

Stosur serves it up

Power hitter keen to gain top-25 ranking

Paul Malone

AUSTRALIAN No.1 Sam Stosur says she is ready to mount a successful Australian circuit challenge as a springboard to grab a career-best top-25 ranking in 2009.

Stosur, unable to play tournaments in the first four months of this year while recovering from viral meningitis and Lyme disease, has undertaken a workload as strenuous as her last full off-season in 2006.

The Queensland power hit-

ter has been training in Sydney in a four-week build-up for next month's Brisbane International.

Stosur was ranked No.154 at the start of May and is now No.52, one spot better than Perth left-hander Casey Dellacqua.

She is chasing her first WTA tour title — four years after she was runner-up at the Brisbane and Sydney events in consecutive weeks.

"First, I want to get back to inside the top 30 next year and I'm doing everything I can do to play well," said Stosur, who

reached a career-high ranking of No. 27 in January, 2007.

"Hopefully I can win a singles title in the not too distant future

"I've always played well in Australia and I'm hoping this summer will be no different. It's four years since I made the Brisbane and Sydney final. It does seem a long time ago."

Stosur, as the highest-ranked Queenslander, seems well placed to be chosen for the first match at Pat Rafter Arena on January 4 and said she would welcome such a symbolic piece

of scheduling. Tournament director Steve Ayles has not decided who should play the match.

"I'll be ready to go on the Sunday or the Monday, night or day," she said.

"I want to get the first round match done and out of the way. Maybe it will feel different playing there rather than the Gold Coast, but nobody is going to have any bigger expectations of me than I'll put on myself."

Stosur's coach, David Taylor, said the best part of her season, in which she was runner-up in

Seoul in October and also beat world No.7 Vera Zvonareva, was that she had not felt tired since a little setback after the French Open in June.

"I'm predicting she will get her highest ranking this year," Taylor said.

"And if she does well with the things that make her such a good player, she's a top 20 player.

"She has been cautious about her health, but she has done four weeks of fitness work and this is her third week of tennis now, with five-hour days."