

MY GAME LAURA MASSARO

As December's PSA World Championships in Manchester draw ever nearer, 2013 champion Laura Massaro tells Squash Player about her game and how she is preparing for the flagship event

WHAT IS YOUR FAVOURITE SHOT?

Probably the forehand boast. I think it's become my favourite shot because I win so many points from it – although it can also get me in some trouble if I end up over-playing it in some matches.

WHAT IS YOUR FAVOURITE PRACTICE?

My favourite is probably one I do with Danny [Massaro] at events. It's almost become a comfort to me and we don't even discuss it anymore. When we arrive at events, it's a way to get me feeling in the groove and technically sharp. We go through simple, straight-drive feeding, moving on to the volley and then a combination of the two. After that, he will feed off the back wall with a short ball, so that I can move up and down the court. I vary my shots, trying to find my range, and I decide when we switch shot selection and, eventually, sides!

WHAT DO YOUR PRACTICE SESSIONS INVOLVE?

At home, they involve working on my technique and movement, while building in some physical work too. At events, they involve a lot more feeding and finding my range on the court I'm playing on.

WHAT DOES YOUR FITNESS TRAINING INVOLVE?

It varies a lot, depending on the time of the season. As a staple, I'm always lifting weights and playing matches. I try to hit a lot during the week as well. Depending on the time of the season, I also train in the gym a couple of times a week, either on the bike or on the treadmill. I find one of the best things about squash training is the variety, with every day being different.

HOW OFTEN DO YOU PRACTISE/ TRAIN AND HOW DOES THIS VARY?

I train twice a day, five days a week and generally once on a Saturday. Sunday always tends to be a rest day. The only reason this changes is if I'm flying out to an event, or I'm planning for an event, and I am trying to taper off and freshen up for the tournament.

ARE THERE PARTICULAR THINGS YOU TRY TO DO IN PRACTICE GAMES?

There are always things going on when I'm playing. Normally, it's all mental stuff... things I know will help me when I arrive at an event and the pressure gets high. I try to let all the technical things I've been working on come out in my matches and not over-think them too much. It's hard to play not thinking about the things you are working on, because normally I'm so desperate to see change, but sometimes the more you try, the less things happen. I've found the best way is to work hard on the things you're working on off the match court and slowly see them seep into matches when you're ready!



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DO YOU HAVE KEY TACTICS YOU USE WHEN PLAYING?

Not really. I try to be adaptable and have a different plan for every match. That keeps things fresh too. It very much depends on who my opponent is, what I’ve been working on and also how I’m feeling physically at the time.

WHAT OPPORTUNITIES DO YOU LOOK FOR IN A MATCH?

I’m always looking for an opponent’s weaknesses. I’m looking for areas where I can expose those weaknesses and also ways to bring my strengths into play. Again, it varies very much on my opponent. Over the years I have tried to make myself adaptable, so I make myself hard to break down. I’ve always tried to strengthen my weaknesses, so they become less exploitable. DP [David Pearson] said Peter Nicol was amazing for this... I always remember him saying Peter’s strengths were 10 out of 10, but his weaknesses were still eight out of 10. You make yourself hard to beat if you can get to numbers like that.

WHAT ARE YOUR STRENGTHS AS A PLAYER?

I would say definitely my mental strength and my ability to stay disciplined in my training day after day. Consistency is also key for me and I think that’s a strength of mine as well.

WHAT PARTS OF YOUR GAME ARE YOU TRYING TO DEVELOP?

I’m always trying to develop my short game, along with my technical swing and movement.

DO YOU HAVE A TIP FOR THE CLUB PLAYER?

Probably to use the whole of the front wall when hitting the ball. I see a lot of club players struggle to hit the back corners and that’s mainly because they try to hit with pace at middle height on the front wall. When under pressure, I think club players and juniors could use the top third of the front wall to get the ball deeper at the back.

WHAT ARE YOUR GOALS FOR THE SEASON?

To continue to improve my squash and stay injury-free. I want to make myself a contender at the World Series events I play in. The women’s tour is so strong at the moment that each event and its lead-up need to be taken on their own merits and prepared for individually.

HOW ARE YOU PREPARING FOR THE PSA WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP IN MANCHESTER?

Typically, when the squash season gets going, the events come thick and fast. The Worlds is quite a while away at the moment, so I will prepare the best I can for the up-and-coming events and then, about a month out, my focus will shift towards being in the best mental and physical shape I can be.

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