, Vergeer admitted that her encounter against fellow Dutch native Korie Haman was the toughest – and most memorable – of her career having been forced to recover from match point before going on to claim the gold medal.

"I think that will be the gold medal in Beijing. She had match point and of course being at the Paralympics you see that as the biggest match of your career and then having match point against me was one of the toughest points in my life.

"It turned positively my way so that's one of the most memorable

moments," she said.

But does she still get nervous before taking to the court?

"I do. I do get nervous. Maybe not in first round I'm not as nervous but for the semifinals and finals I get nervous."

Vergeer admitted that she is not too sure whether she will keep playing on towards Rio de Janeiro in 2016 and is using a bit of a break to redefine her goals and re-establish what she still wants to achieve in what has been a glittering career.

With her name already in the record books, whatever Vergeer achieves from here on out will be a bonus.